WRITINGS OF THOMAS READE

by Thomas Reade

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Thomas Reade, compiled for study and devotional reading.

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Chapter 1

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01.00. CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE, as Displayed

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE, as Displayed

in the Life and Writings of Paul by Thomas Reade, 1841

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON THE VALUE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

PREFACE.

This little treatise has no pretensions to novelty, being on subjects which form the daily meditation of the devout Christian, and from which he derives his purest enjoyment; neither does the Author presume to vie with those, whose works on the life of Paul, have enriched the stores of Sacred Literature.

His design in publishing these thoughts on the Experience of the Apostle, is, in some feeble measure to exhibit the beauty of Evangelical Religion: by bringing into one view, the varied excellencies of Paul’s character; and by unfolding those principles of faith and love, which, through the Spirit, made him so great a blessing to mankind.

Christianity is the religion of the heart. Every doctrine of the Gospel is a sacred spring of holiness. In these pages, the author has therefore endeavored to treat these mysteries of grace, not controversially, but practically: not as subjects for speculation, but as sources of peace and joy.

To the spiritual reader, no apology would be requisite, for the numerous extracts which are inserted from the writings of Paul. These form the intrinsic value of the work. They are precious Jewels, however humble may be the casket in which they are conveyed.

What language can so well describe the inward joys and griefs of the Apostle, as his own heart-felt addresses to the churches of the saints. By them he being dead yet speaks.

May He, whose Power is manifested the weakest instruments, be pleased to render this humble tribute of affection to His cause subservient to the purposes of His glory.

The author is indebted to W. H. Bathurst, for several original hymns, extracted from his collection of "Psalms and Hymns, for public and private use;" which are as spiritual to feeling, as they are beautiful in composition.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON THE VALUE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

"Blest is the Book whose leaves display,

Jesus the Life, the Truth, the Way;

Read it with diligence, and with prayer;

Search it, and you will find Him there."

At a period like the present, when knowledge is rapidly increasing, through the prevalence of education and the facilities of the press; when infidelity, alive to these advantages, is insinuating its

poison in every form; when errors are unhappily springing up, and divisions are weakening the Christian Church- what a treasure is the Word of God.

Here we have Light, to dissipate our darkness- Truth, to guide us amid the mazes of error- Consolations, to gladden us in a world of misery.

The Bible is the Revelation of a Father's love- the Expression of Jehovah's grace to sinners- the Depository of heavenly blessings- the Charter of our highest privileges. The Bible is the religion of Protestants- the glory of our churches- the Poor Man's Friend. Every thing sublime in conception, and tender in expression, it is to be found in the Sacred Scriptures.

The Eternal Jehovah has there revealed Himself as clothed with majesty and honor; glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders; of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; in whose sight the heavens are not clean. And there, he has manifested forth his glory, as mighty to save; forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.

In that blessed Volume, Mercy is seen to arrest the arm of Justice, and all the tenderness of the Father is displayed in the person of the Son. Love breathes throughout its sacred paces; for even when he declares. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten,"- the severe reproof is but "the graver countenance of love." Can we then neglect the Scriptures, which contain the richest treasures, compared with which, all else is poor indeed.

When the Creator of the world becomes an Author, his word must be as perfect as his work. The heavens declare the glory of God, and so does the Volume of his Truth. To the humble seeker after God, the Lord makes himself known as a God of grace and mercy- for the Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The Spirit no sooner applies the truth as it is in Jesus with power to the heart, than the desert is made to rejoice and to blossom as the rose; the soul is beautified with salvation, and all its powers are consecrated to the service of its Redeemer; "for the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." Hence, David, from happy experience could say, "By them is your servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward."

Before his resurrection Jesus prayed in behalf of his disciples, "Holy Father, sanctify them through your truth; your word is truth." And after his resurrection, by his own Almighty Power, he opened their understanding, to understand the Scriptures. Happy then shall we be, if, in unison with the Psalmist we can say, "O how I love your law, it is my meditation all the day. Your testimonies are my delight and my counselors. Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. Your word has quickened me."

Everything around is given to change. Sickness impairs the hue of health; adversity, the prospect of pleasant years; earthly friends may vary in their aspect towards us- at one time, bestowing the testimony of affection, at another, grieving us by a chilling slight. But in the Volume of his Truth, our heavenly Father gives the sweet assurance, that He Changes Not. His Love, his Faithfulness, his Power, are infinite. To all his adopted children his promises in Christ are yes, and in Him amen, to the glory of his grace; for Jesus is the same, yesterday, and today, and forever; having loved his

own, he loved them unto the end. Blessed Truth! Consolatory declaration! How animating, how supporting to the tempted and tempest-tossed believer. O my soul, are you resting upon this immutable rock? Is the unchangeableness of Jehovah-Jesus, your sure foundation ? What can disturb your peace beneath the smiles of infinite, everlasting love? Nothing but sin, indulged in the heart, ought to trouble you. If Jesus dwells within you by his Spirit; if you are united to him, and are abiding in him by a living faith; if your guilt is removed through the merit of his blood, and the efficacy of his intercession; then fear not, for nothing can harm you; do not be afraid, for nothing shall be able to separate you from his love. He who saves you is unchangeable, none can pluck you out of his hands.

When Ishmael was dying from thirst in the wilderness of Beersheba, God opened the eyes of Hagar, and she saw a well of water, which imparted strength to her child.

We also are perishing in a thirsty land, where there is no water. God graciously opens our eyes to behold that well of salvation which he has provided for perishing sinners. With joy he enables us to draw forth its restoring water, and receiving in faith this gift of grace, our souls are quickened, renewed in holiness, and strengthened to serve God in the Gospel of his Son. O ! how can we sufficiently praise our loving Savior, for the blessings which he reveals and imparts to us in his Holy Word.

Whatever man touches he defiles, because his nature is corrupted through the fall. All that proceeds from God is holy. "Every word of God is pure." So David found it. "The word is very pure, therefore your servant loves it." It was a lamp unto his feet, and a light unto his path. He rejoiced in the Word of God, as one that finds great spoil. In his estimation, it was more to be desired than gold, yes, than much fine gold; to his spiritual taste it was sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. He treasured up the Divine word in his mind, and had it ready on every occasion. "Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Through your precepts I get understanding, therefore I hate every false way."

There is no situation in which a believer can be placed, however dark or intricate, however slippery or perilous, but in the Bible he will find appropriate guidance and adequate support. For, "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

The Word of God is wonderful in its operation on the heart and conscience, through the accompanying power of the Holy Spirit, being quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword. "Is not my word like as a fire," says the Lord, and "like the hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" As fire hardens the clay, and melts the wax; as it consumes the dross, and purifies the gold; so does the Word of the Lord. Pharaoh was judicially hardened; David was graciously softened. The former, being left in righteous judgment to the natural working of his heart, resisted the Divine Word, and was destroyed; the latter, being deeply humbled through grace, under the pointed reproofs of the Prophet, confessed his sin with penitential sorrow, and obtained forgiveness.

Some do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God, and perish for lack of knowledge. Others, being unlearned and unstable, twist the Scriptures unto their own destruction- while others

again, hold the Truth in unrighteousness, and perish in their own corruption. But in the midst of all this ignorance and perversion, " the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them, but the transgressors shall fall therein." All who will not submit to the authority of God's Word, shall be broken by the power of his wrath; but, "to this man," says the Lord, "will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My word."

The Word of God and prayer are the divinely appointed instruments, in the hand of the Spirit, for defeating the machinations of Satan and establishing the kingdom of righteousness in the earth- that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of man. This was strikingly verified in the success of the Apostles, who, having declared- "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word,'' saw the immediate fruit of this devotedness to their work; for Luke informs us, that the Word of God increased, that the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and that a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Our hearts are evil; we are surrounded by temptations to evil; and the Evil One is ever on the watch to destroy us. Where then must we flee, and to whom must we look for safety? Jesus is our refuge- His love and His power can shield and save us. He is the Captain of our salvation; the mighty Conqueror over sin and death. When tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Jesus repelled his assaults by wielding the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. To each temptation addressed to his mind, he answered, "it is written," and the Scripture thus powerfully applied, drove back the enemy, until he departed from him, foiled and vanquished.

How strengthening, how consoling is the Word of Truth. With this spiritual armory, this divine treasury, we shall be fortified for the conflict, equipped for our pilgrimage, and upheld amid the dangers of this evil world. As the traveler, in an unknown land, needs a faithful guide; as the mariner, traversing dangerous seas, requires a chart and a compass: so we need a guide and a directory while passing through this world of peril. God has mercifully given us this help.

In his Holy Word, our loving Father has made ample provision for the needs of Zion's pilgrims; while the Spirit, shining into our hearts, enables us clearly to perceive, through his revealed truth, the consecrated way to heaven- Jesus Christ, the righteous. With what fervor then should we bless our God and Savior for all these tokens of his kindness towards us.

Are we bowed down under a sense of the guilt of sin? It is written, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved."

Do we dread a repulse from the mercy-seat? It is written, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Him that comes unto me, I will in no wise cast out. The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hears come. And let him that is athirst come. And whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Is our heart trembling, under the consciousness of utter helplessness at the sight of Satan's power? It is written, "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. My grace is sufficient for you. The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

Are we groaning under the workings of indwelling sin? It is written, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace. Who shall deliver me from the body of this death; I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Do we long for faith, and love, and every grace? It is written; "He shall give you the desires of your heart. Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Whatever you shall ask in my name, believing, you shall receive."

Are we panting after the Savior's presence? It is written, "Unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of Righteousness arise, with healing in his wings. If any man loves me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

Do we feel our need of spiritual wisdom and divine direction? It is written, "If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally and upbraids not, and it shall be given him. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not unto your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths."

Are we afraid of temporal calamity? It is written, "He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. He shall cover you with his feathers; and under his wings shall you trust; his Truth shall be your shield and buckler. Call upon me in the time of trouble, I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

Does the world frown upon us, and persecute us for Jesus' sake? It is written, "Hearken unto me, you that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law. Do not fear the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings. I, even I, am He that comforts you. Who are you, that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be as grass, and forget the Lord your Maker. But I will tell you whom you shall fear. Fear Him who, When he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say unto you, fear him. Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake; rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven."

Do we tremble at the thought of death, and an approaching judgment? It is written, "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death, he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage. The sting of death is sin; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." "These are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through his name."

What a precious book must that be, which can thus provide for every trial and need of the Christian. There is no conceivable state of mind which we may be in, no circumstance in which we can be placed, no exercise of faith and patience which we may be called to endure, but in the Word of God we shall find direction, comfort, and support equal to our day. Surely then, we should daily prize this Word of Salvation, which reveals Jesus in all his fullness, the world in all its emptiness, and heaven in all its glory. There, as in a mirror, we are taught to know ourselves; and with this lamp, we are enabled to walk in safety, amid the dangers which surround our path. O that

we may have grace to receive the Truth into our hearts, and to embrace it in the simplicity of faith. The doctrines and precepts, the histories and characters, the promises and threatenings, contained in the Bible, are all designed to enlighten and purify the soul.

Blessed will that period be, when every human being shall possess the Word of Life, and when every heart shall feel its regenerating power. Lord, hasten on this long-expected day; a day of peace and joy, when all mankind shall love as brethren, and unite to glorify your name. O send out your Light and your Truth, let your Word have free course and be glorified, by the conversion of the world unto you.

Jesus, who is the Light of the World, shines to us through the pages of Eternal Truth. The Bible is full of Christ. It leads our souls to him as the source of its promises, the subject of its prophecies, and the substance of its revealed glories; for it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell- fullness of light, fullness of love, fullness of power, fullness of glory.

"Jesus, my Savior, in your face

The essence lives of every grace;

All things beside which charm the sight,

Are shadows filled with glowworm light.

Your beauty Lord, the enraptured eye

Which fully views it, first must die;

Then let me die, through death to know,

That joy I cannot taste below."

It has been well remarked, that "there are peculiarities belonging to Sacred History, so remote from everything seen among men, and such an unearthly character is given even to its relation of ordinary concerns, that the most superficial observer can scarcely fail to distinguish it from every human production." Its true and faithful portraiture of our own nature, its appeals to the heart of the reader, alone suffice to establish the observation. "There is a knowledge of the human heart, a master key to its subtlest recesses, which not only surpasses human penetration in its origin, but astonishes, while it terrifies the individual, whose bosom is laid open to his own inspection, and who finds himself a stranger, where he had thought himself most at home. Not a lurking passion is suffered to remain undetected in its living pictures. Motives, which we should be ashamed to avow, are dragged before our conscience in the history of another; and while his sentence is passed, we feel a personal condemnation." Thus the Bible speaks to the heart through the understanding; for these things were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

Thrice happy then is the heart in which the Word of Christ dwells richly, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Such a heart shall be kept in perfect peace, while passing through this valley of tears. Trials may assail, and griefs may pierce its tenderest part, but all shall still be well. "Faith and hope will sustain the believer amid the swelling billows, until Jesus shall place his servant beyond the reach of sorrow."

Does the Lord of glory speak

To his creatures here below;

And may souls so frail and weak

All his gracious dealings know?

Does the blessed Bible bring,

Tidings from our heavenly King?

O with what intense desire,

Should we search that sacred book;

Here, our zeal should never tire,

Here, we should delight to look

For the rules by mercy giv’n,

To conduct our souls to heaven.

Shall not he, that humbly seeks,

All the light of truth discern?

Do we not, when Jesus speaks,

Feel our hearts within us burn?

For his soul-reviving voice

Bids the mourner to rejoice.

Lord, your teaching grace impart,

That we may not read in vain;

Write your precepts on our heart,

Make your truths and doctrines plain;

Let the message of your love

Guide us to your rest above."

01.02. Chapter 2

Chapter 2

ON THE CONVERSION OF SAUL OF TARSUS.

Of all the records of Divine Grace, which are treasured up in the Holy Scriptures, none more strikingly exhibits its sovereignty and power, than the Conversion of Saul of Tarsus. To the believer in Jesus, it must be a source of edification and encouragement, to trace the experience of this chosen vessel, from his first reception of the Savior, to the close of his eventful life. When writing to the Christians at Corinth, he could say, through the grace bestowed upon him, "Be followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." May we have grace to resemble this holy man, in his spiritual mindedness and devotedness to the Redeemer.

Here, is the faith and patience of the saints. As grace brings them out of darkness into light, so will grace conduct them to the realms of glory. Entering the celestial city with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads, they shall see the King in his beauty, and raise the head-stone of the spiritual temple with shoutings, crying, "grace, grace unto it."

While viewing the character of the Apostle in his UNCONVERTED state, we must be struck with that more than Egyptian darkness which beclouded his mind. He was of the strictest sect of the Pharisees, who, in general, were bigoted, cruel, and high-minded and proud. For the appearance of greater sanctity, they not only fasted often, and made long prayers, but separated themselves from the herd of mankind; from whom they were distinguished by the badges peculiar to their sect– as, long robes, broad phylacteries, and large fringes and borders of their garments. They were active and diligent in what cost them little; and so contrived the scheme of their religion, that what they did might be seen by men to the best advantage. They coveted, and obtained the praise of men. All their religions and kindness were confined within the bounds of their own party; and the first principle which they taught their new converts was- That none but they were godly, and that all other people were worthless. They therefore endeavored to inspire them with zeal and fierceness against all who differed from them, so that if anyone dared to speak favorably of Jesus of Nazareth, he was put out of the synagogue, and persecuted, even unto death. Such was the character, and such the religion of Saul the Pharisee.

Being brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, he was well acquainted with the writings of Moses and the Prophets; but he knew not the true spiritual meaning of those prophecies which relate to the character, work, sufferings, and glory of the Messiah. So true it is, that "the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Is not this our condition until taught of God to know the misery of our fallen state? We never value the Savior until we feel our need of him; for those who are whole need not a physician, but those who are sick. What cause then have we to bless God, if the Spirit has graciously opened our eyes to see our guilt, and made our hearts to feel a genuine sorrow for sin. Jesus will then be dear, yes,

infinitely precious to our souls, His name will be as ointment poured forth.

Saul was zealous for the Law, as a covenant of works; but he saw not the glory of Jesus, who is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believes. Though scrupulously exact in Pharisaical observances, he could overcome his scruples, and unite with infidel Sadducees to suppress the religion of Jesus, just as Herod and Pilate overcame their mutual enmity when combining to effect his crucifixion.

In the fullness of time, the Sun of Righteousness arose to bless the earth, with healing in his wings. By good old Simeon he was hailed as "a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel." But, "the light shined in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." The promised Deliverer "came unto his own, and his own received him not. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The kings of the earth took counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us."

And in this our day, how many are fighting against Christ and his Gospel. Satan has his emissaries, who are busily employed in attacking Christianity, by bold assertions and daring blasphemies; while others, under the garb of orthodoxy, are opposing the humble, yet zealous preacher of the Truth, that real friend and builder of the Church, as if he were nothing better than a troubler in Israel. The Gospel of peace is the innocent occasion of this fiery opposition, agreeably to our blessed Savior’s own declaration, "I have come to send fire on the earth. Do you suppose that I have come to give peace on earth, I tell you no, but rather division. Do not think that I have come to send peace on the earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword."

The real cause of this warfare, lies hidden in the enmity of the carnal heart, and in the influence which Satan exercises over the minds of them who believe not the Truth. How frequently is this verified in worldly families, when any of their members have been brought to a deep concern for the salvation of the soul. No sweetness of spirit, no humility of mind, no act of self-denial, no endeavor to oblige, can render the obnoxious individuals pleasing in the eyes of their carnal relatives. A frown, a sneer, or a laugh, is frequently employed to intimidate or shame the young believer in Jesus. Sometimes this hatred manifests itself by expulsion from the paternal dwelling, and exclusion from the father’s will. Even a mother, in her blinded enmity to the Truth, can deliver her once beloved child into the bloody arms of the Inquisition. Superstition, bigotry, and worldly hatred, have in all ages ravaged the sheep of Christ.

Jesus said to his disciples, "You shall be hated by all men for my name’s sake. They shall put you out of the synagogues, yes, the time comes, that whoever kills you will think he does God service; and these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. You shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household."

Such has been, and such is the spirit of the world- a determination to retain the forms of Christianity, and to crush its power. The offence of the cross has not ceased. In many countries, where Papal darkness reigns, the old enmity is still in vigorous operation. The Man of Sin cannot endure the light of Truth, nor those who shine as lights in the world. Even in this favored land- this land of Bibles; from where the true light shines with such a glorious luster into surrounding nations,

the spirit of persecution is not extinct. It still works in the bosom of the bigoted, the carnal, and the infidel opposer of the Truth.

Through the mercy of our God we have long been protected from open violence, and are yet privileged to serve him without bodily fear. But who can tell how soon the 'concealed evil' may be permitted to break forth into action? Nothing but Almighty Power ran restrain the malice of Satan and the bitter enmity of the natural heart. Are not dark clouds gathering around us? Do we not hear the awful sounds of an approaching storm? A persecuting spirit is not from above. Urged on by the powers of darkness, it springs from ignorance of the true God, from pride, and from that deadly root of all evil, unbelief.

James and John felt its workings, when they desired that fire might descend from heaven, and consume a Samaritan village, because its inhabitants refused to receive their Divine Master. Jesus rebuked them, and said; "You know not what manner of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man has not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." This blinded state of heart, which fills the earth with misery and bloodshed, was awfully displayed in the spirit and conduct of Saul. Luke, the inspired writer of the Acts of the Apostles, informs us, that when Saul was a young man, the clothes of those who stoned Stephen were laid at his feet; that he consented to the death of this holy disciple; that he made havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and binding men and women, committed them to prison.

Whether Saul was any further engaged in the death of Stephen does not appear. However, the circumstance recorded by Luke, of his guarding the clothes of his murderers, loudly proclaims his approbation of the deed. Let us never forget, that God looks chiefly at the heart; and if the vote be passed there, he writes the man guilty, though he stir no farther. It is easy to murder another by a silent wish, or a passionate desire, as Jesus has declared, in his searching Sermon on the Mount, and John, in his first Epistle. In all moral actions, whether good or evil, God regards the will; and accounts the man a companion in sin, who, though he may never actually join in it, yet inwardly applauds and likes it.

The storm thus begun, increased rapidly. A violent persecution afflicted and dispersed the Christians at Jerusalem, who went every where preaching the Word. Like all the dispensations of God towards his Church, it was over-ruled for the more rapid extension of the Gospel, just as a scattered fire increases the conflagration. The rage of Saul was so fierce at this period, that, in the strong language of the sacred historian, he breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. Not satisfied with his own anathemas, he went unto the high-priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them to Jerusalem.

How wonderful is the Divine forbearance. Truly God is strong and patient. Though in his wisdom he may permit the persecutor's fury to rage for a season, yet, through his power, he makes the wrath of man to praise him; and in his love, he over-rules all for the purifying and enlargement of his Church. He who said to the mighty ocean, Hitherto shall you come, but no further, and here shall your proud waves be stayed- can order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men. All hearts are under the divine control, and can be chained or changed according to His purpose, who works all things after the counsel of his own will. In every age, God is pleased to manifest his power either in the conversion or the destruction of sinners; for He, who rules over all, must and

shall be feared by all intelligent creatures. Oh that the prayers of his Church may speedily be answered, by the ushering in of that period when His name shall be hallowed; His kingdom come; and His will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

The time was now arrived when Infinite Love purposed to make such a manifestation of its glory, as would fill heaven with joy, and earth with praise. The enemy had come in like a flood, but the Spirit of the Lord was about to lift up a standard against him. While Saul was hastening to Damascus, full of persecuting fury, and intending to strike a deadly blow at the infant Church of Christ, thinking thereby, "to do God service;" Jesus met him in the way. Suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about him, greater than the brightness of the sun. The fiery bigot, checked in his career, fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? He said; Who are you, Lord? And the Lord said; I am Jesus whom you persecute. But rise, and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared unto you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of those things which you have seen, and of those things in the which I will show unto you; delivering you from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send you, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith that is in me." Saul, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what will you have me to do? And the Lord said; Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told you what you must do." Being unable to see because of the glory of that light, he was led by the hand of those who were with him, and came to Damascus.

What a display of sovereign grace is here presented to our view. The bloody persecutor now lies prostrate at the feet of Jesus. Though his bodily eyes were darkened, the film of ignorance was removed from his mind, the enmity of his heart was destroyed, the strong-holds of unbelief and pride were thrown down, and he became teachable and submissive like a little child.

"Over the raging waves of human will,

The Savior’s Spirit walked; and all was still."

Have we ever experienced this converting grace of Jesus? Has a divine light ever darted into our minds, showing us, by its irresistible power, the wretchedness of our condition, and the glory of Emmanuel? Have we been brought in humble submission to the foot of the cross, and there found pardon, and peace, and joy, and rest to our souls? Until this great work be done, we are exposed to the curses of the Law, and the eternal vengeance of a Holy God. But love invites us to his throne, and all who touch the scepter of his grace shall live.

To prepare the way for Saul’s admission into the Christian Church, Jesus appeared in a vision to Ananias, a disciple dwelling at Damascus, and commanded him to enquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul, that he might put his hand on him, and restore him to sight. Ananias, dreading the interview, replied, "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem and here, he has authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on your name." Jesus graciously dissipated his fears; "Go your way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel, for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake."

Then Ananias went his way, and entered into the house, and putting his hands on him, said, "Brother Saul, the Lord, Jesus, who appeared unto you in the way as you came, has sent me, that you might receive your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. The God of our fathers has chosen you, that you should know his will, and see that JUST ONE, and should hear the voice of his mouth. For, you shall be his witness unto all men, of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you tarry? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord. And immediately there fell from his eyes, as it had been scales, and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized."

Saul, thus adopted into the family of God, through faith in Jesus, was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision; "He immediately preached Christ in the synagogues; that he is the Son of God; showing first unto them at Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works fit for repentance, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the Prophets and Moses did say should come; that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles."

Can we then be surprised, that all who heard him preach the unsearchable riches of Christ should be amazed, saying "Is not this he that destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and came here for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?"

The conversion of the heart to God is the work of Omnipotence. It is described in Scripture by the boldest figures, being compared to a transition from darkness to light, from death to life; to a new birth, and a new creation. The heart of stone is changed into a heart of flesh, and the haughty rebel is converted into an obedient child. O let us adore the infinite loving-kindness of our God and Savior, who delights in mercy, not desiring the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his way and live.

Lord! what is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you visit him. Wretched fallen man, whose heart rises in rebellion against you, might justly have been left to perish in his sins. But Oh! how infinite is the love which rescues us from deserved woe, and raises us to the highest seat in glory.

Can we meditate on this grace, and not feel humbled and thankful? Alas! so hard are our hearts, that even the agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion of our loving Savior, can be viewed without emotion. Grace alone can melt the rocky heart. Saul was softened, his obduracy was removed, and his darkness dissipated by the beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Who then reed despair, when the bloody Saul is accepted and saved? Oh! that the Eternal Spirit may descend in all his saving influence on this ruined world; then will earth once more resemble heaven, where Jehovah is loved, and honored, and obeyed, with constancy and delight.

Lord! look upon the covenant of peace, that rainbow which surrounds your throne of mercy, for the earth is full of darkness and cruel habitations. Stir up the wills of your faithful people, subdue the wills of your enemies; draw all hearts to yourself, until all the kingdoms of this world shall acknowledge Christ to be the Lord.

The sacred historian informs us that Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that Jesus is very Christ. Thus his growth in grace, and in

the knowledge of his God and Savior, evidenced the soundness of his conversion, and the reality of his faith.

The scriptural evidence of saving faith is love; love to Christ, and love to his people. How heart searching was the question of Jesus to Peter; "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me?" How distinctive the badge which he has given us of our discipleship, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another." The conversion of Saul of Tarsus to the faith of the Gospel, is a standing testimony to the truth of Christianity; and will remain to the end of time, a monument of Almighty Power. With gratitude, he himself declared to the Galatian church this act of the divine sovereignty; "I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached by me, is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." The whole was from Him, who will be gracious to whom he will be gracious. God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, can also shine into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Like Saul, we may be zealous for our own views, and jealous for the interests of our own party; like him, we may blindly attach merit to a spirit of persecution, and think to exterminate those who differ from as is to do God service; but is this the spirit which should dwell and rule in the children of God? Would not such a state of heart prove us to be carnal, however flaming our religious profession might be?

Nothing could be less prepared for a cordial reception of the Gospel than the mind of Saul, when journeying toward Damascus. At this memorable period he was utterly destitute of true repentance and saving faith. He saw in Christ no beauty that he should desire him. The Lambs were daily sacrificed upon the temple-altar, but he never felt the need of a better sacrifice to take away sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness- The high-priest entered every year into the holy place with the blood of others, but he never looked beyond the type to the true Melchisedek, whose atonement and intercession alone could open the gates of heaven, and procure for him an admittance there; the Scriptures were read every Sabbath-day, but to him they were a sealed book- expecting a temporal prince, whose reign should surpass that of David in victories, and that of Solomon in splendor, he spurned at the claims of Jesus of Nazareth to the office of the Messiah- full of overweening thoughts of his own excellence, he could not brook the idea of being saved through the righteousness of another, and especially through Him whom the rulers had condemned as a malefactor, and crucified between two thieves. Scrupulously observant of the letter, he was indifferent to the spiritual requirements of the Law. Hence he felt no humbling convictions on account of the inward workings of evil. His conscience was at ease, so long as he could maintain a decent exterior, and enjoy the reputation of superior sanctity. Every unholy passion, directed against the Son of God, and his redeemed people, was extolled as praise-worthy zeal and meritorious service. The more he ravaged the despised sect of the Nazarenes, the higher he rose in his own estimation, and in that of the rulers.

Such were the self-righteous feelings of Saul, when arrested by the blessed Jesus in his mad career. What power, short of Omnipotence, could have effected so sudden, so great, so universal a change! It was truly the work of that Eternal Word who said, amid the darkness of chaos- "Let there be light, and there was light." He was made a new creature in Christ Jesus; old things passed away, and all things became new. His proud heart was humbled; his breast, so lately filled

with rage, now overflowed with love; his mind, once so dark, was now enlightened to see his vileness; and so earnest were his cries for mercy, that the Searcher of hearts himself bore testimony to his sincerity, by declaring to the fearful Ananias, "Behold, he prays."

Strictly moral in his conduct, and well versed in the traditions of the elders- zealous for God, and ready to extinguish every spark of supposed heresy; Saul of Tarsus, before his conversion, was like the whited sepulcher- beautiful to look at. Yet, with all these Jewish attractions, his heart was not right with God. While he made many and long prayers, he never breathed the contrite sigh; while he thanked God that he was not as other men, he never cried from a broken heart- "God be merciful to me a sinner." In this state of blind unbelief and spiritual insensibility, rejecting the mercy of God, and the Savior of mankind, he would have filled up the measure of his iniquities, had not sovereign grace snatched him as a brand from the burning, and made him a vessel unto honor, sanctified and fit for the Master's use.

Is the case of Saul an uncommon one in this our day? Alas! no. Thousands possess the Bible, who are ignorant of the way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer; thousands attend the ordinances of the Gospel, who never feel its power; thousands are very zealous for the religion of their fathers, who yet ridicule such of their brethren, as excel them in the spirituality of their affections, and the holiness of their lives. During the reign of Papal darkness, what thousands glutted themselves with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, exulting, with Princes and Bishops over the sheep of Christ, rejoicing to see the sacred fires of the Inquisition lighted up, to consume the bodies of the faithful, who protested against the errors of the Church of Rome. The Beast, though wounded, is not yet dead! The ancient enmity to the light of Truth is still in active operation!

In every age, the heart of man is the same unvarying spring of evil. Under every covering, whether it be that of outward morality, or amiability of temper, it is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Every garment of nature's weaving, how beautiful soever its texture or coloring, is too scanty wholly to conceal the inbred corruption. Divine Truth, with unsparing hand, tears away the flimsy veil, and discovers the heart in all its vileness. "You say I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." But while he who is THE TRUTH, thus exposes to herself the fallen church of Laodicea, he most graciously adds, "I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white clothing that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that you may see."

This exposure, however humiliating, was the fruit of covenant love; "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent." And now, behold a display of condescending mercy, which should move every heart, and awaken every Christian feeling; "Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends." O! that all may listen to the voice of mercy, inviting the soul to sweet communion with the Savior, before it be exchanged for the thunders of the day of Judgment. Nothing will abide the fiery trial, but the gold which Jesus promises to bestow. True faith, producing its happy fruits, shall be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ, who, like the refiner's fire, shall try every man's work, of what sort it is.

How painful is the thought, that the hearts of dying creatures should be so averse from that religion which breathes nothing but peace and good-will toward man. The religion of Jesus is emphatically the religion of love- Divine Love embodied in its most endearing form. True happiness increases, as the power of the Gospel in the heart increases. The more we resemble Christ- in his meekness and humility, in his love and obedience, the more we shall enjoy the presence of God, and the sweeter anticipations we shall have of future glory.

Our aversion to holiness proves us to be the children of the fall. Our nature is radically corrupt. We may respect the decencies of religion, while pride, yes, even hatred to real godliness, rankles in our breast. Thus it was with Saul of Tarsus, and so it is with every merely nominal Christian, who is a stranger to the plague of his own heart, and has never felt the need of a better righteousness than his own, to justify him in the sight of God.

There is a little flock, saved by grace, to whom it is the Father’s good pleasure to give the kingdom. Saul was brought into the fold, and so will all who betake themselves, through the Spirit, to the good Shepherd. Writing to these redeemed ones, Jude gives this affectionate exhortation; "But you, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." May all who read these pages drink deeply into the spirit of this apostolic exhortation, that receiving the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls, they may join the glorified Church in heaven, in ascribing blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, unto Him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, forever and ever.

01.03. Chapter 3.

Chapter 3.

PAUL’S HUMILIATING CONFESSION.

THE OPPOSITION HE MET WITH FROM THE JEWS.

HIS RECEPTION AT JERUSALEM BY THE APOSTLES.

THE NATURAL ENERGY OF HIS CHARACTER.

PRIDE is the great opposer of regenerating grace, and would, if unsubdued, forever close the heart against the entrance of the Spirit. By an act of sovereign love, the proud sinner is made sensible of his guilt and helplessness. The Spirit, through his convincing light, empties him of all haughty thoughts of his own righteousness and strength; while the Law, in which he trusted, affords him no shelter from the arm of Justice. By its spirituality and extent, reaching to the inmost motions of the will, the Law pronounces his condemnation; and extorting from him the anxious cry- What trust I do to be saved?- becomes a schoolmaster to bring him unto Christ, that he may be justified by faith. Thus, through grace he renounces all dependence on his own works, and is resolved to be saved in God’s way, or to perish at his feet.

Such were the feelings of Paul, now that be was baptized with the Holy Spirit, and made a servant and an Apostle of Jesus Christ -SELF was crucified. With heart-felt sorrow he confessed his guilt, bore the most open testimony to the former enmity of his heart, and magnified that grace which brought him out of darkness into marvelous light. O happy change! the fruit of everlasting love.

Many striking instances are recorded of his self-abasing acknowledgments. When standing on the stairs of a castle at Jerusalem, he said to the infuriated multitude, who were ready to tear him in pieces for his boldness in preaching Christ, as the King and Redeemer of Israel; "I persecuted this way unto death, binding and delivering into prison both men and women, as the high-priest bears me witness, and all the estate of the elders, from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring those who were there, bound to Jerusalem to be punished." With this usual sincerity, when pleading his cause before King Agrippa, he unhesitatingly declared, "I thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, which things I did in Jerusalem; and many of the saints I put in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them; and I punished them often in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme, and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them, even unto strange cities." To the Galatian converts, he told the same humiliating history; "You have heard of my life in time past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the Church of God, and devastated it." In his Epistles to the Christians at Corinth, he thus abases himself; "I am the least of the Apostles, and am not fit to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God."

Enumerating to the believers at Philippi his Pharisaical merits, of which he was once so proud, he ranks as one of their number, "his zeal in persecuting the Church." To the Ephesians, in a strain of sweet humility, he thus extols his grace which was so richly manifested in his conversion; "I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God, given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

How beautiful is true humility; it is the very image of Jesus. This heavenly grace gives such a sweetness to him who possesses it, that even the world attempts to imitate so lovely an attainment. The essential difference between Christian and counterfeit humility is soon discovered, by the patient endurance of the one, and the petulant nature of the other. The haughty Saul, when he became a Christian, was humbled by every view of himself; but his humility was blended with gratitude, as is beautifully instanced in his Epistle to Timothy; "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has enabled me, for he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was once a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief. Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to those who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

After this exhibition of free unmerited mercy, no poor sinner need despair. To the heavy laden soul crying out for help, the converted Saul gives the cheering intelligence, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." How blessed is the assurance, that with the Lord there is mercy, that with him there is plenteous redemption. Delightful truth! He is good and ready to forgive, full of compassion and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. Happy then is the man who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God; for the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those that hope in his mercy. What can exceed the richness of this divine promise, made to every humble believer in Jesus; "Because he has set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him, I will set him on high, because he has known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver and honor him; with long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation."

As Paul, like a ravenous wolf, devoured the sheep of Christ, so he himself, when made one of the Savior’s flock, became the object of bitter persecution. How true it is, that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. Even natural affection cannot restrain the violence of this deep-seated enmity against Christ and his people; for, "the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child; and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death." With what faithfulness did Jesus forewarn his disciples, that through much tribulation they must enter the kingdom. But, did he leave them comfortless? Oh! how gracious are his parting words- "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

"After that many days were fulfilled," the sacred historian informs us, "the Jews at Damascus took counsel to kill Saul." They watched the gates of the city day and night, so intent were they on their purpose. But their laying wait was made known to Saul, and the disciples took him by night, and let

him down by the wall in a basket, by which means he escaped out of their hands.

How secure is the believer in Jesus. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people. Behold, he that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." Jesus guarded the life of his servant, to whom he had appointed a great and glorious work. He could therefore say to King Agrippa; "Having obtained help of God, I continue to this day." Blessed are they, who are actively engaged in the Lord’s service; they may have many trials by the way, but He, who for their sakes endured the cross, despising the shame, will uphold them by his grace, and at length give them a crown of glory that fades not away.

We might naturally expect, that a powerful opposition would be excited against a man, whose conversion to the faith of Christ afforded such an overpowering evidence to the truth of Christianity, and whose holy life in Christ condemned the worldliness of the Priests and Pharisees. The more Paul, by his life and doctrine, demonstrated the power and excellency of the Gospel, the more inveterate was the enmity manifested against him. The minds of the Jews, as a nation, were judicially blinded. They knew not the day of their visitation. The Lord would have gathered them, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and they would not. Their language towards Jesus was; "We will not have this man to reign over us."- and to his faithful servant; "Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live." No arguments could convince them, no reasoning could persuade them, no miracles, wrought before their eyes, could remove the stubbornness of their unbelief. Nothing, no nothing but the Almighty Power of the Spirit of God could bring them, as humble penitents, to the foot of the cross, make them to rejoice in the atonement of Jesus, and cause them to glorify God, by an entire submission to his will.

"Even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart, nevertheless, when they shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away." When that reviving period shall arrive, a new impulse will be given to the Christian Church; and the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea.

In reading the history of the infant Church, we might naturally expect that the disciples, on hearing of the conversion of Saul, would instantly hail it as a glorious triumph of Christianity. But, how faithfully does the sacred historian describe the feelings of the primitive Christians, who, knowing that Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, the more effectually to deceive and to destroy, dreaded lest they should be betrayed under the mask of friendship. "When Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join himself to the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the Apostles, and declared unto them, how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus."

What could be more natural, than that Saul, having tasted the grace of Jesus, should be anxious to join himself to his beloved people. The Apostle mentions this visit to Jerusalem, in his Epistle to the Galatians; "You know what I was like when I followed the Jewish religion—how I violently persecuted the Christians. I did my best to get rid of them. I was one of the most religious Jews of my own age, and I tried as hard as possible to follow all the old traditions of my religion. But then something happened! For it pleased God in his kindness to choose me and call me, even before I was born! What undeserved mercy! Then he revealed his Son to me so that I could proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles. When all this happened to me, I did not rush out to

consult with anyone else; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to consult with those who were apostles before I was. No, I went away into Arabia and later returned to the city of Damascus. It was not until three years later that I finally went to Jerusalem for a visit with Peter and stayed there with him for fifteen days. And the only other apostle I met at that time was James, our Lord’s brother. You must believe what I am saying, for I declare before God that I am not lying. Then after this visit, I went north into the provinces of Syria and Cilicia. And still the Christians in the churches in Judea didn’t know me personally. All they knew was that people were saying, "The one who used to persecute us now preaches the very faith he tried to destroy!" And they gave glory to God because of me."

When Saul first introduced himself to the church of Jerusalem, in the new character of an Apostle, we cannot be surprised at the tardy reception he met with, as the disciples would well remember the caution given to them by their Divine Master- "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." How exactly does this accord with our own experience. Any sudden change of character generally excites a degree of suspicion in our minds, and makes us cautious, lest, by coming too hastily to a favorable decision, we should become the dupes of artful deception; and more especially, if an avowed enemy, suddenly professes himself to be our friend.

But, if there be joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents, is there no feeling of delight in the hearts of believers, when sinners, and especially persecutors, are converted to the faith of Christ? Assuredly there is- and such holy joy was experienced by the saints at Jerusalem, when Barnabas had dissipated their fears, by bearing witness to the grace of Jesus manifested towards this bloody persecutor. The Apostles admitted Paul to the fellowship of the saints; they rejoiced over him; he was with them coming in, and going out of Jerusalem; and in their Epistle to the Gentile converts on the subject of circumcision, they styled him and Barnabas; "Beloved- chosen men, who had hazarded their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus." Thus they bore testimony to the truth of his conversion; and they glorified God in him.

During his stay at Jerusalem, the zealous Paul was actively engaged in the work to which Jesus had appointed him. He spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians; but so violent was their enmity to the Truth, that they went about to slay him; which, when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, were multiplied."

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. This ancient aphorism, founded upon experience, proves the truth of David’s declaration; "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God shall help her, and that right early." The disciples, who were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, went everywhere preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them, and there was great joy in that city. Many traveled as far as Venice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. Some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus; and the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

When tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem, the hearts of the disciples overflowed with joy. Being anxious to ascertain the reality of these conversions, they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. This good man, who was full of the Holy Spirit, and of faith, gladly undertook the journey. When he came to Antioch, and saw the grace of God, as displayed in the spirit and conduct of these converts to the Truth, who were first honored by the name of Christian, he was glad, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord. His visit and labors were greatly blessed; for much people was added unto the Lord. O that we could now behold a renewal of these gracious manifestations of the Spirit; that this ancient promise might now be experienced in all its fullness- "I will cause the shower to come down in his season, there shall be a shower of blessings." May we never cease to pray, until God shall make our Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

Christian love is of a peculiarly cementing nature; it binds those together by the sweetest ties whose hearts are filled with the Spirit of Jesus. This uniting love was felt in all its delightful influence by the early Christians, whose trials and consolations were derived from the same sources. From the world, they experienced contempt and persecution; from Christ their Divine Savior, they received strength and peace. This union of heart was enjoyed by Barnabas and Paul, whose lives were now devoted to the glory of the Redeemer.

Having introduced Paul to the church at Jerusalem, and feeling his heart knit to this monument of the Savior’s grace, Barnabas was desirous to have him as a fellow-laborer. He, therefore, departed to Tarsus, where Paul had been sent by the brethren to escape the fury of the Jews; and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. For a whole year, these honored servants of Christ, assembled themselves with the Church, and taught many people. Paul, being called by special grace to the apostolic office, was not permitted to remain in obscurity. He was a chosen vessel, and had a great work to do. Jesus, therefore brought him into his vineyard, which the Apostle cultivated with unwearied labor, and watered with many prayers and tears.

When the Lord bestows his gifts, he designs them for use, and not for idle display. The faith which he gives, is a working faith, and must be tried. The patience which he imparts, must have its perfect work. Thus wrote James to the twelve tribes who were scattered abroad; "Brethren, count it all joy, when you fall into diverse temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience; but let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

O what an honor does God put upon poor mortals, when be employs them in his service. The highest archangel derives his honor and happiness, from fulfilling, without any mixture of sin, the commands of the Almighty. Jesus, who is in the bosom of the Father, has taught us to pray, "Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Were our views of Jehovah’s greatness and glory, such as they will be when we see him as he is, how lowly would every human distinction appear, compared with that honor which rests upon the saints of the Most High.

Shall a worm of the earth, a rebel sinner, a hell deserving creature, be made a child of God; yes, an heir of God through Christ? Nothing but infinite Wisdom could have devised- nothing but infinite Power could have effected- nothing but infinite Love could have revealed, and applied, in all its fullness, so vast a blessing. Darkness, despair, and destruction would have overwhelmed our apostate race, had not infinite Mercy rejoiced against judgment, through the atoning blood of the

Lamb of God.

With never-ceasing delight Paul and Barnabas declared these glad tidings of great joy to the listening crowds at Antioch. They spoke from the heart, to the heart, having themselves tasted that the Lord is gracious, and living in the daily enjoyment of his presence, through the influence of the Holy Spirit. O that our hearts felt this glow of holy love, which rendered the primitive believers so abundantly useful, and caused them to shine as lights in the world.

In tracing the life and character of Paul, there is one feature of peculiar prominence, which cannot fail to strike every attentive observer- THE NATURAL ENERGY OF HIS MIND. He pursued no half measures, he entered into no cold calculations; what he did, he did with all his heart. This he intimated, when pleading before King Agrippa; "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth;" -and he fully acted upon that conviction. Being dark in his views of prophetic truth respecting the Messiah, he stumbled at that Stone which God had laid in Zion. Jesus was to him a rock of offence. Hence all his energies were called into action to suppress the growing Church of Christ, and to silence those who proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God, and the Savior of the world. But, when enlightened by the Holy Spirit to see the glory of Emmanuel, and, to behold in the virgin's Son, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace; a total change took place within him. His native energies were then directed into anew channel. Being brought under the influence of holy love; his ardor, though unquenchable, was tempered by mildness.

With incessant toil he labored to promote the cause of his beloved Savior, esteeming no sacrifice too great to advance his kingdom. Forbearance and charity shed their sweetness over his character, while decision and courage proved the firmness of his faith. He was truly a burning and a shining light– a city set on a hill, which could not be hiden. The sacred historian records several instances of his boldness in declaring the truth of the Gospel.

At JERUSALEM, as we have already seen, he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians. At ANTIOCH, Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you, but seeing you put it from you, and, judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." At Iconium they abode long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. At EPHESUS, Paul went into the synagogue, and spoke boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.

Lukewarmness and faint-heartedness are traitors in the camp of Israel, and do more to weaken the cause of truth than the fiercest opposition from its determined enemies. Faith and love, patience and prayer, are mighty weapons in the hand of the Spirit. The weakest saint, when exercising these graces, shall come off more than conqueror over the powers of darkness.

The reason why so many shrink from suffering for Christ's sake, arises from the coldness of their love. Their faith, being weak, cannot bear them up against that stream of persecution which so powerfully sets in against them. Through fear, they yield to the attacks of the enemy, and thus bring distress into their consciences, as well as discredit on the Gospel. The realities of Eternity seem to be forgotten; or, at least, but faintly impressed upon their minds. Looking more at present

inconveniences connected with a bold attachment to Christ, than at the glories to be revealed, they flag in their Christian course, and would forever perish, if not restored through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The undaunted Apostle was a stranger to that fear of man, which brings a snare and causes multitudes to shrink from the cross. Paul being convinced of the truth of Christianity, through the immediate teaching of his divine Savior, and the inward witness of the Spirit, feared not the face of man, nor the fury of the oppressor. Whether in Jerusalem, amid the bigoted Jews, or at Athens, among the philosophers of the age, he gloried in the cross of Christ; and drew all his peace and joy from a believing reliance on the power and grace of Jesus.

The poison of popularity, the prospect of some temporal advantage, a false shame, the love of ease, a dread of suffering; in a word, the love of the world, concentrating all these evils within itself, causes many a minister of the Gospel to betray his trust, and many a promising professor to droop and wither.

Faith in the atonement of Christ, is the victory that overcomes the world. This divine principle made the faithful Apostle always to triumph in Christ. Through the power of the cross, the world had lost its charms, and death its terrors. A heavenly light filled his mind, and an all-constraining love his heart. He saw in Jesus, all that was precious, and he found in him all that he needed; hence he disregarded the frowns of men, and was willing to bear shame and reproach for Jesus' sake. Being filled with the Spirit, he preached the word of life with the fullest confidence of success; well knowing, that through the combined power of Truth and Love, the stoutest hearts would be humbled, the hardest softened, and the most polluted rendered pure.

When Jesus was seated at the right-hand of the Father, in fulfillment of his promise, he graciously poured out the Holy Spirit on his Apostles. With this Divine unction, they went forth to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation; and nothing could exceed the fortitude which they displayed. Their courage astonished the Jewish rulers; of whom it is recorded, that, "when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled, and took knowledge of them- that they had been with Jesus."

To encourage his disciples before his departure, Jesus said, "Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full." Being now as sheep in the midst of wolves, they needed strength and protection. With a believing reliance on this promise, "Then all the believers were united as they lifted their voices in prayer: "O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them... Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. In fact, everything they did occurred according to your eternal will and plan. And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give your servants great boldness in their preaching. Send your healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus." After this prayer, the building where they were meeting shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And they preached God's message with boldness."

It may well be said, that the prayer of faith moves the hand that moves the world. Happy, thrice happy would it be for the Christian Church, if all her ministers were men of a kindred spirit, who, in the fullness of their faith and love, could sacrifice reputation, ease, wealth, yes, even life itself, for

the Gospel’s sake. But alas! the spirit of the world has made sad inroads into the visible Church of Christ; for many are slumbering on the lap of ease, who should be watchmen on the walls, and champions in the camp of Zion. Still, there are many blessed witnesses, who are valiant for the Truth, whose light shines in the midst of darkness, and whose labors are rendered effectual in spreading the knowledge of Christ. May their numbers be abundantly increased, until Zion shall become a praise in the earth.

To every such faithful laborer, Paul gives this most important charge, "Be an example to all believers in what you teach, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity. Until I get there, focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them. Give your complete attention to these matters. Throw yourself into your tasks so that everyone will see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on your teaching. Stay true to what is right, and God will save you and those who hear you."

How rousing was the Divine commission given by Jehovah to his servant Jeremiah; "Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land--against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you."

With equal force is the command to Ezekiel, "Son of man, do not fear them. Don’t be afraid even though their threats are sharp as thorns and barbed like briers, and they sting like scorpions. Do not be dismayed by their dark scowls. For remember, they are rebels! You must give them my messages whether they listen or not. But they won’t listen, for they are completely rebellious!"

The great Apostle of the Gentiles entered fully into the spirit of these Divine charges. He was no timid, no time-serving shepherd of the flock. His character is beautifully described by Malachi, under the general description of faithful pastors; "They passed on to the people all the truth they received from me. They did not lie or cheat; they walked with me, living good and righteous lives, and they turned many from lives of sin. The priests’ lips should guard knowledge, and people should go to them for instruction, for the priests are the messengers of the Lord Almighty."

May all the friends of Christ be stirred up to fervent prayer at this eventful period, that a spirit of revival may be poured out on all our Churches, lest the Lord, in righteous judgment, should fulfill on us, his threatening to the church at Ephesus; "Remember from where you are fallen; and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of his place, except you repent."

In pity to a dying world,

Almighty Father, send your grace;

And let your banner be unfurled,

And faith’s slow triumph speed its pace.

What millions of immortal souls,

Still live unmindful of your way

And as death’s fearful torrent rolls,

Hundreds are daily swept away.

O Lord, must creatures be undone,

Who from your hand receive their breath?

Shall they be lost, for whom your Son,

Came down to suffer shame and death?

Let sovereign mercy interpose,

To rescue sinners from their doom;

And send your Word to heal their woes,

And light their passage to the tomb.

O spread your Truth through every clime,

Teach stubborn souls to weep and pray;

Let this be the accepted time,

And this salvation’s glorious day.

01.04. Chapter 4 .

Chapter 4.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE PERSECUTIONS WHICH

PAUL ENDURED FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL.

When Daniel stood before Nebuchadnezzar to explain his dream, he shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God, however galling it might be to the ambition of this haughty conqueror. He told him of the fleeting nature of his own dominion; that empire would succeed empire, until the period of the fourth monarchy should arrive, when the God of Heaven would set up a kingdom which should never be destroyed; that it would break in pieces and consume all the former kingdoms, and that it should stand forever. This kingdom was represented to Nebuchadnezzar by a stone cut out without hands- to signify, that it would be established in the earth by an Almighty Power, and not through human skill. While other empires were to pass away, this stone was to increase, until it should become a great mountain, and fill the whole earth. In another vision, Daniel saw one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven; he came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him; and there was given to him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all the people, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away; and hit kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

Jesus, the Prince of peace, the Lord of glory, is this Son of Man, this King of Zion. All who truly believe in him, are the subjects of this spiritual kingdom; for it was revealed to Daniel, that "the saints of the Most High should take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever." In fulfillment of this glorious prophecy, Jesus said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." As his kingdom was to be erected upon the ruins of idolatry, and whatever exalts itself against the glory of God, the world would naturally oppose its establishment and enlargement. And so it was revealed to Daniel. He saw a persecuting power in his emblematical vision, which should make war with the saints, and prevail against them, until the Ancient of Days should come, and judgment be given to the saints of the Most High; and the time arrive, that the saints should possess the kingdom.

From this Prophecy, in connection with those contained in the Revelation of John, we are made acquainted with two important facts- the one is, that the Kingdom of Christ shall finally prevail, and become an universal Dominion, blessing the earth with peace and righteousness; the other, that the true Church of Christ will have to contend with the powers of darkness, and to endure persecution from an ungodly world, until the period shall arrive when Christ will tread the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God, and break his enemies in pieces like a potter’s vessel.

With these prophetic declarations before us, we need not be surprised at the multiplied trials of Paul, and those of true Christians in every age, who devote their lives to the service of Christ, and

to the destruction of Satan’s kingdom. But it will not be always so. The period of the Church’s glory is rapidly advancing. The Lord will hasten it in his time.

To trace the various trials which the Apostle endured, his many privations, and never-ceasing cares, will, no doubt, be interesting as well as profitable. The view of his sufferings should shame us out of our slothfulness. Can we remain indifferent to the interests of Christ’s kingdom, and the eternal happiness of mankind, when he underwent so much for the same Jesus, whom we profess to worship; and out of love to such perishing sinners, as now surround us; and who are continually passing into eternity, regardless of the torments which await them?

It is painful to think, how little our hearts are affected by the wickedness which overspreads the earth. There is an indolence on this subject, which indicates great lack of spiritual feeling. We are not sufficiently alive to the evil of sin, even in our best moments; but could we see, as God sees, we would be overwhelmed by the view of human depravity.

While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Law, written with the finger of God on two tables of stone, the people were corrupting themselves, by making a golden calf and dancing round it with idolatrous worship. The Almighty acquainted Moses with this act of rebellion, and threatened to destroy them instantly. Anxious for the honor of God and the preservation of Israel, he interceded in their behalf, and prevailed. But no sooner did Moses descend from the mountain, and become himself a witness to their abominations, than his anger waxed hot against Aaron and the congregation. He cast the tables out of his hands, and broke them beneath the Mount; he ground the golden calf to powder; and in the name of the Lord God of Israel he commanded the sons of Levi to slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.

How far beyond our conception is the patience of God, who beholds, at one glance, all the evil which is perpetrated, yes, all the evil which is devised, by all the millions of human beings throughout their successive generations! Truly his mercy is infinite. He is God and not man, therefore we sons of men are not consumed. But the Lord is also a God of judgment, who will by no means clear the guilty; for he has declared by his prophet, that "the wicked shall be turned into hell and all the nations that forget God."

We live in a day of rebuke and blasphemy; in a day when the judgments of God are abroad in the earth; a day in which the enemies of Christ are awake and active. Infidelity is unfurling its standard, and spreading its poison. Satan is mustering his forces against the saints of the Most High. If ever the people of God were called upon by the voice of Providence to be up and doing, it is now. This is not the time to slumber, when the foe is in the breach; it is not the season for rest, when the Lord calls his soldiers to the spiritual combat. The weapons of our warfare, though despised by the world, are mighty, through God, to destroy the empire of Satan and to establish the kingdom of Christ upon earth.

O that the Spirit of love may descend upon us from on high. Then will ministers and people, like the early Christians, labor for the conversion of sinners; cultivate personal holiness; sit loosely to the world; and gladly suffer the loss of all things for Jesus’ sake.

What the great Apostle of the Gentiles cheerfully endured, out of love to the souls of men and for the sake of his Redeemer, would daunt the stoutest heart, if destitute of Gospel principles. Nothing but Divine Love, shed abroad in the heart, could have produced such astonishing acts of patience

and self-denial; such cheerfulness in suffering; such preparedness for death.

When writing to the Corinthians, he says, "But sometimes I think God has put us apostles on display, like prisoners of war at the end of a victor’s parade, condemned to die. We have become a spectacle to the entire world—to people and angels alike. Our dedication to Christ makes us look like fools, but you are so wise! We are weak, but you are so powerful! You are well thought of, but we are laughed at. To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, without enough clothes to keep us warm. We have endured many beatings, and we have no homes of our own. We have worked wearily with our own hands to earn our living. We bless those who curse us. We are patient with those who abuse us. We respond gently when evil things are said about us. Yet we are treated like the world’s garbage, like everybody’s trash—right up to the present moment."

Where is the worldling who would endure such accumulated sufferings and contempt, for any promises of good beyond the grave? Worldly men will bear many privations, connected with some earthly advantage, which they hope before long to enjoy; it is the true Christian only, who can suffer for eternal glory. Much consolation was mixed with the Apostle’s tribulations, he could therefore say, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed."

Following the steps of his Divine Master, who endured the cross, despising the shame, he told the Corinthians, "In everything we do we try to show that we are true ministers of God. We patiently endure troubles and hardships and calamities of every kind. We have been beaten, been put in jail, faced angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, endured sleepless nights, and gone without food. We have proved ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, our sincere love, and the power of the Holy Spirit. We have faithfully preached the truth. God’s power has been working in us. We have righteousness as our weapon, both to attack and to defend ourselves. We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us. We are honest, but they call us impostors. We are well known, but we are treated as unknown. We live close to death, but here we are, still alive. We have been beaten within an inch of our lives. Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything."

As if this weight of suffering were insufficient to manifest the strength of his faith and patience, there were teachers in the church of Corinth, who, through envy, sought to undermine his usefulness, by insinuating doubts respecting the validity of his claim to the office of an Apostle. This aspersion excited a holy indignation in the breast of Paul; for nothing could be more abhorrent to a heart hating pretension, than such a false assumption of character. With peculiar energy, he thus writes to the Corinthian church, "Am I not an apostle? Haven’t I seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes? Isn’t it because of my hard work that you are in the Lord? Even if others think I am not an apostle, I certainly am to you, for you are living proof that I am the Lord’s apostle." What a striking instance is this, of self-abasement. While he was compelled to magnify his apostolic office, he beautifully invests it with the robe of humility. Then he adds, "Truly the signs of an Apostle were wrought among you, in patience, in signs, in wonders, and mighty deeds."

Referring to his traducers, he says; "They say they serve Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in jail more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jews gave me

thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled many weary miles. I have faced danger from flooded rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the stormy seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be Christians but are not. I have lived with weariness and pain and sleepless nights. Often I have been hungry and thirsty and have gone without food. Often I have shivered with cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of how the churches are getting along."

With a heart supremely fixed on heaven, and despising the coveted things of the world, he makes this Christian declaration; "If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then am I strong." O! how wonderful is the grace of God in its operations on the human heart. How softening- how subduing. No worldly motive could have effected such a change in the mind of this once bigoted Jew. What had he to gain from the world by embracing Christianity? Nothing, but a series of sufferings, and a bitter death.

Like Moses, he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of the world; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. The true Christian, like the lowly-minded Apostle, must be contented to have his good evil spoken of. His labors of love, undertaken with the purest intention, may be attributed to some mercenary motive; and his very sufferings, patiently endured for the Truth's sake, may be ascribed to the vainglorious desire of getting himself a name.

Let us cease from man. Our eye must be simply fixed upon God; his Will must be our Law; and his Glory the end of our actions; for not he that commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends. While doing his will in the simplicity of faith, and in a spirit of love, we must bear with patience the oppositions of sinners, the uncharitable aspersions of religious professors, and even the unkind surmises of Christian friends.

The admonitions of Peter are very important to the tried believer in Jesus. "For God is pleased with you when, for the sake of your conscience, you patiently endure unfair treatment. Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing right and are patient beneath the blows, God is pleased with you. This suffering is all part of what God has called you to. Christ, who suffered for you, is your example. Follow in his steps. He never sinned, and he never deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when he was insulted. When he suffered, he did not threaten to get even. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly."

Can we thus return good for evil? Under every species of trial, can we patiently endure, as seeing Him who is invisible. To do so, is practical Christianity; it is being imitators of Him who was meek and lowly in heart; and who has commanded us to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and follow him. "If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Do we then study the character of our blessed Lord as revealed in the gospel; and pray without ceasing, that our souls may be transformed into his holy image? The more we drink into the spirit of Jesus, the more we shall experience peace and rest in our souls.

Suffering is the lot of all, but the afflictions of the righteous are sanctified afflictions; they conduce to their growth in grace, and mark out the way to the heavenly kingdom. Paul knew this well; for Jesus had told him, what great things he must suffer for his name's sake. In the midst of the furnace, his Savior stood near him, giving him the blessed assurance, that if he suffered with him, he should also reign with him. Hence, soaring on the wings of faith and love above this darkened scene, he could exclaim with holy triumph, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

When Jesus drew near to the time of his crucifixion, how sweetly did he comfort his little flock, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Peace is the legacy which Jesus left to his Church; a precious gift, more valuable than the wealth of the Indies. It is the fruit of his Spirit, the portion of his saints; whose peace, flowing like a river, widens as it approaches the ocean of eternity. In the midst of trouble, they are kept in perfect peace, because their minds are stayed on Him; resting with unshaking faith upon his atonement, righteousness, and intercession, they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Are they called to endure affliction? They can praise their Savior in the fires. The flame which loosens the earthly cord, like a fiery chariot, bears their unfettered spirits to the realms of bliss. None are exempt from trials; all must prepare to meet them; come they will, in one shape or other. There are trials peculiar to a state of poverty, and to a state of wealth. Some have family burdens, with the blessing of health; others are free from domestic cares, but are oppressed with sickness; some enjoy the blessedness of personal piety, while their immediate relatives are far from God; others are laboring to benefit their fellow sinners, but meet with little else than ingratitude and opposition. The poor man is tempted to think harshly of God; the rich man to forget him. Even the believer finds a constant need for watchfulness and prayer, by reason of the sin which dwells in him.

Thus each one has to bear his own burden; and oh! how often does our merciful God, "stay his rough wind, in the day of the East wind," that his people may be able to carry their cross with comparative ease, through the sustaining power of his Holy Spirit, until they all meet around his throne, wearing the crown of glory, and ascribing all their salvation to Him who washed them from their sins in his own blood, and made them Kings and Priests unto God.

"He that has made his refuge God,

Shall find a most secure abode

Shall walk all day beneath his shade,

And there, at night, shall rest his head.

Just as a hen protects her brood

From birds of prey that seek their blood,

Under her feathers; so the Lord

Makes his own arm his people’s guard.

But if the fire, or plague, or sword,

Receive commission from the Lord

To strike his saints among the rest,

Their very pains, and deaths are blest.

The sword, the pestilence, or fire,

Shall but fulfill their best desire,

From sins and sorrows set them free,

And bring your children, Lord, to thee."

01.05. Chapter 5.

Chapter 5.

A SHORT HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE TRIALS OF THE APOSTLE.

Let us now trace the Apostle’s journey of mercy, as recorded by his fellow-laborer and historian Luke. It is highly instructive to pursue such a tour of benevolence, "to contemplate a man, who renounced the comforts of home, not to amass wealth, or gratify curiosity, or acquire knowledge, which might be ostentatiously displayed on his return; but to perform the unsolicited offices of love to strangers; to impart to them the best of all gifts, the blessings of salvation; to do good to others not only at the expense of time and labor, but at the risk of his life. It was thus that Paul, like his Master, went about doing good." While we travel with him from city to city, we shall find that every where bonds and afflictions awaited him. He was a flame, kept alive in the midst of raging waters. By the preserving care of his Savior, he was immortal, until his work was done.

At JERUSALEM, the theater of his bloody persecutions, he no sooner began to preach salvation through the cross of Christ, than the unbelieving Jews went about to kill him.

At ANTIOCH the people flocked in such numbers to hear the Gospel, that the Jews, filled with envy, spoke against those things which were spoken of Paul, contradicting and blaspheming, until they succeeded in raising a persecution against him, and in expelling him out of their coast. But he shook off the dust of his feet against them, and came unto Iconium, being filled with joy, and with the Holy Spirit. At ICONIUM, the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against Paul and Barnabas, so that an assault was made both by the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and stone them.

At LYSTRA, certain Jews, who came from Antioch and Iconium, persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, they drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead; but while the disciples stood round about him, he was miraculously restored. At this place the Apostle gave a striking proof of the purity of his principles. Having performed a miracle upon a cripple who had never walked, being lame from his birth, the astonished multitude cried out, "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." It was with much difficulty that Paul restrained them from offering sacrifices unto him, saying. "Sirs, why do you these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach to you that you should turn from these vanities unto the living God." How different was the spirit and end of Herod, who drank in the poison of popular adulation. Being arrayed in royal apparel, and seated upon his throne, he made an oration to the people. They gave a shout, saying, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory; and he was eaten by worms, and gave up the spirit."

At PHILIPPI, when traveling with Silas, the multitude rose up together against them. The magistrates rent off their clothes in anger, and commanded to beat them; and when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely, who,

having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. Here, the Almighty appeared in behalf of his suffering servants; for, while they were singing praises to God during the hour of midnight, suddenly there was a great earthquake; so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one’s bands were loosed. Through the wonder-working power of grace, the jailor was made to cry for mercy, to believe in Jesus, to show kindness to the Apostle, and to rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

At THESSALONICA, Paul reasoned with the Jews three Sabbath-days out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must have suffered and risen again from the dead; and that Jesus whom he preached unto them is Christ. And some believed and joined with him and Silas. But the Jews who believed not, moved with envy, took certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar.

At BEREA Paul had no rest; for when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached by him at this place, they came here and stirred up the people. Yet his visit was not without some fruit; for the Jews at Berea, were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. And the happy consequence was, that many of them believed- also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

At ATHENS, he had to endure the strife of tongues, In the synagogue he disputed with the Jews, and in the market daily with those who met with him. Certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics encountered him; while others, mocking, said, "What will this babbler say? You bring strange things to our ears." The opposition which Paul met with from these philosophers, most strikingly shows the holy and humbling nature of the Gospel. The Epicureans derided him, because the pure and self-denying precepts of Christ condemned their loose and exorbitant course of life. The Stoics assailed him, because the meek and lowly spirit of the Gospel was directly opposed to their immoderate pride and love of praise. All, both philosophers and plebeians, ridiculed him, because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection, and exposed, by arguments drawn from Creation and Providence, the folly of idolatry, and their gross superstition in worshiping an unknown God.

At CORINTH, when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment-seat. But here the Apostle received strength and consolation from on high. The Lord spoke to him in the night by a vision "Do not be afraid, but speak, and hold not your peace, for I am with you, and no man shall set on you, to hurt you, for I have many people in this city."

At EPHESUS, a violent tumult was raised by Demetrius, who made silver shrines for Diana. The whole city was full of confusion, and so great was the danger that, when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples did not allow him.

At MILETUS, Paul expressed his feelings to the elders of the church of Ephesus with inimitable tenderness. "And now I am going to Jerusalem, drawn there irresistibly by the Holy Spirit, not knowing what awaits me, except that the Holy Spirit has told me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by

the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about God’s wonderful kindness and love. And now I know that none of you to whom I have preached the Kingdom will ever see me again."

At CAESAREA the Apostle manifested a noble firmness. A certain prophet from Judea, named Agabus, took Paul’s girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owns this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." When the disciples heard this, they besought Paul not to go to Jerusalem. But was such a man as he to be intimidated, through fear of suffering? Could he, who gloried in tribulation for Christ’s sake, be induced to shrink from the cross? Paul answered; "Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! For I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but also to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus." And when he could not be persuaded, they ceased, saying- the will of the Lord be done!

Can we thus surrender into the hands of our heavenly Father, without a murmur, whatever is dearest to us? Not daring to cavil at his inscrutable Wisdom, do we cordially acquiesce in all the arrangements of his Providence and rejoice in the manifestations of his glory, even when He requires the sacrifice of our most valued comforts? Under every bereavement, can we say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord?" "The will of the Lord be done?"

At JERUSALEM, the Apostle did indeed experience the full accomplishment of the predictions of Agabus. All the city was upset; and when the people ran together, they took Paul, and dragged him out of the temple, and went about to kill him. The chief captain also commanded him to be bound with two chains. But Jesus did not forsake his faithful servant. In a vision of the night, the Lord stood by him, and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul, for as you have testified of me in Jerusalem, so must you bear witness also at Rome." With such divine assurances of support, with such favored manifestations of his Savior’s love, he might well say to Agrippa, in his eloquent defense, "I pray to God that both you and everyone here in this audience might become the same as I am, except for these chains." Having appealed to Caesar- Festus said to Paul, "Unto Caesar shall you go." All this was over-ruled, to lead this faithful ambassador of Christ to Rome, that there also he might testify the Gospel of the grace of God.

With such unceasing trials the Apostle might well say to the Corinthians, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." But his hope was founded on the Rock of Ages; his life was hidden with Christ in God; therefore he was safe and happy.

Being put into a ship at Adramytium, this faithful minister of Christ proceeded on his voyage to Rome. He, whose way is in the sea, and whose path is in the great waters, was pleased to raise a storm, which should manifest his power, promote the spread of his Truth, and procure respect for his suffering servant. When neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest threatened their destruction, all hope that the crew would be saved was taken away.

Any religion will stand in a calm. In a storm, in the moment of imminent danger, the true Christian alone exhibits the strength of his principles. When the worldling is filled with dismay, he is full of comfort, yes, exceeding joyful in all his tribulation. Amid the raging elements, the Apostle stood as the messenger of mercy- "Sirs, you should have hearkened unto me, and not have left from Crete,

and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall he no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship alone. For there stood by me this night the Angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, fear not, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and, lo, God has given you all those who sail with you. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me."

Happy Paul! to be thus honored by God, and blessed with his presence! Caesar, surrounded with all the splendors of an imperial palace, was poor indeed, when compared with this despised prisoner of Jesus Christ. We may here learn to form a just estimate of human happiness. It does not consist in the abundance of wealth, the dignity of power, or the fascinations of pleasure; but, in the enjoyment of the Divine favor, and in an uniform loving obedience to the Divine Will.

Can we, like the holy Apostle, in filial confidence declare, "Whose I am, and whom I serve?" To do this is happiness upon earth; to feel this, is the commencement of heavenly felicity. If our hearts assure us that the Lord is our portion, we are truly rich, under every outward privation. Faith is the key which unlocks the store-house of divine bounty. Possessing this gift of grace, the believer can hope against hope, and repose upon the promises under every discouragement. When all is dark around him, and dangers threaten his destruction, he can even then rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of his salvation. How sweetly does David sing, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble- therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."

Faith is a triumphant principle. It supported the royal Psalmist under all his varied trials, and upheld the undaunted Paul amid the storms which every where assailed him. To the affrighted crew, the Apostle manifested its supporting influence, when he declared, "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." This is faith in its native simplicity. It is taking God at his word. It is trusting in a naked promise, believing that God will do as he has said. It is confidence in the faithfulness, power, and love of Christ. It is reliance upon the Truth of Him who cannot lie, whose counsel shall stand, and who will do all his pleasure. Such faith, as it honors God, so it brings peace and purity into the soul.

Being cast upon the Island of Melita, the Apostle would no doubt preach among its inhabitants the unsearchable riches of Christ. Publius, the chief man of the island, lodged him three days courteously; to whom he rendered a signal benefit through the power of Jesus, by the restoration of his father to health. The common people also were directed to attend unto the word of salvation, by his miraculous escape from death; for when a viper fastened itself upon his hand, he shook it off without receiving any harm. Thus they saw in Paul the prisoner, a dignity far surpassing an ordinary character; and they honored him with many honors.

At length the Apostle came to Rome. When the brethren heard of his arrival in Italy, they came to meet him, as far as Appian Forum, whom, when Paul saw them, he thanked God, and took courage. After he had been three days at Rome, he called the chief of the Jews together, to whom he made known the reasons fur his thus appearing as a prisoner among them; and when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodgings, to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the Law of Moses, and out of the Prophets, from morning until evening; and some believed the things which were

spoken, and some believed not. Through the preserving care of his Almighty Savior, Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house; and received all that came unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching them those things which concern the Lord Jesus, with no man forbidding him. The same God who quenched the violence of the burning fiery furnace, and shut the lions' mouth, restrained the power of Nero, and the fury of the Jews.

How divine was that principle which enabled the Apostle to undergo such a series of cruel mockings and scourgings. Blessed be God! the same faith is now imparted to every earnest seeker after Christ. We all need it, and we may all obtain it. "Ho, every one that thirsts, come to the waters, and he that has no money. Whoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely. Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth. Incline your ear, and come unto me, hear, and your soul shall live." Such is the freeness of redeeming love. The poor and the maimed, the halt and the blind, are invited; while the proud, who make light of these blessings, are sent empty away. With these invitations of mercy, the unwearied Apostle went forth into the highways and hedges, seeking out the lost sinners of mankind, and compelling them, through the force of Truth and Love, to come to the Gospel-feast. As a loving heart makes willing feet, so he considered no distance too great, no road too rough, if only he could be the means of saving sinners from the wrath to come. He delighted in his work; his whole heart was engaged in it, and his whole life was devoted to it. But the time now drew near, when this servant of Christ was to seal the Truth with his blood, and to receive the crown of martyrdom; a crown, in his estimation, infinitely surpassing in glory, all the diadems of the world.

From Rome, in what appears to be his last Epistle, Paul feelingly and triumphantly writes to his beloved Timothy; "Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner; but be partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel, according to the power of God. I am appointed a preacher, and an Apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For which cause I suffer these things; nevertheless, I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. Remember, that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my Gospel, wherein I suffer trouble as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the Word of God is not bound; therefore, I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. You have fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord delivered me."

"All they which are in Asia be turned away from me. The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains. When he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day; and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, you know very well. Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world. At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. I pray God, that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom, to whom be glory forever and ever, Amen."

How sweet, how serene, how full of hope are his parting, his almost dying words, "I am now ready to be offered, and 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 to me in that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"

Thus sank to rest this bright luminary of the Christian Church; but he only sank beneath the earthly horizon, to rise, with resplendent glory, in the morning of the resurrection. Like his Divine Master, he was forsaken by his friends in the bitter hour of persecution; and like him, he prayed that it might not be laid to their charge. Thus did Stephen, and so will all who possess the spirit of Jesus, and who feel the influence of that love, which covers, as with a mantle, a multitude of sins.

As Paul felt the blessedness of the promise, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you;" so he could boldly say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man shall do unto me." He was not afraid to die, for he had a desire to depart and to be with Christ. His heart was in heaven, because his treasure was there. When, therefore, the appointed hour arrived which was to convey his waiting spirit into the presence of his God, he cared not by what instrument this blessedness was to be attained, whether by the wild beast, the fire, or the sword; knowing that He, who had never forsaken him, would carry him in safety over every wave of trouble. O! the blessed triumph of the cross! Death is the believer’s consecrated road to glory; for Jesus has led the way, he has opened the gate to everlasting life, and ever lives to guide and guard his people through the darksome valley to his throne above.

Happy then is the true believer. The world may smile, or sneer- he heeds it not. His eye is fixed upon an endless glory; he sees the King in his beauty, and the land which is very far off. By faith he brings its glories near. He already enjoys them by sweet anticipation, and can say, "The Lord is mine, and I am his." Is this our delightful experience? If so, then death will be an everlasting gain; we shall hail its approach with gladness, and bless the hour which brings us into the presence of our God.

"O for a martyr’s glowing zeal

He fears no danger, shuns no pain;

He stands opposed to earth and hell,

And tells them all their threats are vain

See where the faithful champion stands!

Undaunted by his numerous foes;

He listens to his Lord’s command,

And life itself for Him foregoes.

The kindling flames around him blaze;

His courage stands the awful test;

The dying saint, no fear betrays,

Nor does he ask his foes for rest.

His treasure they can not destroy;

And while they think to cast him down,

They do but hasten on his joy,

And brighten his celestial crown.

Farewell, he cries, to all below;

I mount to yonder blest abode;

To join the saints in heaven I go,

To dwell forever with my God.

How blest are they whose work is done

Who now enjoy the glorious prize;

Be this our care, the race to run,

That we may know, and share their joys."

01.06. Chapter 6.

Chapter 6.

ON CONVERSION.

PAUL’S DELIGHT IN PREACHING THE GOSPEL.

THE CHARACTER OF THE PEOPLE TO WHOM HE WROTE.

HIS THANKFULNESS FOR SUCCESS IN HIS MINISTRY.

We have beheld a glorious display of Almighty power in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who, from a fiery bigot was made a zealous disciple of Jesus Christ. In the great work of conversion, the Almighty acts upon us as rational creatures. When man fell from his original state of innocence, and lost the image of his Maker, he did not lose those powers of his soul which distinguished him from the brute creation. Being endued with understanding, will, affections, memory, and conscience, he still remained a free agent, a responsible being, subject to moral obligations. But he became a sinner, and as such, he was obnoxious to infinite justice, lay under the curse of a broken law, and having lost both righteousness and strength, was utterly unable to regain either holiness or happiness.

In this state of spiritual death, despair would have made Adam its wretched victim, had not the Throne of Grace appeared, from where, in sweetest sounds Mercy proclaimed salvation through the Virgin’s Son. What wonder must have seized the heavenly host, when love, uprising from the bosom of the Eternal Father, in the person of the Everlasting Son, thus expressed his willingness to save our ruined race, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the Book it is written of me, I delight to do your will, O my God."

Jesus, the promised Savior, came into our world, and bled and died that guilty man might, through his death, be made an heir of glory. A way of escape is now opened for us. All, who believe in Jesus, shall be saved. All, who are found in Him, are accepted and blessed of the Father. But as the mercy of our God is great, so also is his justice. Out of Christ, we are hopeless and helpless. We fell in Adam. Through his fall we lost all spiritual strength. We cannot save ourselves. No parental discipline, no human law, no system of education, no influence of friends, no moral persuasion, no ministerial labor, no afflictive dispensation, nor any other earthly thing, can, of itself, turn a soul from darkness unto light; from the power of Satan unto God. All these may be, and often are, blessed as means; but the Holy Spirit is the sole efficient, free, and sovereign agent in the regeneration of the soul. God will, and must, have all the glory of our salvation, through Jesus Christ. The proud sinner must be humbled, and brought as a little child to the foot of the cross. Fallen man fancies himself to be something, when he is nothing, less than nothing, and vanity. But this is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, or the mighty man in his might, or the rich man in his riches. Let them boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the Lord who is just and righteous, whose love is unfailing, and that I

delight in these things. I, the Lord, have spoken!"

Through the Gospel of his grace, the Almighty persuasively, yet powerfully, addresses the understanding, the conscience, and the heart. He reveals to us our danger as apostate rebels; our madness in preferring sin to holiness; the road to hell, rather than the way to heaven. He unfolds to us the redeeming love of Christ, to melt our hearts, to captivate our affections, to move our wills to choose him as our only Savior. And when His Divine Power thus accompanies the Word of Truth, great and glorious is the change produced- the darkened understanding is enlightened, the crooked will receives a new bias, the wayward affections are fixed upon Christ, and the wretched outcast is made a child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.

"The human heart is naturally shut against the Truth by spiritual blindness, and the influence of sinful affections. The unregenerate man is incapable of perceiving its excellence, and dislikes it, because it aims at humbling his pride, and would detach him from the unhallowed objects of his love. External means are not sufficient to remove those obstacles to a cordial reception of the Gospel. You may describe colors, in appropriate terms, and with glowing eloquence, to a blind man; but no distinct idea of them will be excited in his mind, while he is without the organ of sight, by which only they are perceived.

"In what manner God acts upon the soul when he renews it, it is impossible to explain. The Scriptures informs us, that, he opens our eyes, enlightens our understandings, changes our hearts, makes us willing, and fulfils in us all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power. With these and similar declarations we should be satisfied. In the economy of grace and of nature, we must be content with the knowledge of facts. There is a veil upon the mode of the Divine operations, which presumption may attempt to remove, while humble piety will be employed in observing and admiring the effects. Happy is he who can say with the man whom our Savior cured, 'One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.'

"There is not a principle of our religion more clearly taught in the Scriptures, and which should be more steadfastly maintained, than that the conversion of a sinner is the effect of supernatural influence. It is a principle which is in unison with all the other parts of the system, and contributes, in concert with them, to promote its ultimate design, the glory of Almighty and Sovereign Grace. To God is reserved the exclusive honor of our salvation; and the proper sentiments of man are humility and gratitude. The scriptural doctrine of grace as the efficient cause of conversion, takes away from man every pretext for alienating himself from his Maker, who should be the constant and supreme object of his love, and trust, and gratitude. It annihilates his boasted dignity and excellence, and leaves nothing to be seen and admired but the Divine goodness. This is true religion; for, in harmony with all the works of God, it terminates in the manifestation of his glory."

Jesus, when pouring his heavenly light into the benighted mind of Nicodemus, made him acquainted with this all-important truth, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto you, you must be born again." John, the beloved disciple, informs us, that when Jesus "came unto his own, his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them he gave power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

To the multitudes who followed him because they ate of the loaves and were filled, Jesus said, "All who the Father gives me shall come to me; and him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out. No man can come to me, except the Father who has sent me draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes unto me." James, in perfect unison with his Divine Master, says; "Of his own will he begat us with the word of truth.'' And so does Peter, "You were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold- but, with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot. See that you love one another with a pure heart fervently, being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever."

John attests the same divine truth, "whoever is born of God does not commit sin, for his seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." Paul, taught by the same Holy Spirit, proclaims in all his Epistles, the doctrine of free grace, abounding to the chief of sinners through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. When speaking of himself in his ministerial capacity, he says, "By the grace of God, I am what I am- and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, which is Jesus Christ. We are ambassadors for Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

With feelings of gratitude the Apostle ascribed all his ministerial usefulness, and personal holiness, to the grace of God, and to that unction from the Holy One, which is the pledge of future glory. It is beautiful to see with what humility he seeks, on all occasions, to magnify the love of God, which shone so brightly in his conversion. If we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, our hearts, like that of Paul, will overflow with thankfulness and praise.

With the same faithful pen, guided by the unerring Spirit of Truth, he shows to the various churches, the source of all their blessedness; "You has he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; having forgiven you all trespasses. For by grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast. You are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light. Know you not, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God; and such were some of you; but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is in you, which you have of God; and you are not your own, for you are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

O! that the pure Gospel of our salvation were sounded throughout the earth; then would the nations rejoice and be glad; then would this waste howling wilderness become the garden of the Lord. Blessed is that minister, who, like the great Apostle of the Gentiles, is able to say to his flock, "Brethren, be followers of me, and mark those who walk so, as you have us for an example." An awful neglect, yes more, a marked dislike, is often manifested to the doctrines of grace, under the specious but false pretense of vindicating the interests of morality. Pride lurks at the bottom of such opposition, or at least a dangerous obscurity veils the minds of many, respecting the true nature of the Gospel of Christ. These opposers may be amiable in their manners, benevolent in their dispositions, and correct in their conduct; yet, being dark in their views respecting the Gospel

way of salvation, they consider the zealous preacher of the cross as an enemy, rather than a friend to practical Christianity. They do not see that all practical godliness springs from a living faith in a crucified Savior, through whom the sinner is freely and fully justified, "without the deeds of the law."

Were all our churches filled with such men as Paul the Apostle and servant of Jesus Christ, our island would become a Goshen, full of the light of Gospel Truth. A day is fast approaching, when each must give account of himself to God. We are all stewards of the manifold gifts of grace. All have some talents committed to their trust, and for those talents all will be responsible unto God who gave them. When the command goes forth, "Give an account of your stewardship," may we do it with joy, and not with grief. Dreadful, in that day, will be the doom of slothful pastors, blind guides, negligent hearers, and wilful abusers of Divine mercy. Has the Father so loved us, as not to withhold from us his Son, his only Son? Has the Son so loved us, as to purchase our souls with his own blood? Has the Eternal Spirit so loved us as to condescend to dwell in our polluted hearts? And shall none of these things move us?

This love of God in Christ was the delightful theme which inspired the tongue, warmed the heart, fired the zeal, and impelled the progress of the indefatigable Apostle into the darkest regions of the earth. He knew no happiness separate from that of preaching Christ crucified, as the Savior of sinners, the Justifier of the ungodly, the Purifier of the unclean. When he saw the divine blessing accompanying his labors, in fulfillment of his Redeemer’s promise, his heart overflowed with joy. He knew whom he had believed; he inwardly felt the consolations of the Gospel; he realized by faith the glory to be revealed; and was desirous that all around him should partake of the same felicity.

The Epistles which he wrote, afford abundant evidence of his unfeigned faith in the Lord Jesus, and his fervent love to all the saints. As letters are directed to certain individuals, so the Epistles of Paul describe the people to whom they were addressed. The following directions are so plain, that no one can well mistake the character of the people for whom they were intended. "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints." "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be saints." "To the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus." "To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi." "To all the saints and faithful brethren which are at Colosse." "Unto the church of the Thessalonians, which is in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ."

From these addresses, with which his several Epistles commence, it is evident, that the Apostle did not write to a set of carnal, ungodly, worldly, unbelieving men, who cared nothing for Christ, or for the salvation of their souls; but, to those who had been convinced of sin, converted to God, united by faith to Jesus Christ, in whom the Holy Spirit dwelt, and who, by their holy lives, were so many shining lights in the midst of a dark and polluted world.

Are these beautiful letters, which contain such consolations and directions, addressed only "To the saints, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus?" Then let not the carnal professor of the Gospel, whose heart is glued to the world, for one moment think, that these glorious promises in Christ Jesus are his, merely because he has been sprinkled with water at the baptismal font, or because he bears a Christian name, and outwardly adheres to the visible Church of Christ! While in a state of unregeneracy, all the denunciations of wrath contained in these Epistles are against him; for thus

says the Apostle, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maranatha." However much it may offend his pride, yet such a nominal Christian, destitute of the Spirit of Christ, while conforming to the ceremonials of religion, is on a level with the poor benighted heathen; yes, in a condition far more awful.

For what says our blessed Lord himself, respecting the highly-favored Jews of his day, whose privileges were not so great as those which we enjoy since his glorious ascension, and the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit? "Woe unto you, Chorazin, woe unto you, Bethsaida; for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you." "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."

Let each one then, with deep solicitude, ask himself this serious question- Do I bear the character, and manifest the spirit, of those primitive believers to whom Paul wrote with such paternal affection? To ascertain this important point, still further inquire- Do I believe in Jesus with all my heart? Is my love to him supreme and fervent? Am I reposing all my hopes of glory upon his atonement, righteousness, and intercession? Do the fruits of the Spirit appear and abound within me? Am I delivered from the pollutions and vanities of the world? Is holiness the element in which I desire to live? Do I crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts, and, through the Spirit, mortify the deeds of the body?

If our hearts can give the faithful affirmative; if we can truly say that we love Jesus, and long to be forever with him; and if our daily walk bears witness to the sincerity of this our profession- then we may read these beautiful Epistles, as if they were addressed to ourselves, and take all the promises of forgiveness, reconciliation, strength, and consolation, which are contained in them, to our personal comfort; and in the fullness of faith, and hope, and charity, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The praising Christian is the happy Christian. God wills the happiness of his people, and is Himself the source of their happiness. The heart of Paul was peculiarly susceptible of grateful emotions. Divine grace shone forth with such a loveliness in all his actions, as renders the contemplation of his character and experience most interesting to the Christian mind. Let us hear some of his sweet accents of praise, as expressed to the churches which he had been instrumental in forming, in the midst of idolatrous abominations.

To the Christians at Rome, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." To the Corinthians, "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ" To the Philippians, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, for your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now." To the Colossians, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which you have to all the saints." To the Thessalonians; "We give thanks to God always for you all, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father,

knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fit, because that your faith grows exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other abounds."

Having himself tasted the goodness of the Lord, the Apostle was delighted, when he saw other poor sinners, led by the Spirit, to the same fountain of grace and mercy. What a happy feeling is holy gratitude, when it expands itself toward that Savior whose bounty is ever affording fresh occasion for its rapturous emotion. Those cold hearted Christians lose much spiritual enjoyment, who would exclude the exercise of the affections from their system of religion. As some people, through the corruption of their hearts, "turn the grace of God into lasciviousness;" and others let their passions run mad into the wilds of enthusiasm; so many, to avoid these evils, as they think, oppose the glorious freeness of Gospel grace, and the lively exercise of sanctified affections. But, unless the affections of the heart be engaged, little progress will be made in the Divine life by the mere knowledge of the head. With the heart man believes unto righteousness; Christ dwells in the heart by faith. True faith is not a cold assent of the understanding; it is a divine grace wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit, which exercises the highest powers, and the best affections of the soul. It unites the believer to Christ, works by love, and binds all the members of his mystical body together, by the indissoluble bond of charity.

Are we in possession of this Gospel grace? If not, are we seeking after it, with an earnestness which will ensure the blessing? Faithful is he who has promised, who also will do it. Jesus, who bids us ask, will never fail to bestow the gift which his Spirit stirs us up to seek. How encouraging are the words of David, "Lord, you have heard the desire of the poor; you prepare their heart, and your ear hearkens thereto."

01.07. Chapter 7.

Chapter 7.

THE PRAYERS OF PAUL FOR THE CHRISTIAN CONVERTS.

HIS LABOR TO PROMOTE THE STABILITY OF BELIEVERS.

THE LOVE OF CHRIST HIS GOVERNING PRINCIPLE.

HIS BENEVOLENT EXERTIONS FOR THE POOR SAINTS IN JUDEA.

The heart of Paul glowed with holy love, and was ever sending forth its fervent aspirations to a throne of grace, in behalf of the objects of his affection. He knew the value of prayer. To thanksgivings for the spiritual blessings imparted to the Gentile Christians, he added earnest supplications, that they might grow in grace and hold fast the beginning of their confidence, firm unto the end. What a beautiful example of ministerial faithfulness is thus afforded by this tender-hearted shepherd, to all succeeding pastors in the Christian Church. How sublime and energetic, how full of life and unction, are the prayers which he poured out in behalf of those newly converted believers, to whom he wrote his Epistles.

He has left us a most precious specimen of that fervent prayer which avails much. May all who read these holy breathings of the Apostle, experience the fullness of the blessings which he so ardently implored for all the churches.

Being filled with the spirit of grace and supplication, he thus expressed the inward feelings of his heart, "I have never stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the wonderful future he has promised to those he called. I want you to realize what a rich and glorious inheritance he has given to his people."

"When I think of the wisdom and scope of God’s plan, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit. And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God’s marvelous love. And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love really is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God."

"I pray that your love for each other will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in your knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until Christ returns. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—those good things that are produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring

much glory and praise to God."

"So we have continued praying for you ever since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you a complete understanding of what he wants to do in your lives, and we ask him to make you wise with spiritual wisdom. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and you will continually do good, kind things for others. All the while, you will learn to know God better and better. We also pray that you will be strengthened with his glorious power so that you will have all the patience and endurance you need. May you be filled with joy, always thanking the Father, who has enabled you to share the inheritance that belongs to God’s holy people, who live in the light. For he has rescued us from the one who rules in the kingdom of darkness, and he has brought us into the Kingdom of his dear Son. God has purchased our freedom with his blood and has forgiven all our sins."

"And may the Lord make your love grow and overflow to each other and to everyone else, just as our love overflows toward you. As a result, Christ will make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy when you stand before God our Father on that day when our Lord Jesus comes with all those who belong to him."

"Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until that day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. God, who calls you, is faithful; he will do this."

"And so we keep on praying for you, that our God will make you worthy of the life to which he called you. And we pray that God, by his power, will fulfill all your good intentions and faithful deeds. Then everyone will give honor to the name of our Lord Jesus because of you, and you will be honored along with him. This is all made possible because of the undeserved favor of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ."

"May our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father, who loved us and in his special favor gave us everlasting comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and give you strength in every good thing you do and say."

"May the Lord bring you into an ever deeper understanding of the love of God and the endurance that comes from Christ." "May the Lord of peace himself always give you his peace no matter what happens. The Lord be with you all." Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." "The God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever, Amen." "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." "Grace be to you, and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, 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." "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end." "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, Amen."

The glorious subject of these petitions cannot be too much studied; the blessings which they contain, cannot be too earnestly implored. These prayers of the Apostle lead us, as it were, into the inner chamber of his heart. We see what were his inmost desires for the spiritual welfare of his children in the faith. Here, nothing is cold or formal; all is fervent, energetic, affectionate. That which the world derides, and the formalist censures, is the very thing he so ardently supplicated for the churches of Christ; even the religion of the heart, manifesting itself by a supreme delight in Jesus, by a bold renunciation of fleshly lusts, and by an uniform obedience to the Will of God.

The Apostle not only rejoiced over those who were made the subjects of divine grace, and prayed for their continuance in well-doing; but he also labored with incessant toil for their establishment in the faith. This truly apostolic spirit is beautifully displayed in his address to the elders of Ephesus, "You know that from the day I set foot in the province of Asia until now I have done the Lord’s work humbly—yes, and with tears. I have endured the trials that came to me from the plots of the Jews. Yet I never shrank from telling you the truth, either publicly or in your homes. I have had one message for Jews and Gentiles alike—the necessity of turning from sin and turning to God, and of faith in our Lord Jesus. And now I am going to Jerusalem, drawn there irresistibly by the Holy Spirit, not knowing what awaits me, except that the Holy Spirit has told me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about God’s wonderful kindness and love. And now I know that none of you to whom I have preached the Kingdom will ever see me again. Let me say plainly that I have been faithful. No one’s damnation can be blamed on me, for I didn’t shrink from declaring all that God wants for you. And now beware! Be sure that you feed and shepherd God’s flock—his church, purchased with his blood—over whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders. I know full well that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. Even some of you will distort the truth in order to draw a following. Watch out! Remember the three years I was with you—my constant watch and care over you night and day, and my many tears for you. And now I entrust you to God and the word of his grace—his message that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself."

Not having been at Rome when he wrote his Epistle to the Christians of that city, he expressed his desire with peculiar delicacy, that he might be permitted to visit them, for their furtherance in the faith of the Gospel. "God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the Gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request, if by any means, now at length I might have a prosperous journey, by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end you may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me."

As the heart of Paul was filled with love and gentleness, so he was equally undaunted in the hour of danger. His Christian heroism was strikingly displayed at Lystra. Having, as we have seen, been stoned by the people, he miraculously rose up, and came into the city; and the next day, he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the Gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. Afterwards he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches. Then he came once more to Derbe and Lystra; so the churches were established in the

faith, and increased in number daily.

The Apostle, regardless of his personal safety, watched over the interests of the infant churches. When persecution was spreading its fires on every side, he trembled for the souls of his spiritual children, lest Satan should get an advantage over them; for he was not ignorant of Satan’s devices. Also, he had a deep insight into the human heart, being well acquainted with his own. And knowing that, "as in water, face answers to face, so the heart of man to man," he was enabled to speak a word in season, and to give such cautions as were needful to guard believers against those snares which were laid for their feet.

His love for the souls of men, led him to endure the greatest privations for their salvation and growth in grace. Impelled by this principle, he traversed various regions, that he might plant churches, and water those churches which were already planted. No force of opposition could deter him from the performance of this duty, nor cause him to desert his beloved converts in the hour of danger. When he could not see them, through providential hindrances, he wrote invaluable Epistles to confirm and strengthen them; and when enabled to travel, we find how fearlessly he revisited those places which were noted by his trials; being willing rather to risk the loss of life, than that one soul should perish through his neglect or from fear of suffering.

In all this the Apostle sought not his own glory, but the glory of God; not his own interest, but the interest of perishing sinners. Hence he could say, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." With the angels of God, he could rejoice over one sinner that repents; and praise the Lord for every brand which was plucked out of the fire. Having been caught up into paradise, his soul was full of heavenly love, and all his prayer, and desire, and labor was, that heaven might be let down into the hearts of men, through a believing reception of Jesus Christ.

What a model is here presented to Christian teachers in every age. There was nothing luke-warm, nothing timid, nothing selfish, in the character of this preacher of righteousness. The love of Christ was the governing principle of his actions; to promote the glory of Christ was the constant desire of his heart. He could truly say, "To me to live is Christ." A heavenly light irradiated his mind. He saw, by faith, the realities of eternity, and his affections yearned over dying sinners. Beholding them suspended by the thread of life over the gulf of hell, in danger every moment of dropping into its everlasting fire, he labored to rescue them from ruin. With unwearied solicitude, he directed them to Jesus, the only Savior and Friend of sinners, whose blood cleanses from all sin, and who can and will save to the uttermost, all who come unto God by him.

Thus he felt for the unconverted Jews, when writing to the Church of Rome, "In the presence of Christ, I speak with utter truthfulness—I do not lie—and my conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm that what I am saying is true. My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them."

He also expressed his great solicitude for their salvation, "Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved; for I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they, being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." In them he saw the image of his former self. He could therefore pity them, and pray for

them, and labor to do them good. But he trembled for their state of unbelief. With a prophetic eye, he foresaw the miseries which were coming upon them as a people, who, to use his own words, "who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them to the uttermost."

The present degraded state of the Jews is an awful commentary upon these words; while their existence as a people, affords an undeniable and perpetual evidence to the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. "My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him; and they shall be wanderers among the nations." "Fear not, O Jacob my servant, says the Lord; for I am with you; for I will make a full end of all nations where I have driven you; but I will not make a full end of you." "You shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a by-word among all nations where the Lord shall lead you." "And it shall come to pass, that as you were a curse among the heathen, O House of Judah and House of Israel, so I will save you, and you shall be a blessing." What uninspired men could have uttered these words with the certainty of their fulfillment? It is most evident, therefore, that the prophecy came not in old times by the will of man; but holy men of God spoke, as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

The Jews have been scattered and persecuted; they are to this day, wanderers, and a by-word among the nations. Those kingdoms which once oppressed them are now no more; while the Jews still preserve their national character, customs, and religion, though dispersed throughout the earth, without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice. What but Almighty Power could have effected, and what but Infinite Omniscience could have foreseen, events, which ought to shame the infidel out of his unbelief!

The Apostle who foretold their miseries, has also, in his Epistle to the Romans, foretold their restoration, and conversion to the faith of Christ. This glorious event will be to the world, as life from the dead, when "Israel shall return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and when they shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." In the same compassionate spirit, Paul grieved over the benighted heathen, who, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world, walked in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that was in them, because of the blindness of their heart. With these affections of compassion and earnest longings for the salvation of sinners, he told the Romans, that, "from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum, he had fully preached the Gospel of Christ."

The Lord, whom he so faithfully served in the Gospel of his Son, sustained him amid all his labors, so that he could say, "I am filled with comfort; I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation." This experience of his Savior’s loving-kindness, made him even "exult in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope makes not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us." Thus he was strengthened to glorify God in the fires; and to spread abroad the savor of his name.

With the love of God, the love of our neighbor is inseparably connected; for, "If any man says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom lee has not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loves God, must love his brother also." Under the influence of this Christian love, the Apostle cheerfully expended his strength, in promoting the temporal, as well as the spiritual welfare of his brethren. His religion was of a practical nature; it did not consist in high professions and swelling words; in many promises, and few performances; but in self-denying labors.

When writing to Timothy, he gave him this command, "Tell those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which will soon be gone. But their trust should be in the living God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give generously to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them. By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of eternal life."

To the exercise of the same practical piety, he exhorted the Galatian converts, "Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." The second time when Paul went up to Jerusalem, he saw James, and Peter, and John, who gave to him and Barnabas the right-hand of fellowship. It was then agreed that he and Barnabas should go unto the Heathen, while the other Apostles would go unto the Jews, "Only they wanted," writes Paul to the Galatians, "that we should remember the poor, the same which I also was forward to do."

The prophet Agabus had foretold by the Spirit, that there would be a great famine throughout the world, which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. This period of affliction called into active exercise that grace of love, which, when genuine, evidences itself by feelings of compassion and acts of unselfish liberality. The early Christians were happily united in heart; they formed but one holy family; their interests, their joys, their sorrows, were so blended together, that if one member suffered, all the members suffered with it. Thus it was at this calamitous season; for the historian informs us, that the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea, which also they did; and sent it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

The Apostle was indeed most forward to remember the poor suffering saints. He used all his influence with the Gentile churches to furnish them with the means of subsistence, and spared no pains to impress the hearts of believers with the exalted duty of Christian beneficence. "I have," said he to the elders of the Ephesian Church, "showed you all things, how you ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said; It is more blessed to give, than to receive." Though very anxious to visit Rome, in order to benefit the Christians there by his counsel and ministry; yet he had a work of love to perform, which he felt desirous first to accomplish. He therefore writes, "I am planning to go to Spain, and when I do, I will stop off in Rome. And after I have enjoyed your fellowship for a little while, you can send me on my way again. But before I come, I must go down to Jerusalem to take a gift to the Christians there. For you see, the believers in Greece have eagerly taken up an offering for the Christians in Jerusalem, who are going through such hard times. They were very glad to do this because they feel they owe

a real debt to them. Since the Gentiles received the wonderful spiritual blessings of the Good News from the Jewish Christians, they feel the least they can do in return is help them financially. As soon as I have delivered this money and completed this good deed of theirs, I will come to see you on my way to Spain. And I am sure that when I come, Christ will give me a great blessing for you."

The charitable Apostle was delighted with the liberality of the Macedonian Christians towards the suffering churches of Judea. To the Corinthians he held them forth as a beautiful model for imitation, "Now I want to tell you, dear friends, what God in his kindness has done for the churches in Macedonia. Though they have been going through much trouble and hard times, their wonderful joy and deep poverty have overflowed in rich generosity. For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford but far more. And they did it of their own free will. They begged us again and again for the gracious privilege of sharing in the gift for the Christians in Jerusalem." He then bestows a commendation upon the Corinthians themselves, "I really don’t need to write to you about this gift for the Christians in Jerusalem. For I know how eager you are to help, and I have been boasting to our friends in Macedonia that you Christians in Greece were ready to send an offering a year ago. In fact, it was your enthusiasm that stirred up many of them to begin helping." "This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"

With Apostolic authority, he might have enforced their obedience; but wishing rather to win them over to the exercise of Christian beneficence, he says, "Since you excel in so many ways—you have so much faith, such gifted speakers, such knowledge, such enthusiasm, and such love for us—now I want you to excel also in this gracious ministry of giving. I am not saying you must do it, even though the other churches are eager to do it. This is one way to prove your love is real. You know how full of love and kindness our Lord Jesus Christ was. Though he was very rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich." " And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others; being enriched in everything to all bountifulness, which causes through us thanksgiving to God."

How indefatigable was this servant of Christ. Who can view his character, and not glorify God in him. May the contemplation of it, stir us up to an increased desire after that grace which produced in him such holy fruits. As by a participation in the sorrows of others, we lessen their poignancy; so, by an endeavor to increase the happiness of others, we augment our own. Let us then embrace every opportunity of doing good to the souls and bodies of men; for opportunity is the flower of time, while the right improvement of it is the fruit. "To a Christian, it must be regarded as an axiom, that an opportunity of doing good, is tantamount to a command to undertake the service. Let us remember, that we have here no option. Our faculties are given to us, not as a property, but as a trust; and we are bound at our peril to forbear availing ourselves of the opportunities which Providence may place within our reach, of doing justice, and showing mercy, of lessening the miseries, and augmenting the happiness, of our species."

How sweetly constraining is the Christian motive to brotherly love; "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not, knows not God, for God is love. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."

"One there is above all other;

O how he loves!

His is love beyond a brother’s,

O how he loves!

Earthly friends may fail and leave us,

This day kind- the next bereave us,

But this Friend will never deceive us,

O how he loves!

Blessed Jesus!- Would you know him,

Give yourself entirely to him;

Is it sin that pains and grieves you?

Unbelief and trials tease you?

Jesus can from all release you;

O how he loves!

Love this Friend- who longs to save you.

Do you love? he will not leave you

Think no more then of tomorrow,

Take his easy yoke and follow,

Jesus carries all your sorrow,

O how he loves!

All your sins shall be forgiven,

Backward shall your foes be driven;

Best of blessings he’ll provide you,

Nothing but good shall e’er betide you,

Safe to glory he will guide you,

O how he loves!

01.08. Chapter 8.

Chapter 8.

THE EFFECTS OF THE APOSTLES PREACHING.

HIS PROPHETIC WARNINGS OF SPIRITUAL DECLENSIONS.

HIS GLORYING IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST.

HIS TENDERNESS OF SPIRIT.

HIS VIEW OF THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL.

Light and darkness are not more opposed to each other, than Christianity and Paganism. If we look at the sages of antiquity, or at the civilized heathens of modern times, and inquire what all their self-inflicted tortures are intended to effect; the answer is given in the streaming blood and dying groans of human victims, whose mangled bodies are supposed to propitiate their angry deities. Their idols are objects of terror, before whose frightful forms they tremble, and to pacify whose wrath, they blindly rush into the jaws of death. Their idols are 'vices defied', which mark the source from where they spring.

Our God is love- rich in mercy to all who call upon him. Our God is holy- the fountain of blessedness to his people. Love, purity, and mercy are no attributes belonging to heathen deities. As in ancient, so in modern days the peculiar features of idolatry are obscenity and blood. Such is the worship which Satan has established in the earth; for so Paul declares- "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils and not to God." In obedience to his Savior's command, the Apostle went forth into all lands preaching to the Gentiles the Gospel of his grace, and laboring in His strength to turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. And wonderful was the effect of his labors among those polluted idolaters, to whom he made known the unsearchable riches of Christ.

When the Gospel was preached in these first ages of the Church, it was revealed to the hearts and consciences of sinners with great power. They deferred not their repentance one day, on account of any worldly considerations. They did not stay until they had set their houses in order. Neither did the fear of losing their estate, pleasures, or even life itself, separate them from Christ. Crowds of sinners who heard the Apostle preach, flocked into the Church as doves to their windows, turning speedily and without reserve to God their Savior; so that Zion, with holy admiration, might well exclaim. "Who has begotten these?"

Luke bears ample testimony to the truth of these remarks. After the Apostle's sermon at Antioch, he tells us, "As Paul and Barnabas left the synagogue that day, the people asked them to return again and speak about these things the next week. Many Jews and godly converts to Judaism who worshiped at the synagogue followed Paul and Barnabas, and the two men urged them, "By God's grace, remain faithful." The following week almost the entire city turned out to hear them

preach the word of the Lord. But when the Jewish leaders saw the crowds, they were jealous; so they slandered Paul and argued against whatever he said. Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and declared, "It was necessary that this Good News from God be given first to you Jews. But since you have rejected it and judged yourselves unworthy of eternal life—well, we will offer it to Gentiles. For this is as the Lord commanded us when he said, 'I have made you a light to the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the farthest corners of the earth.' When the Gentiles heard this, they were very glad and thanked the Lord for his message; and all who were appointed to eternal life became believers."

The ministration of the Gospel had this great effect upon them, because, when it was made known by the voice of men externally to the ear, it was applied inwardly to the heart, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, while the Law was thundering its denunciations of wrath against sin from mount Sinai- The Gospel was proclaiming pardon and peace through the blood of Jesus from the hill of Zion. Then were fulfilled the sweet words of David, "Your people shall be willing in the day of your power, in the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, you have the dew of your youth." But the still more glorious day is hastening on, when Jesus shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied. His children, begotten to him "through the Gospel, shall then exceed in number, as well as brightness and beauty, the spangles of early dew which the morning discloses to the delighted eye of the beholder." Oh happy period! when believers shall cover the earth as the dew drops of the morning; when they shall appear in the beauties of holiness, adorned with humility, hope, love, and all the graces of the Spirit; when all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest; when every heart shall be his dwelling place.

The Gospel, being thus preached with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, was the power of God unto salvation both to Jews and Greeks. And now, as then, it is the word of life, of reconciliation, of salvation, to thousands of wretched sinners, whose hearts are opened, like that of Lydia, to attend to the voice of Mercy. Oh! how can we withstand this Gospel of grace, in which such ample provision is made for every need. In the greatness of his love, our heavenly Father has revealed an all-sufficient Savior, for the removal of our guilt and for our recovery to his favor; and an all-sufficient Sanctifier, for the renewal of our hearts and for our restoration to the privileges of his children. Being taught by the Spirit, Paul knew full well that he might preach and Apollos water, but that God only could give the increase.

In this Epistle to the Thessalonians, he takes particular notice of this accompanying grace of God, "For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true. And you know that the way we lived among you was further proof of the truth of our message. So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord. For this cause, we thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard of us, you received it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually works in you that believe."

The single-hearted Apostle and his fellow laborers in the Gospel, arrogated no power to themselves. They acknowledged their own weakness; declaring that they possessed this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of man. This he confessed to the Corinthians, when stating the efficacy of his labors among them, "Not that we are

sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God, who has made us able ministers of the New Testament."

How harmoniously do the graces of the Spirit blend their excellencies in the experience of Paul, which like the glorious rainbow in the clouds, present to our view the wonderful work of God. Oh! that our admiration may lead us, through grace, to a close imitation of this indefatigable servant of Christ. The faithful minister of the Gospel has joys and sorrows peculiarly his own. Regardless of all personal inconveniences, connected with his pastoral office- his soul can rejoice when, through his labors, sinners are converted unto God. Such delight Paul felt, in the midst of all his conflicts; of this pleasure, John partook when he wrote, "I have no greater joy, than to hear that my children walk in truth;" and in such pure felicity, will every faithful pastor participate, whose heart is in his work, and whose life is devoted to the cause of Truth.

How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things. May their numbers and their success be abundantly increased, until the whole earth be filled with the glory of the Lord. But with sorrow we have to lament, that the Gospel does not exhibit its primitive power among us. Its conquests are few; and the dispensers of it have reason to complain, that they spend their strength to very little purpose. And why is this? Is the Lord’s hand shortened that it cannot save? or, is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear? Are the truths of the Gospel less important now than when they were first preached? or the threatenings against those who neglect them; less alarming? By no means. As professing Christians we must seek for the cause of this evil in ourselves. Like those whom our Lord describes in the parable, we are ever ready to frame excuses for not attending to the call of the Gospel. We try to shelter our slothfulness under the plea of inability to do what the Gospel requires; or, from the lack of time to seek after the promised strength. Thus we deceive ourselves, until death reveals to us our fatal error.

O! that we were wise, that we understood this, that we would consider our latter end. May the Spirit awaken us to a sense of our danger. What language can exceed the tenderness of our heavenly Father; "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord your God which teaches you to profit, which leads you by the way that you should go. O that you had hearkened to my commandments, then your peace would have been as a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea."

We might have supposed that the world would have grown more holy and more confirmed in the faith of the Gospel, during the lengthening period of the Christian dispensation; but Paul in his Epistle to Timothy discloses a painful truth, "The Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron." "For the time will come, when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." To the Thessalonians he also writes, "Please don’t be so easily shaken and troubled by those who say that the day of the Lord has already begun. Even if they claim to have had a vision, a revelation, or a letter supposedly from us, don’t believe them. Don’t be fooled by what they say. For that day will not come until there is a great rebellion against God and the man of lawlessness is revealed—the one who brings destruction, whom the Lord Jesus will consume with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming."

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter declares, "But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly teach their destructive heresies about God and even turn against their Master who bought them. Theirs will be a swift and terrible end. Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality. And because of them, Christ and his true way will be slandered. There shall also come in the last days, scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying; where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were, from the beginning of the creation."

From where arises all this evil in the Christian Church? The springs which supply these bitter waters are clearly revealed in the charges which John was commanded to deliver to the angels of the seven churches. "I have this complaint against you, because you have left your first love. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die. You are neither cold nor hot, I would you were cold or hot; so because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue you out of my mouth." This defection of Christian principle, this declension from the holiness of the Gospel, must be traced to the innate corruption of the heart. A growing insensibility to the evil of lukewarmness, a neglect of closet duties, or a heartless performance of them, a lack of watchfulness and circumspection, a sinful conformity to the world, an over-grasping after earthly things, bespeak a people fallen from that exalted standard of faith and love which so signalized many of the early Christians from the world around them.

But, if in the days of Paul the mystery of iniquity began to work, if John had to rouse the declining churches, and even in the purest age of Christianity had to declare, that many deceivers and antichrists were entered into the world; let us look to ourselves, lest we fall from our own steadfastness; let us daily examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith; and knowing that the end of all things is at hand, let us seek for more grace, that we may be sober, and watch unto prayer, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If such signs of declension are visible among professing Christians, who still maintain an outward regard to the ordinances of the Gospel; what black marks may we not expect to find upon those who, though called Christians, do not pretend to make any profession of religion at all. These hate the light, and will not come to it. They love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. The world reigns in their hearts, and Satan has the sway over them. They will not part with those sins which the Word of God condemns, nor perform those duties which it enjoins. They may attend a preached Gospel, but they do not hear it with teachable hearts. Their fastidious minds are soon offended with the matter or manner of the preacher. They criticize the style of his discourse, but overlook, or are offended at its home-directed truths. They, being spiritually healthy in their own estimation, feel no need of the Physician; and would gladly absent themselves altogether from the house of God, did not some secret whisper of conscience, the force of early habit, or a desire to keep up an outward decency of character, restrain their departing steps.

These and other similar causes operate to exclude the light of the Gospel from the hearts of sinners. O! what a wretched being is man, when left to himself! Every evil nestles in his heart, producing a thousand stings to torment him in time and through eternity. Paul directs us to the contemplation of this misery, "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to those who are lost; in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of those who believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." David, who was well acquainted with the

deceitfulness of the heart, describes the wicked man as flattering himself in his own eyes, until his iniquities be found to be hateful.

It is awful to think what delusions men practice upon themselves. Through the artifices of Satan, and the false reasonings of their own hearts, they are deceived to their own ruin. By comparing themselves with those who are more notoriously wicked; and thus thinking themselves good. By magnifying their supposed virtues, and softening down their vices. By presuming upon the mercy of God, as if he were too benevolent to put his threatenings into execution; or in other words, too good to be true. By depending upon a death-bed repentance, not considering that repentance is the work of the Holy Spirit; and that they cannot turn and prepare themselves by their own natural strength, to faith and calling upon God. By disbelieving the eternity of hell torments, as being a punishment too cruel and severe for the all bounteous Creator to inflict upon his erring creatures. By denying the particular providence of God; esteeming it beneath his glorious Majesty, to inspect their trivial concerns, or to notice each trifling deviation from his Law. By lowering the standard of Christian morality. By supposing the Almighty to be such an one as themselves.

It is the gracious work of the Spirit to convince the world of unbelief, that radical evil from where grow a thousand branches, each bearing the most deadly fruit. Unbelief threw a shadow over the lovely scenes of paradise, and still shrouds the earth with sadness– it bars the gate of heaven, and opens that of hell. Unbelief blinds the eyes of sinners to the dangers which beset them, and the misery which awaits them. They have eyes and see not, they have ears and hear not. While to their worldly interest they are quick-sighted in the extreme, a thick film covers the eye of their minds when the higher interests of eternity are set before them. The things of eternity, being invisible, are forgotten, or lightly regarded, while those of time, always appealing to the senses, are ever uppermost in their affections. They know that death will come, but he is now, as they fondly hope, at a distance from them. Hence they sport with lightsome heart along the flowery path of pleasure, until the unexpected dart is hurled, which hurries them, in all their unpreparedness, into the presence of their Judge.

"Life, and the scenes that round it rise,

Share in the same uncertainties;

Yet still we hug ourselves with vain presage,

Of future days serene and long,

Of pleasures fresh and ever strong,

An active youth, and slow declining age.

Like a fair prospect still we make

Things future, pleasing forms to take;

First, verdant meads arise, and flowery fields;

Cool groves, and shady copses here,

There brooks and winding streams appear,

While change of objects still new pleasures yields.

Farther, fine castles court the eye,

There, wealth and honors we espy;

Beyond, a huddled mixture fills the stage,

Until the remoter distance shrouds

The plain with hills, those hills with clouds,

There, we place death, behind old shivering age.

When death alas! perhaps too near,

In the next hedge does skulking he,

There plants his engines, thence let fly his dart,

Which, while we ramble without fear,

Will stop us in our full career,

And force us from our airy dreams to part."

Thus, vain man, heedless alike of present danger and future evil, neglects the blessings of the Gospel, and with awful madness rushes into the everlasting fire. Is he warned of his danger? He laughs at the credulity of his advisers. Is he invited to accept the offers of redeeming love? He cannot relinquish the pleasures of the world. He is willing to run all risks, rather than endure the self-denying requirements of Christianity. Heaven presents no charms to his vitiated taste. Being earthly, sensual, devilish, his desires are only carnal, and his every step brings him nearer to the pit of hell. But oh! how great is the change, when the Holy Spirit shines into his heart, and gives him the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ! Evils are then discovered which before lay hidden and unknown. Boasted virtues are found to be rebel sins; and crimes, committed under soft and tender names, are seen in all their blackness. Thus Paul, in his state of darkness, considered it meritorious to ravage the Church of Christ; but when enlightened by the Spirit of Truth, he saw his zeal to be rebellion, and his persecution murder.

In every age, whether barbarous or refined, the preaching of the cross is to those who perish, foolishness. The most learned in human science, cannot, by the unassisted powers of reason, discover the glory of the cross of Christ. Their lofty minds cannot stoop so low as to receive, in the simplicity of faith, the humiliating truths connected with, and flowing from, the doctrine of the atonement. This is a path which the vulture’s eye has not seen. Human philosophy cannot perceive the beauty and sublimity of this consecrated way to glory. But, blessed be God, the poor have the Gospel preached unto them; the poor are made rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom; though never taught to measure distant planets, or to explore with philosophic eye the center of the earth. With humble minds they listen to the truth, receive it in faith and love, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, are made holy and happy by it.

David tuned his harp to this delightful subject– "Happy are those who hear the joyful call to worship, for they will walk in the light of your presence, Lord. They rejoice all day long in your wonderful reputation. They exult in your righteousness. You are their glorious strength. Our power is based on your favor; for the Lord is our defense, the Holy One of Israel is our King. Remember me, too, Lord, when you show favor to your people; come to me with your salvation. Let me share in the prosperity of your chosen ones. Let me rejoice in the joy of your people; let me praise you with those who are your heritage."

How triumphant is the power of the cross, which enabled the Apostle to say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." No wonder he was anxious to make known to a ruined world, this mystery of grace, which had filled his heart with joy and peace. It was at the foot of the cross, that he had learned to despise all human greatness, and to desire, above all things, an interest in the righteousness of his crucified Savior. The glory of the cross threw all the glories of the world into the shade. Vanity was inscribed on all its pleasures, its possessions, and its power. Hence, with Christian boldness he assured the Roman converts, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes." He declared also to the believers at Corinth, "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

Deeply impressed with the infinite blessings which flow down from heaven through Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between God and man, he labored to impress the hearts of others, that they, like him, might be made partakers of the grace of God. Through the force of Truth, Felix was made to tremble, Agrippa was almost persuaded to be a Christian, and thousands on the day of Pentecost, were pricked to the heart. What effect has the Gospel had on our hearts? Have we been humbled and changed by it? Has it brought us to Christ, the sinners only refuge from the wrath to come? Is the world crucified to us, no longer swaying our affections? Are we crucified to the world, being esteemed worthless for Jesus’ sake? The Almighty said to Abraham, "I will bless you, and you shall be a blessing." However much, then, the people of God may be despised, they are the seed which the Lord has blessed.

How expressive are the words of our Savior to his disciples, "You are the salt of the earth." Salt has two properties. By the one it preserves from corruption the substance with which it is mixed; and by the other, it communicates to that substance its own savor. The two-fold benefit is derived to the world from true believers. Through their counteracting influence, the progress of corruption is retarded, and by their example, precept, and prayers, the savor of their spirit is diffused. This blessedness is the work of the Holy Spirit, and is produced through the consistency and persevering labors of the righteous.

The life of the believer is a patient continuance in well-doing, a pressing forward towards the mark, a running the race set before him, a growth in grace. Hence, with much solicitude, Paul wrote to the Colossians to continue in the faith, and not to be moved away from the hope of the Gospel which they had heard, and which was preached to every creature under heaven. "God has given me the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming his message in all its fullness to you Gentiles. This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been

revealed to his own holy people. For it has pleased God to tell his people that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. For this is the secret: Christ lives in you, and this is your assurance that you will share in his glory. So everywhere we go, we tell everyone about Christ. We warn them and teach them with all the wisdom God has given us, for we want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ. I work very hard at this, as I depend on Christ's mighty power that works within me."

As the heart of Paul was large enough to contain a whole world, with respect to his desires and prayers for the conversion of every human being to that state of spiritual happiness which he enjoyed; so, he was full of the tenderest sensibilities towards those to whom he had been made the honored instrument in bringing to the knowledge of Christ. With what parental tenderness does he address his beloved converts at Thessalonica and Philippi, "We were as gentle among you as a mother feeding and caring for her own children. We loved you so much that we gave you not only God's Good News but our own lives, too. And you know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children. We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you into his Kingdom to share his glory." "God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus."

How exquisitely touching are these appeals to the sympathies of our nature. They speak directly to the heart. We can conceive of nothing more endearing than this tenderness of ministerial affection. The blessed Apostle felt all the father towards his spiritual children- he exhorted- he comforted- he charged each of them, that he might build them up in the faith of the Gospel. His Epistle to Philemon is replete with feelings of Christian friendship; in which, after having expressed his joy in hearing of his faith and love which he had towards the Lord Jesus, and towards all saints, he thus pleads for Onesimus; the runaway servant of Philemon, who, it appears, had robbed his master- "Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul--an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus-- I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. So if you consider me your partner, give him the same welcome you would give me if I were coming. If he has harmed you in any way or stolen anything from you, charge me for it. I, Paul, write this in my own handwriting: "I will repay it." And I won't mention that you owe me your very soul! Yes, dear brother, please do me this favor for the Lord's sake. Give me this encouragement in Christ. I am confident as I write this letter that you will do what I ask and even more!"

Can any thing be more lovingly persuasive, or more humbly solicitous than these appeals to the heart of Philemon. There is throughout the whole Epistle, a delicacy of sentiment and a pathos which strikingly mark the elevated and refined state of the Apostle's mind. When parting with such a father in Christ, the elders of Ephesus might well weep sadly, falling on Paul's neck and kissing him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they should see his face no more!

Is this Saul of Tarsus, the murderer of Stephen, the blasphemer of Jesus, the persecutor of the sheep of Christ? What cannot grace effect! Well might Jehovah say, "Behold I am the Lord, the God of all flesh, is there anything too hard for me?" The Gospel is truly a revelation of love and mercy; and those who dispense its blessings, and would wish to see them received by the world, must, with Paul, exhibit in their own spirit, the loveliness and loving-kindness of the Prince of

Peace.

This Apostle of Jesus Christ was well instructed in the mysteries of the kingdom. Though his heart was full of the tenderest feelings of compassion, yet he knew how to use the terrors of the Law, as well as the persuasives of the Gospel. With a masterly hand he drew the contrast between the Law and the Gospel, showing with admirable precision the effects produced by each. The Law is the ministry that brought death and of condemnation. The Gospel is the ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness. The Law is the letter which kills. The Gospel is the spirit which gives life. The Law, as a covenant of works, though glorious, was done away with. The Gospel, as a covenant of grace, by reason of the glory that excels, is of perpetual duration. By the Law comes the knowledge of sin. Through the Gospel is the knowledge of salvation. The Law works wrath. The Gospel imparts peace. The Law exhibits God as a consuming fire. The Gospel reveals him as a reconciled Father.

What the Holy Spirit has joined together, let not vain man pretend to separate. The Spirit makes use of the Law and the Gospel in working faith, and it must be the work of preachers to join the Law and the Gospel together. They must awaken and wound by the Law, and they must comfort and heal by the Gospel. By the Law they must strike with terror those who are insensible, and rouse such as are sleepy; and by the Gospel they must pour the soft healing oil of the covenant into the wounds of those who are broken in spirit, and are sinking under the weight of their misery. This is rightly to divide the Word of Truth, according to the charge given by the Apostle to Timothy, "Study to show yourself approved of God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth;" that is, dispensing it suitably and agreeably to the state and temper of the hearers.

The promises of the Gospel are not to be laid open to sinners, who are slumbering on beds of sloth, but they must be awakened by the threatenings of the Law. On the other hand, the corroding medicines of the Law are not to be applied to such as are ready to be swallowed up with excess of sorrow, but to them must be administered the strengthening, reviving cordials of the Gospel. By the Law, sinners must be led to the brink of Jordan; but by the Gospel, they must be carried over Jordan into the promised land of spiritual rest, the pledge and foretaste of heavenly bliss.

It is delightful to observe the wisdom of our Lord; how exactly he suited his counsel to the various states of mankind. The secure and presumptuous he sent to the Law, that they might be humbled. To the contrite and penitent, he preached the Gospel, that they might be comforted. When the rich Pharisee, full of self-conceit, said, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" The answer was, "If you will enter into life, keep the commandments." When the broken-hearted woman fell at his feet, and spoke in tears the guilt of her life, and the anguish of her soul- "Your sins are forgiven," was the gracious reply.

Thus the wisdom of God shines forth in all his dispensations. The Law gives us the shadow of good things to come; the Gospel reflects their image more distinctly; while in heaven they will be viewed in the perfection of beauty, and be revealed in the saints, in all their fullness of glory.

"Ground of my hope, the cross appears;

I see the man of sorrows bleed

I bid adieu to guilty fears,

And in his death my pardon read.

And could you, O my Savior die,

To rescue me from endless woe!

Enough! there’s none more blest than I,

Since you could love a sinner so.

I leave the world its boasted store,

Of pleasures that must quickly end;

I prize its vanities no more,

Since I have found the sinner’s friend.

I care not if the world revile,

The world that hates my master’s cause;

The world, I know would quickly smile,

Were I again what once I was.

Then farewell world, and farewell all

That emulates a Savior’s claims;

I’ll bear him and obey his call,

Regardless who approves or blames.

I’ll praise him while he gives me breath,

Nor then will cease to sing his love;

For when my voice is lost in death,

I hope to join the choirs above."

01.09. Chapter 9.

Chapter 9.

PAUL’S DISINTERESTEDNESS (unselfishness).

HIS PARENTAL SOLICITUDE FOR HIS SPIRITUAL CHILDREN.

HIS SELF-RENUNCIATION.

HIS CHRISTIAN FORBEARANCE WITH WEAK BRETHREN.

Disinterestedness formed a beautiful feature in the character of Paul. It is the appointment of God, that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel; as the Jewish priests, who ministered about holy things, lived of the things of the temple. It is also due from a principle of equity, that those who devote their time and talents for the spiritual good of others, should be preserved, by a suitable maintenance, from those anxieties and cares which necessarily attend worldly business. This equitable provision is clearly ordained of God, both under the Old and New Testament dispensations, that the faithful minister may be enabled, with more unfettered spirit, to pursue the arduous labors of his office. "We have planted good spiritual seed among you. Is it too much to ask, in return, for mere food and clothing? Those who are taught the word of God should help their teachers by paying them."

When Paul succeeded, through the grace of God, in forming a church, both Jews and Gentiles instantly united to crush this little company of believers; while some accused him of self-interested motives, as if he only sought a livelihood among the newly converted Heathen. This accusation led him to refuse repeated offers of assistance, that he might cut off occasion from them who thus desired an occasion to misrepresent him. He therefore said to the elders of Ephesus- "I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to those who were with me." Though he had a full right, as a minister of Christ, to the support of Christian believers, for whose sake he expended all his strength; yet from the peculiar state of the infant Church, he made this disinterested declaration- "I have used none of these things; neither have I written these things that it should be so done unto me; for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. For though I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel."

Nothing could be farther removed from the heart of the Apostle than self-seeking, and the love of what he designated filthy lucre. The man who could say, "I die daily;" whose desire was to depart, and to be with Christ; whose affections were set on things above; and whose life was hidden with Christ in God; would feel no hankering after the perishing honors and riches of the world. His appeal to the church of Corinth is a striking specimen of that eloquence of the heart, which flows from a feeling of conscious integrity- "The only thing I didn’t do, which I do in the other churches, was to become a burden to you. Please forgive me for this wrong! Now I am coming to you for the

third time, and I will not be a burden to you. I don’t want what you have; I want you. And anyway, little children don’t pay for their parents’ food. It’s the other way around; parents supply food for their children. I will gladly spend myself and all I have for your spiritual good, even though it seems that the more I love you, the less you love me."

Nothing but the power of the Spirit of Christ, could have produced a feeling so completely opposed to every principle of our fallen nature. "I will very gladly spend, and be spent for you," is the language of warm affection. It is the expression of an entire surrender of ourselves for the good of those whom we tenderly love; as the Apostle said to the Philippians, "If I am offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all; for the same cause also, do you joy and rejoice with me." But to say, "I will gladly spend myself and all I have for your spiritual good, even though it seems that the more I love you, the less you love me," -is a glorious triumph over the pride and selfishness of the human heart.

O! that we could see among professing Christians, more of this unwearied, this disinterested love. To possess this grace is to resemble Christ, who went about doing good, even to the evil and unthankful; who prayed for his enemies; who laid down his life for his murderers; and who has left us an example that we should follow his steps. Without this heavenly principle of love, which suffers long and is kind, we shall soon grow weary in well-doing, especially, if our labors be requited with ingratitude. To retaliate injuries is the work of pride; to bear them meekly, is the fruit of humility. He, who is saved by infinite mercy, will cheerfully forgive an offending brother. The spirit of the Gospel is love. Happy is the man whose soul is cast into this heavenly mold, and receives the image of Him, who is love.

The faithful minister of the Gospel is often called to spend his strength among a people, who, so far from valuing his exertions for their spiritual good, oppose him in every possible way. Yet, he goes on laboring with unwearied patience in the midst of every discouragement. His motives being misjudged, and his character maligned, still, in the strength of that Savior who sees the sincerity of his heart, he perseveres in his work of mercy. Knowing the value of souls, and the grace of Jesus, he is determined to endure every trial, though the more abundantly he loves, the less he be loved. This holy perseverance does not, in general, lose its reward. The Lord blesses such a patient exercise of faith and hope, both to the shepherd and his flock. Many opposers of the Truth are led, through the Spirit, to submit their wills to Jesus, and to love the man, through whose persevering meekness and unwearied forbearance, they have been brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

May each Christian reader, while holding before himself the mirror of Divine Truth, be enabled to discover his own character. Have you, like the disinterested Paul, this holy love to the Gospel of Christ? Can you labor for the salvation of sinners, though your labors be requited with ingratitude and contempt? Do you esteem all things which nature admires, as loss for Christ? Is your heart powerfully drawn toward the people of God, and do you love them, because they are the members of Christ, and the temples of the Holy Spirit? What are your views of sin? Is it beheld as rebellion against God? as the crucifier of Christ? Is it hated, opposed, and more and more destroyed within you? Is holiness the sacred atmosphere in which you delight to live? Can you say with the heavenly-minded Apostle, I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ? Do you esteem it your heaven, to be with Christ, to be made like him, and forever to behold his glory. If, with the deep

feeling of humility and self-abasement before God, your heart can assent to these important questions, then rejoice, yes, again and again rejoice; for He who has begun this good work in you, will carry it on, and perfect it to his own everlasting praise.

True faith, from its very nature, must influence the heart, and cause the fruits of holiness to spring up and abound. When genuine, it works by love and is never satisfied with any present measure, but is always panting after an increase; since He, who imparts it, is infinite and inexhaustible, and has declared, "Whoever has, to him shall more be given; and he shall have more abundance."

PARENTAL SOLICITUDE was an interesting trait in the character of the Apostle. Fearing lest his humiliating sufferings, which he so feelingly described to the Corinthian Christians, should make them ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, he says in his Epistle to that church, "I am not writing these things to shame you, but to warn you as my beloved children. For even if you had ten thousand others to teach you about Christ, you have only one spiritual father. For I became your father in Christ Jesus when I preached the Good News to you. So I ask you to follow my example and do as I do. That is the very reason I am sending Timothy—to help you do this. For he is my beloved and trustworthy child in the Lord. He will remind you of what I teach about Christ Jesus in all the churches wherever I go."

Where is the zealous minister of Christ who does not meet with trials, among the very people, for whose welfare he is expending all his strength? This holy man had innumerable trials, and those arising from false brethren were not among the least. Pursuing his former appeal to their hearts, he adds; "I know that some of you have become arrogant, thinking I will never visit you again. But I will come—and soon—if the Lord will let me, and then I'll find out whether these arrogant people are just big talkers or whether they really have God's power. For the Kingdom of God is not just fancy talk; it is living by God's power. Which do you choose? Should I come with punishment and scolding, or should I come with quiet love and gentleness?"

His parental fears were greatly excited for the Corinthian converts. He saw among them much to commend and much to blame. With what faithfulness does he set before them his holy apprehensions "I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself. For I promised you as a pure bride to one husband, Christ. But I fear that somehow you will be led away from your pure and simple devotion to Christ, just as Eve was deceived by the serpent."

Though at a distance from Colosse, he was equally alive to the dangers which surrounded the Christians in that city, from the storms of persecution. He therefore writes, "I want you to know how much I have agonized for you and for the church at Laodicea, and for many other friends who have never known me personally. My goal is that they will be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love. I want them to have full confidence because they have complete understanding of God's secret plan, which is Christ himself. In him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

With the same fatherly spirit, he exhorted the Hebrew Christians, "Be careful then, dear friends. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. You must warn each other every day, as long as it is called "today," so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ."

It is truly beautiful to behold this combination of tenderness with that honest plain-dealing which will not allow sin to remain unreproved upon a Christian brother. The divinely-taught Apostle was well acquainted with the deceifulness of the heart and the devices of Satan. He knew the dangers which accompany both the smiles and the frowns of the world, having himself experienced both. His anxieties were, therefore, never dormant, respecting those young believers in Jesus, whose faith might be shaken through the afflictions attendant upon a zealous profession of the Gospel.

Another striking instance of his solicitude is afforded us in his Epistle to the Thessalonians, "Finally, when we could stand it no longer, we decided that I should stay alone in Athens, and we sent Timothy to visit you. He is our co-worker for God and our brother in proclaiming the Good News of Christ. We sent him to strengthen you, to encourage you in your faith, and to keep you from becoming disturbed by the troubles you were going through. But, of course, you know that such troubles are going to happen to us Christians. Even while we were with you, we warned you that troubles would soon come—and they did, as you well know. That is why, when I could bear it no longer, I sent Timothy to find out whether your faith was still strong. I was afraid that the Tempter had gotten the best of you and that all our work had been useless. Now Timothy has just returned, bringing the good news that your faith and love are as strong as ever. He reports that you remember our visit with joy and that you want to see us just as much as we want to see you. So we have been greatly comforted, dear friends, in all of our own crushing troubles and suffering, because you have remained strong in your faith. It gives us new life, knowing you remain strong in the Lord."

Then; with expanded heart, he breaks forth into the most joyous thanksgivings to God- "How we thank God for you! Because of you we have great joy in the presence of God. Night and day we pray earnestly for you, asking God to let us see you again to fill up anything that may still be missing in your faith. May God himself, our Father, and our Lord Jesus make it possible for us to come to you very soon."

Like the gardener, he was most solicitous about his tender plants; and labored to screen them from the nipping blast. By faith and prayer, he daily committed them to Him, who died to redeem them by his blood; and felt assured, that He, who had called them by his grace, would preserve them unto his kingdom and glory.

No one had a clearer perception than Paul of the sovereignty of Divine Grace, and the stability of the Divine Promises; yet this did not cause him to relax in his endeavors, by all possible means, to guard believers against the subtlety of Satan, the snares of the world, and the deceitfulness of sin.

He knew the inseparable connection there is between the means and the end; that the one, as well as the other, is divinely ordained. To the ship’s crew he said, "There shall be no loss of any man’s life among you," -and yet he added, "Unless these abide in the ship, you cannot be saved."

His constant warning therefore was, "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall. Do not be high-minded, but fear. Let no man deceive himself." How many err in practical religion by following human theories, instead of the Word of God. The purposes of Jehovah, which are secret to us, do not release us from the performance of revealed duties. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." Therefore, whenever we meet with a plain precept, we

should simply endeavor to obey it, without tarrying to enquire into God’s hidden purpose.

SELF-RENUNCIATION was a prominent feature in the conduct of Paul. Self was swallowed up in that one great object, to promote which all his desires centered- Christ and Him Crucified. He was willing to be esteemed as nothing, so that Christ might be all and in all. The glory of Jesus was his constant aim, to hold him forth in all his excellencies was his delight, though, in so doing, he should be esteemed by the worldly wise, and the great ones of the earth, as a fool for Christ’s sake. Thus, with beautiful humility, he told the Corinthians, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake."

In his Epistle to the Philippians we have a most interesting instance of this victory over selfish feeling- "And I want you to know, dear friends, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including all the soldiers in the palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, many of the Christians here have gained confidence and become more bold in telling others about Christ."

How cheering it must have been to the Apostle, in the midst of his sufferings, to behold the Gospel making its conquests in the palace of Caesar! At the close of this Epistle he says, "All the saints salute you, chiefly those who are of Caesar’s household." Oh! that every palace may be illuminated by the Truth of the Gospel, and by the holy lives of its possessors. Happy is that nation where God is known in its palaces as a sure refuge; where its king is a nursing father, and its queen a nursing mother to his Church. Happy is that nation which is in such a case; yes, blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God.

That the bonds of the Apostle should have emboldened others to speak the word without fear, when the natural effect might have been intimidation, was a cause for thankfulness. But in the midst of these encouragements, he had to notice, what to many would have been a painful trial, "Some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. They preach because they love me, for they know the Lord brought me here to defend the Good News. Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. But whether or not their motives are pure, the fact remains that the message about Christ is being preached, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice. For I know that as you pray for me and as the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will all turn out for my deliverance."

Grace shines with peculiar luster in this generous feeling of his heart. No malice, no retaliating passion of envy, or ill-will was awakened in his bosom. All his desire was that Christ should be preached and sinners saved. Did any envy his success, or seek to lessen him in the esteem of others? -he bore it with patience. Did they preach Christ as the only Savior of sinners? -he could, and did rejoice, even though they preached Christ out of envy and strife, supposing to add affliction to his bonds.

Self was sacrificed to the glory of the Redeemer. This humble servant of Christ felt no keen solicitude about his own reputation, if only the riches of pardoning love, through a crucified Jesus, were proclaimed to the world.

Does our Christian experience accord with this beautiful spirit and temper of the Apostle? Those only are disciples indeed, who have the mind of Christ, and who resemble him in his humility,

self-denial, and love. What a glorious object would the Christian Church be, yes, the joy of the whole earth, if all its professing members were filled with that charity which suffers long and is kind; if they were clothed with that lowliness of mind, which causes each to esteem others better than themselves. O that sovereign grace may produce in rich abundance these peaceable fruits of righteousness- and hasten on that blissful period, when Jesus will reign in the hearts of all his people, and bless the earth from the rising to the setting sun.

CHRISTIAN FORBEARANCE, was another lovely excellence in the Apostle. Understanding well the glorious liberty of the Gospel, he could bear, with much patience, the prejudices of weaker brethren.

How seldom do old established Christians make sufficient allowance for the inexperience and infirmities of young believers, whose minds, just opening to the Truth, have not attained to the stability of the Christian character.

Toward these babes in Christ, much tenderness should be manifested, and much solicitude exercised, as the mother watches over the first steps of her infant. This lovely part of the Apostle's character is displayed in the following exhortations, "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. So don't condemn each other anymore. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not put an obstacle in another Christian's path. We who are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification, for even Christ pleased not himself. Give none offence, either to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God; even as I please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. If what I eat is going to make another Christian sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don't want to make another Christian stumble."

Living, as we do, in a Christian country, we have not to encounter the Jewish distinctions of foods and drinks; nor to experience the offence of food offered unto idols; yet the duties of charity, forbearance, and self-denial are of perpetual obligation, and in one way or other are called into daily exercise. Let us follow after the things which make for peace, and things whereby one may edify another.

This was the truly charitable practice of the Apostle; "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient; All things are lawful for me, (meaning no doubt things in themselves indifferent) but I will not be brought under the power of any. I keep under by body, and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." Thus, while he conscientiously abstained from whatever might offend the weakest of his brethren, he most carefully avoided, whatever would injure his own soul.

But here the line must be distinctly drawn; for, while we yield to the prejudices of weaker brethren, we must never make sinful compliances to conciliate the people of the world. Jesus said to his disciples, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets."

If, then, we try to recommend religion, or to remove the prejudice of worldly people, by departing in any instance from our proper character as professing Christians, we deceive ourselves, and discover great defect both in principal and judgment. The apostolic injunction is, "you must live in a

manner worthy of the Good News about Christ, as citizens of heaven. Let your speech be always with grace. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Hence our duty is plain; for though we cannot always discourse upon spiritual things; yet, we must always speak in the spirit of the Gospel; and though we cannot always be engaged in religious exercises, yet, our light must so shine before men, that they, seeing our good works, may glorify our Father which is in heaven.

As believing Christians, we must never conceal our principles, nor shrink from an open confession of our faith. If we call Jesus Lord, we are bound to honor him, by a cheerful obedience to his will, whatever harm it may bring upon us. Sinful compliances are never blessed of God to the conviction or conversion of ungodly people; but often end in the confusion of those who make them.

It may however be asked, did not Paul say, "I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some?" He did– and his language to the Corinthian church is peculiarly striking, "This means I am not bound to obey people just because they pay me, yet I have become a servant of everyone so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with the Jews, I become one of them so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with those who follow the Jewish laws, I do the same, even though I am not subject to the law, so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with the Gentiles who do not have the Jewish law, I fit in with them as much as I can. In this way, I gain their confidence and bring them to Christ. But I do not discard the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. When I am with those who are oppressed, I share their oppression so that I might bring them to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone so that I might bring them to Christ. I do all this to spread the Good News, and in doing so I enjoy its blessings."

From his whole spirit and conduct, it is evident, that what he conceded either to Jews or Gentiles, were things which did not in the slightest degree affect the fundamentals of the Gospel. Unlike the Pharisees, he would not strain at a gnat and swallow a camel; or tithe the mint, anise, and cummin, while he neglected the weightier matters of the Law.

The religion of Paul was the religion of the heart -a religion of truth and love. Though he could bear with the infirmities of the weak, yet, with uncompromising firmness, he maintained the purity of the Gospel. Of this, he has given us two striking instances, which are highly characteristic of his charity and decision. He told the Galatians, who were drawn away by Judaizing teachers from the truth of the Gospel, that he had opposed the circumcision of Titus (he being a Gentile) lest the doctrine of justification by faith should appear to be renounced; and assured them, that if they were circumcised, Christ would profit them nothing. While, in perfect consistency with this conduct, he took Timothy, (his mother being a Jewess) and circumcised him, with the simple view of rendering him more acceptable, and his ministry more successful among the Jews. Thus he made a judicious and important distinction, between the essentials and the non-essentials of religion.

Acting on this principle, when Gentiles were converted to the faith of Christ, he could receive them as brethren, and eat and lodge with them, in opposition to the deeply-rooted prejudices of the Jewish nation. And this he did, from his comprehensive view of Christian liberty, which, while it delivered him from the bondage of the ceremonial Law, led him to delight in the expansive spirit of the Gospel.

In his Epistle to the Corinthians he gives us abundant proof of his utter aversion to a party spirit, which, engendering strife and schism, rends and disfigures the body of Christ. With enlarged heart he loved all, whether Jews or Gentiles, who loved the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; and cheerfully conformed, for the sake of unity and peace, to any custom which compromised no Gospel principle, militated against no Gospel doctrine, and lowered no Gospel precept.

With enlightened mind he beheld the Christian dispensation in its native glory, consisting, not in foods and drinks, not in forms and ceremonies, not in human systems and opinions, but in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

With holy delight he saw the blessing of Abraham descend on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that they, as well as the Jews, might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. With fervent desire he thus expressed himself to the church of Rome; "So I pray that God, who gives you hope, will keep you happy and full of peace as you believe in him. May you overflow with hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. I am fully convinced, dear friends, that you are full of goodness. You know these things so well that you are able to teach others all about them. Even so, I have been bold enough to emphasize some of these points, knowing that all you need is this reminder from me. For I am, by God’s grace, a special messenger from Christ Jesus to you Gentiles. I bring you the Good News and offer you up as a fragrant sacrifice to God so that you might be pure and pleasing to him by the Holy Spirit."

Entering fully into the design of the Gospel, which, like the leaves of the Tree of Life, is for the healing of the nations, he was ready to become all things to all men; and to seek the profit of many, that they might be saved. Few, comparatively, attain to this exalted standard of Christian Experience; for "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s."

To love the Gospel for its own sake, and to love those who live under its sanctifying influence, though in minor things they differ from us, is to imbibe the catholic spirit of Paul. The exclusive love of our own party, which closes our hearts against those who follow not with us, even though they be the followers of Christ, is the very bane of Christian unity, and the prolific source of evil.

Happy indeed will that period be, when the envy of Ephraim shall depart- when Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim- when all the tribes of the Lord shall love as brethren, and unite with one mind and heart. in promoting the glory of Jehovah!

Much wisdom and love, much faithfulness and forbearance, are required in the ministers of Christ Their whole spirit and life should be a commentary upon the Word which they preach.

This holy conformity to the Gospel should also be visible in all who profess to believe in Jesus. It was so with many of the Corinthians. With what joy could the Apostle declare; "But the only letter of recommendation we need is you yourselves! Your lives are a letter written in our hearts, and everyone can read it and recognize our good work among you. Clearly, you are a letter from Christ prepared by us. It is written not with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. It is carved not on stone, but on human hearts."

Also, over many of the Thessalonians he was much comforted, "You yourselves became an example to all the Christians in Greece. And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Greece, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your

faith in God. We don’t need to tell them about it"

A character, so opposite in principle and practice, to that which the world admires, is the work of Almighty Power. "If any man among you," says the Apostle, "seems to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise; for the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."

However much an ungodly world may despise the faithful ambassador of Christ, there is a sanctity of spirit, a purity of purpose, an energy of action, displayed in his character, which mark him out as a chosen vessel; as one whom Jesus delights to honor.

How important are the titles which he bears in the Word of God- a pastor, a teacher, a steward, a watchman, a builder, a laborer. How incessant his care, his wisdom, his fidelity, his vigilance, his exertion. Who can estimate the value of such a man, whose life is thus devoted to the cause of Truth? We should honor him, as the glory of the churches, and the messenger of Christ. We should esteem him very highly in love for his work’s sake.

"Nature teaches us to love our benefactors, and the grace of God will inspire a particular affection to those who have been the instruments of our spiritual good. Indifference to the people and interests of the ministers of religion proceeds from indifference to religion itself, and may be justly considered as a proof, that those in whom this temper prevails, have not experienced the peace and comfort which the instructions and exhortations of the faithful servants of Jesus Christ communicate to believers."

The jailor at Philippi, when converted to the faith of Christ, overflowed with gratitude to the instruments of his conversion. "He took Paul and Silas the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately. And when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." Lydia, when she was baptized and her household, besought these honored servants of Christ, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come in to my house and abide there. And she constrained them." To Gaius, John writes, "Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do, to the brethren and to strangers; which have borne witness of your charity before the church."

If the ministerial character be so elevated; if the work to be achieved be so arduous; if the stream of opposition rolling against it be so powerful; well might the holy Apostle exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Truly God only can give, what may emphatically be called a minister’s heart. Such a heart of devotedness to Christ, was imparted to Paul; and such a heart of faithfulness and love dwells in all, who are truly called by his grace, to serve Him in the Gospel of his Son.

"O! for that flame of living fire

Which shone so bright in saints of old;

Which bade their souls to heaven aspire,

Calm in distress, in danger bold.

Where is that spirit, Lord, which dwelt

In Abraham’s breast, and sealed him thine;

Which made Paul’s heart with sorrow melt,

And glow with energy divine?

That Spirit, which from age to age

Proclaimed your love, and taught your ways;

Brightened Isaiah’s vivid page,

And breathed in David’s hallowed lays?

Is not your grace as mighty now

As when Elijah felt its power;

When glory beamed from Moses’ brow,

Or Job endured the trying hour?

Remember, Lord, the ancient days;

Renew your work, your grace restore;

Warm our cold hearts to prayer and praise,

And teach us how to love you more."

01.10. Chapter 10.

Chapter 10.

ON THE CHARACTER OF PAUL, AS A MAN OF PRAYER.

HIS UNBENDING INTEGRITY.

Prayer is the cry of a new-born soul, the sign of penitence, the language of desire, the breath of faith. Contrition, humility, faith, and thankfulness, form the essence of acceptable prayer. He who commands us to pray, can alone impart the spirit of prayer. Our blessed Savior has not only taught and commanded us to pray, but did Himself set us an affecting example of fervent prayer.

At his baptism, while he was praying, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him.

Just before he chose his twelve Apostles, he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

At another time, in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.

When great multitudes came together to hear and to be healed by him of their infirmities, he graciously supplied their spiritual and bodily needs, and then withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.

"Taking with him Peter, and James, and John, Jesus went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his clothing became white and glistering, and a voice out of the overshadowing cloud, said, This is my beloved Son; hear him."

When his soul was put to grief in the garden of Gethsemane, being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me, nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done."

Like their Divine Master, all true believers have been, and still are, a praying people. To live without prayer is to live without God in the world. True spiritual prayer is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the token of every promised blessing. A praying soul is a thriving soul; for as all things are possible to him that believes, so all needful things shall be granted to the prayer of faith.

PAUL WAS A MAN OF PRAYER. With holy fervor he daily poured out his heart to God, in behalf of the churches which he had planted amid the wilds of Heathen superstition. As the first evidence of his conversion, was, "Behold he prays;" so this mark of his adoption into the family of God was never obscured. In the spirit of a child, he approached God, as his Father in Christ Jesus, and felt anxious that all within the sphere of his influence should enjoy the blessedness of adoption.

How sweetly did he display this privilege of the believer in Jesus to the church at Rome, "You have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry; Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."

This exalted privilege of sonship, the Apostle made known also to the Christians of Galatia; "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying; Abba, Father. Wherefore, you are no more a servant, but a son; and if a Son, then an heir of God through Christ. For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Happy indeed are they, who are thus admitted into the family of God; each member of which can sweetly sing–

"Father God! how sweet the sound!

How tender and how dear

Not all the harmony of heaven,

Could so delight the ear.

Come, sacred Spirit, seal the name,

On my expanding heart;

And show, that in Jehovah’s grace,

I share a filial part."

To believe in Jesus with the heart unto righteousness, to love him with supreme affection, to live under the sanctifying influence of his Spirit, to draw near to God with the confidence of children, and to be assured that our persons and services are accepted in the Beloved, is the very essence of Christianity.

How animating is the promise of Jesus to his disciples, "Whatever you shall ask in my name believing, you shall receive." But some may say– how can we thus pray? Is not faith the gift of God; and are not our hearts naturally averse from this spiritual duty? Jesus who kindly supplies all our need according to the riches of his grace, has left nothing undone in his work of mercy. His chosen servant was divinely directed to encourage the hope of sinners, and to animate the efforts of believers. "The Spirit," says he to the Romans, "helps our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us, with groanings that cannot be uttered. And he that searches the hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints, according to the will of God." Thus, provision is made for every Christian pilgrim, who, journeying on his way to Zion, beholds these encouraging words– "Ask, Seek, Knock."

But must souls dead in sin be exhorted to pray? Certainly they must; because prayer is of divine appointment; and because all, without exception, are dependent upon Divine Goodness, and stand in need of Divine Mercy.

Prayer is the cry of need. The infant cries when its necessities are felt; and so does the convinced sinner, when awakened by the spirit to a sense of his danger. The humble performance of duty, is infinitely better than a thousand speculations upon it. Man’s moral inability cannot take away God’s right in commanding, nor man’s guilt in not obeying the Divine Law.

A prayerless soul is a Christless soul. Sinners must therefore be roused from their perilous state, and in the powerful language of Isaiah, exhorted to seek after, and call upon God- "Seek the Lord while you can find him. Call on him now while he is near. Let the people turn from their wicked deeds. Let them banish from their minds the very thought of doing wrong! Let them turn to the Lord that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. "My thoughts are completely different from yours," says the Lord. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."

While men are speculating, sinners are perishing, and Satan triumphing. Time is short- Eternity is opening upon us. Now, only now, is the accepted time. Sinners must therefore be urged to cry for mercy, through the blood of Christ; leaving it with God to bless his own appointed means, who works in us to will and to do according to his good pleasure.

Peter said to Simon Magus, "Your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent, therefore, of this your wickedness, and pray to God, if perhaps the thoughts of your heart may be forgiven you, for I perceive, that you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached to a multitude of sinners, whom he addressed as the crucifiers of Jesus. And what was the effect produced? They were pricked in their hearts; and cried, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Disregarding all metaphysical distinctions about the bondage and freedom of the will, Peter, under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit, thus addressed the convicted multitude- "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." "And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation." Then those who gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. Thus, Scripture and experience attest, in spite of human theories, that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

If sinners ought to be exhorted to seek for mercy, surely saints must be stirred up to fervent prayer. It is their duty and their privilege; their strength and their consolation.

How encouraging are the promises of Jesus; "When you pray, enter into your closet, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret, shall reward you openly." "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Thus, a blessing is pronounced on secret, and on social prayer. If they who fear the Lord, speak often one to another; how much more will they delight to hold communion with their heavenly Father through the Son of his love.

Reader, is prayer the delightful exercise of your soul? Are your refreshments sought for, and obtained, at the throne of grace? Have you access by faith in the blood of Jesus, to the Father of mercies, through the power of the Holy Spirit? Many are the apostolic exhortations to prayer "Pray without ceasing- Continue instant in prayer- Give yourselves unto prayer- I desire that men pray

everywhere." "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." This made Paul very desirous to have the prayers of all the churches in his behalf.

He entreats the Thessalonians, "Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified; and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for all men have not faith."

To the Hebrews he writes, "Pray for us, for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly; but I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner."

To the Corinthians, "In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we learned not to rely on ourselves, but on God who can raise the dead. And he did deliver us from mortal danger. And we are confident that he will continue to deliver us. He will rescue us because you are helping by praying for us. As a result, many will give thanks to God because so many people’s prayers for our safety have been answered."

To the Philippians; "I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

To the Romans, "Now, I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those who do not believe in Judea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints, that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed."

To Philemon; "Prepare me a lodging, for I trust that through your prayers, I shall be given unto you."

These highly interesting extracts show how much even an inspired Apostle valued intercessory prayer. How delightful is the thought, that Christian friends, though separated from each other, may meet in spirit at a throne of grace. To the true believer, prayer is a precious privilege. At the mercy-seat, sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, he pours out his heart, makes known his needs, and derives renewed strength to perform his duties. There he lays his burden at the feet of his Savior, and there he is filled with peace and joy. Like Hannah, he goes to his God with a sorrowful spirit, and like her, he returns with a gladsome heart. With David he cries- "Return, O Lord, deliver my soul, O save me, for your mercies’ sake." And with him he sings, "The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord has received my prayer. I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness, and will sing praise to the name of the Lord most high." Full of faith and love, his affections yearn over perishing sinners- he makes intercession for all men- stands in the gap in seasons of national judgments- and pleads with his God in be half of a guilty land.

Thus, the praying Christian is the true patriot- the best friend to his native country. Such a national blessing did Elisha esteem the prayers of Elijah, when he cried after the ascending Prophet- "the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." Oh! that our Elijahs may be jealous for the Lord their God; and lift up the voice of earnest supplication to him that smites. For, wrath has gone out from the Lord- the plague has begun. Commissioned by that Almighty Being, whose Name, whose Word, whose day is profaned, death has entered our land in its most frightful form. The pestilence

which walks in darkness, and the sickness which wastes at noon-day, are now sweeping into eternity the thoughtless and unprepared. How loud is the call- "Prepare to meet your God." How solemn the warning- "Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live."

O that the servants of Christ, in this our time of danger and desolation, may be stirred up to fervent prayer. Did we as a nation humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God; did we plead in faith the merits of the Great Atonement; then would his wrath be turned away, and his blessing would descend upon us. With united hearts let us supplicate the God of Britain, that His Spirit may be poured out on our king, our princes, our priests, and on all the people of these realms, that England may still be His peculiar treasure-the Ark to bear His Truth- the honored instrument, in His hands, for evangelizing the world. (The most unthinking must surely be awakened to a sense of danger, when that sweeping Pestilence, the Asiatic Spasmodic Cholera, has been brought, by the immediate hand of God, into this country. Its desolating ravages in India, Persia, and the Turkish Dominions in Asia, Africa, and Europe; its awful effects in Hungary, Russia, Prussia and France; its milder, but progressive work of destruction in our own Island, are calculated to arrest the thoughtless- and lead all to listen to the voice of God, speaking to the Nations by this tremendous scourge. God has evidently a controversy with his people. He has made bare his arm in righteous judgment. But how gently does he deal with us! we have only felt the sprinkling of the norm. If we do not repent, the overwhelming flood may soon descend upon us, hurrying whole cities into one common grave. Oh! that England may know the time of her visitation; then will God be gracious unto our land, and pity his people.)

PAUL WAS A MAN OF UNBENDING INTEGRITY.

He may truly be called a transparent character. There was nothing dark or ambiguous about him. All was open, ingenuous, sincere. He walked in the light.

Holding sacred the dictates of conscience, he sought its approving testimony! Hence he could say, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."

When accused before Felix as a mover of sedition, he boldly asserted his conscious rectitude; "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man."

In all ages, the faithful servants of Christ have been charged with fomenting divisions, and turning the world upside down. They have been treated as "pestilent fellows," because they testify of the world, that the works thereof are evil. But, like the upright Apostle, they can appeal with confidence to the Searcher of hearts. He knows their inmost desires to promote His glory, and the best interests of mankind. Possessing these two blessings– "an approving conscience, and a smiling heaven," they can bear with patience the ridicule of the wicked, and labor for the good of those who seek their hurt.

As a minister of the Gospel, Paul was faithful to his trust. While the priests of heathen deities, in order to better delude their votaries, were throwing a veil of mystery around their superstitions; he, as the servant of Jehovah, had no object but to disseminate the light of Truth, no motive but that of fervent love to the Redeemer.

Neither did he shrink from human scrutiny, nor wrap himself up in falsehoods. Like Samuel of old, he could appeal to the churches with fearless integrity, "We reject all shameful and underhanded methods. We do not try to trick anyone, and we do not distort the word of God. We tell the truth before God, and all who are honest know that. For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile; but as we were allowed by God to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, who tries our hearts; for neither at any time used we flattering words as you know, nor a cloak of covetousness, God is witness."

Thus he appealed to them, with respect to his words, and to God, as touching his heart. They knew that he had used no "flattering words." And, he knew, that God was witness to the inward purity of his motives in preaching the Gospel among them.

Such was the straight-forwardness of Paul’s conduct. This holy man had no sinister ends in view. He coveted not the passing glories of a world which lies in wickedness, nor the applause of dying multitudes. His treasure, and his heart were in heaven. No privation could draw a murmur from his lips, nor cause him to think harshly of his God and Savior. His anxieties did not spring from selfish considerations, nor from fear of personal inconveniences. Far otherwise- all his concern was to make known the unsearchable riches of Christ, whatever grief or loss, whatever pain or death, might accompany his labor.

With unspeakable joy he could say to the Corinthians, "But thanks be to God, who made us his captives and leads us along in Christ’s triumphal procession. Now wherever we go he uses us to tell others about the Lord and to spread the Good News like a sweet perfume. Our lives are a fragrance presented by Christ to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those being saved and by those perishing. To those who are perishing we are a fearful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved we are a life-giving perfume. And who is adequate for such a task as this? You see, we are not like those hucksters—and there are many of them—who preach just to make money. We preach God’s message with sincerity and with Christ’s authority. And we know that the God who sent us is watching us."

Sincerity is a pearl of great price; without it, religion is an empty name. The most gifted talents are of little worth, if unaccompanied by this Christian grace; while, clothed with it, the humblest attainments are pleasing unto God, who sees not as man sees. Religion has its seat in the heart. There, must its power be felt; and from thence, must its light proceed. To possess a single eye, which aims at nothing but the glory of Jesus, and simplicity of heart, which abhors every species of deceit, is to possess the spirit of the Gospel.

While the mind is engaged in holy meditations on the glories of redemption, the affections of the heart must be captivated by the love of Christ, and the will inclined to serve him with all its powers. This is genuine Christianity; the workmanship of God.

"O Savior, may we never rest

Until you are formed within;

Until you have calmed our troubled breast,

And crushed the power of sin.

O may we gaze upon your cross,

Until the wondrous sight

Makes earthly treasures seem but dross,

And earthly sorrows light;

Until released from carnal ties

Our spirit upward springs;

And sees true peace above the skies,

True joy in heavenly things.

There, as we gaze, may we become

United, Lord, to Thee;

And in a fairer, happier home

Your perfect beauty see."

01.11. Chapter 11.

Chapter 11.

PAUL’S FAITHFULNESS IN REPROVING.

HIS OBEDIENCE TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT.

Among the many duties which compass the walk of the believer, few are more difficult to perform, than that of Christian reproof. We might naturally expect, that the great Apostle would be faithful in the performance of this duty. And so he was. Under every circumstance, however difficult or delicate, arising either from opposition or affection, Paul was a Faithful Reprover. By the light of Truth, he could discern the least deviation from the path of rectitude; and guided by a spirit of love, he was ever ready to impart the faithful admonition.

Much wisdom, combined with kindness, is required in the reprover, and much humility, blended with thankfulness, in the reproved; for, "As an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover to an obedient ear." Those who reprove must guard against every feeling, yes, even appearance of superiority; lest, by exciting the pride of the reproved, the intended benefit should be lost.

Notwithstanding the delicacy of this Christian duty, faithfulness must guide its operation when the occasion requires its severe exercise. The tender-hearted Paul had to perform this painful task in several instances, which are recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and in his own Epistles.

When the Holy Spirit said, "separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them," these holy men were obedient to the heavenly mandate. Having performed the wont assigned to them, they sailed to Antioch, from where they had been recommended to the grace of God, for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. The relation of this missionary tour gladdened the assembled church, and called forth many thanksgivings unto God.

Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord. "After some time Paul said to Barnabas, "Let’s return to each city where we previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers are getting along." Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark. But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not shared in their work. Their disagreement over this was so sharp that they separated. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus. Paul chose Silas, and the believers sent them off, entrusting them to the Lord’s grace. So they traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia to strengthen the churches there."

The heavenly-minded Paul was well acquainted with his own heart, when he said to the people of Lyconia, "We also are men of like passions with you." Though we cannot expect perfection in this sinful world, where the holiest of men are compassed about with infirmities; yet we must bewail

that warmth of temper, which occasioned such excellent men to separate from each other. How instructive is Scripture Biography– It not only develops the inward principles of the heart, but makes us also acquainted with the nature and effects of those actions, which these principles produce.

The Bible is a faithful record. There we see man in his real character, whether groaning under the slavery of Satan, or rejoicing as the servant of Jesus Christ. Truth requires no covering, and therefore seeks none. The faithfulness with which the lives of believers are recorded, forms no small evidence of the truth of Scripture, which rests its veracity, not on the excellence of man, but on the immutability of Jehovah. The failings of the saints are detailed with the same impartiality as their graces, no, are even more minutely described, with the evident intention of humbling our pride, and showing us that salvation is of grace and not of works. The sins of believers, be it ever remembered, cannot be charged upon that holy religion which condemns them; but, upon their own corrupt nature which produces them. Holiness is the peculiar characteristic of the Gospel, and proves it to be from God.

The sacred historian bears testimony to Barnabas, that he "was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit." He had willingly given up the world for the Gospel’s sake; for, being the owner of land he sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the Apostles’ feet. John Mark was his sister’s son, for whom he felt, no doubt, much natural affection. He was a young disciple and not sufficiently strengthened in faith, to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; hence he shrunk from the trials which awaited the Apostle in every city; and being most probably overcome by fear, left him at Pamphylia and returned to Jerusalem.

Barnabas, in the Spirit of that charity which hopes all things, was desirous to try Mark on another journey, but Paul, who well knew the evil of faintheartedness in the work of the Gospel, and the absolute necessity for a man to be willing to run all risks, if ever he would do good as an ambassador of Jesus Christ, remonstrated with Barnabas upon the instability of John Mark’s conduct, and the unsuitableness of taking him for a companion in labor, who previously had deserted them in the work. Hence arose the sharp contention which ended in their separation.

Though he would not desire to justify what is wrong, even in the holiest of men, yet, it is evident that nothing guided the Apostle, but that uprightness of principle and that devotedness of heart to Christ, which rendered him so abundantly useful to the souls of men. Painful as was the circumstance, it forms another development of Paul’s character; while, through the over-ruling power of God, it was made conducive to a more enlarged diffusion of the Gospel of peace.

In his last Epistle to Timothy he leaves this satisfactory record- " Take Mark and bring him with you; for he is profitable to me for the ministry." Thus Mark proved himself to be a true believer, by his growth in grace, and his continuance in well-doing. How relevant is the admonition of the Apostle, to all who feel inclined to expose, rather than to correct, the failings of a Christian brother, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." Thus beautifully were the graces of the Spirit blended in the character of this servant of the Redeemer. He drank into the Spirit of Christ, and trod in his steps. May we go and do likewise.

Another striking instance of his faithfulness in reproving, is related by himself to the Galatians, "But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him publicly, speaking strongly against what he was doing, for it was very wrong. When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile Christians, who don't bother with circumcision. But afterward, when some Jewish friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore because he was afraid of what these legalists would say. Then the other Jewish Christians followed Peter's hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was influenced to join them in their hypocrisy. When I saw that they were not following the truth of the Good News, I said to Peter in front of all the others, "Since you, a Jew by birth, have discarded the Jewish laws and are living like a Gentile, why are you trying to make these Gentiles obey the Jewish laws you abandoned?"

What could exceed the honesty of the reproof here exhibited to our view? Did the Apostle speak evil of Peter behind his back? No- he withstood him to the face. Did he shrink from a public, though painful, denunciation of Peter's conduct on this occasion? No- he rebuked him openly, before them all. Did his reverence for Peter's age and character, cause him to palliate or connive at what he conceived to be injurious to the cause of Truth? No- he boldly reproved him, when he saw that he walked not uprightly, according to the truth of the Gospel.

This was faithfulness indeed; and no doubt Peter well knew how to value it, and to love his brother Apostle for it; for "the ear that hears the reproof of life, abides among the wise." Consistency of conduct is, at all times, most important, both in ministers and people. On this occasion, there was a lack of consistency in Peter's conduct, which Paul condemned. If he thought it right to eat with the Gentile converts, he ought not to have separated himself from them, when certain Jews came from James. By this act, he either tacitly acknowledged, that he had done wrong, or he was influenced by an undue fear of man.

But another and yet more pernicious effect resulted from this inconsistency of Peter. In this act, he contradicted the glorious design of the Gospel, which was to break down the middle wall of partition, and to unite both Jews and Gentiles in one body in Christ; for the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Peter was the more inexcusable, as the vision with which he had been favored to prepare his mind to visit Cornelius, and the blessed fruits of that visit, must have removed his Jewish prejudices, and led him to see, that unto the Gentiles also, God would grant repentance unto life.

Paul therefore, perceiving the evil which would arise to the Gentile churches from this conduct of his beloved fellow-laborer, boldly maintained the liberty of the Gospel; which, while it freed the Jewish Christians from the ceremonials of the Law, brought the Gentile converts into all the privileges of the children of God. Hence, he gloried in this blessed truth, -"you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus- There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

In no stage of our Christian pilgrimage are we removed out of the reach of temptation, or from the hidden evils of our fallen nature. "By faith we stand." Nothing but Almighty Power can keep us from falling, and enable us, under all circumstances to walk uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel. How faithfully did the zealous Apostle also reprove the church of Galatia, on account of their being drawn away by Judaizing teachers, from the simplicity of the Gospel. "I marvel," said he, "that you are so soon removed from him who called you into the grace of Christ unto another

Gospel, which is not really another; but there be some who trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ." And then, with apostolic authority, he declares- "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again; if any man preach another Gospel unto you, than that you have received, let him be accursed."

Errors in doctrine are seldom unattended by defects in practice. If we depart from the purity of the Truth, we shall suffer loss, both in holiness and comfort. This Paul knew, and deplored- "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing--if it really was for nothing? But now that you know God--or rather are known by God--how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you."

Few things are more painful than that which is experienced by the minister of Christ, when he beholds his flock carried away by dangerous errors, and losing their affection for him, through the insinuations and flatteries of false teachers. No one, not so circumstanced, can fully enter into the heart-felt grief of such a pastor.

With great tenderness of spirit Paul then appeals to their former affection for him. "Surely you remember that I was sick when I first brought you the Good News of Christ. But even though my sickness was revolting to you, you did not reject me and turn me away. No, you took me in and cared for me as though I were an angel from God or even Christ Jesus himself. Where is that joyful spirit we felt together then? In those days, I know you would gladly have taken out your own eyes and given them to me if it had been possible. Have I now become your enemy because I am telling you the truth? Listen! I, Paul, tell you this: If you are counting on circumcision to make you right with God, then Christ cannot help you. You were getting along so well. Who has interfered with you to hold you back from following the truth? It certainly isn’t God, for he is the one who called you to freedom. I only wish that those troublemakers who want to mutilate you by circumcision would mutilate themselves."

With such earnestness did their spiritual father long for their restoration, that he used the strongest metaphor to express his feelings, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you, and to change my voice, for I stand in doubt of you." Who can question the sincerity of a heart which could make such affectionate appeals, and administer such faithful reproof. His parental heart was grieved that they should so soon forsake him, and listen to the voice of strangers, who sought to lead them away from the simplicity that is in Christ.

This part of the Apostle’s history affords a useful lesson to faithful ministers– to watch over their flocks with jealous care, and not to withhold the wholesome reproof, though it may deeply wound; for "faithful are the wounds of a friend."

Of all the offices held by man, none is so important in its nature, and awful in his responsibilities, as that of the Christian Ministry, however much it may be despised by an ungodly world, or unhappily dishonored by the unseemly conduct of some who sustain it. Glorious indeed will be the reward of that man, who, in the spirit of Paul, takes upon himself the care of souls, and solemnly engages in the presence, and through the grace of Jesus, "to teach and to admonish, to feed and provide for the Lord's family; to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his children, who are in the midst of this evil world, that they may be saved through Christ forever." May all who enter into this sacred office, "never cease their labors, their care and diligence, until they have done all that lies in them, according to their bounden duty, to bring all such as are, or shall be committed to their charge, unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfection of age in Christ, that there be no place left among us, either for error in religion, or for viciousness of life."

The will and ability to perform so great a work, is given of God alone; hence arises the need for earnest prayer, that the Holy Spirit may impart those gifts and graces which are peculiarly essential in an ambassador of Christ.

"Would I describe a preacher, such as Paul

Were he on earth, would hear, approve, and own,

Paul should himself direct me. I would trace

His master-strokes, and draw from his design.

I would express him simple, grave, sincere;

In doctrine uncorrupt; in language plain,

And plain in manner; decent, solemn, chaste,

And natural in gesture; much impressed

Himself, as conscious of his awful charge,

And anxious mainly, that the flock he feeds

May feel it too; affectionate in look,

And tender in address, as well becomes

A messenger of grace to guilty men."

This bright example of a Gospel minister, the Apostle held forth to us in his own experience, spirit, and conduct. As his labors were incessant, so also were his solicitudes for the welfare of the Church of God. In enumerating his trials, he mentions last, as if to mark its peculiar greatness, that which came upon him daily, "the care of all the churches."

We cannot forbear to mention another instance of his uncompromising firmness when ministerial reproof was needed. He deeply lamented the evils which disfigured the Corinthian Church, "Now, dear brothers and sisters, I appeal to you by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop arguing among yourselves. Let there be real harmony so there won't be divisions in the church. I plead

with you to be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. For some members of Chloe’s household have told me about your arguments, dear friends. I had to feed you with milk and not with solid food, because you couldn’t handle anything stronger. And you still aren’t ready, for you are still controlled by your own sinful desires. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn’t that prove you are controlled by your own desires? You are acting like people who don’t belong to the Lord. When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I prefer Apollos," aren’t you acting like those who are not Christians? Who is Apollos, and who is Paul, that we should be the cause of such quarrels? Why, we’re only servants. Through us God caused you to believe. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. My job was to plant the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God, not we, who made it grow. The ones who do the planting or watering aren’t important, but God is important because he is the one who makes the seed grow."

Discarding all idea of personal merit, the disinterested Apostle strikes at the root of popular applause and party spirit. By his deep insight into the human heart, he saw the source from where these evils spring– that love of change, that fondness for novelty, that captious spirit, that itching ear, that setting up of one minister above another which divided the Church, and engendered strifes and contentions among them. With unwearied solicitude he labored to counteract these growing evils, that all who professed and called themselves Christians, might be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.

Paul was well aware that an enemy had done this. As the kingdom of Christ is extended by union, gentleness, and love, so Satan increases his dominion by discord, strife, and hatred. Knowing the depths of this arch-deceiver, and being jealous for the Truth, he forewarned the Corinthians against his delusions; "No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval." Is not this a word in season? Do not errors and divisions even now weaken the Christian Church, and tarnish her glory? Blessed is he that watches, and keeps his garments unspotted from sin.

With equal fidelity he apprized the Christians at Rome to beware of schismatics, who would endanger their peace and unity- "And now I make one more appeal, my dear brothers and sisters. Watch out for people who cause divisions and upset people’s faith by teaching things that are contrary to what you have been taught. Stay away from them. Such people are not serving Christ our Lord; they are serving their own personal interests. By smooth talk and glowing words they deceive innocent people."

This unwearied laborer was the more anxious for their preservation from these evils, as they were in a prosperous spiritual condition- "But everyone knows that you are obedient to the Lord. This makes me very happy. I want you to see clearly what is right and to stay innocent of any wrong. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

These instances are sufficient to show, that Paul was a faithful reprover, that he feared not the face of man. While others were dissembling, or courting popular applause, he could say with honest Nehemiah, "Even their assistants took advantage of the people. But because of my fear of God, I did not act that way."

As a Christian, and a preacher of righteousness, the Apostle was obedient to the reigning government; and cheerfully submitted to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake. His religion was the religion of peace and good order, not of strife and confusion. "Woe unto him that strives with his Maker. Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth." While the rebellious sinner exclaims; "Who is Lord over us?" -the humble Christian cultivates a spirit of reverential love.

In drawing a sketch of the Apostles conduct and preaching we must notice his important exhortations to the duty of Christian obedience to civil government. Having revealed to Titus, the glorious appearing of the Great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ, he subjoins- "You must teach these things and encourage your people to do them, correcting them when necessary. You have the authority to do this, so don’t let anyone ignore you or disregard what you say. Remind your people to submit to the government and its officers. They should be obedient, always ready to do what is good. They must not speak evil of anyone, and they must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone."

How beautifully does the Christian character shine forth in this admonition. Were all rulers and subjects brought under the holy influence of the Gospel, then truth and justice, brotherly kindness and charity, devotion and piety, concord and unity, with all other virtues, would so flourish among us, that they would form the stability of our times, and make the Church of Christ a praise in the earth.

As it is by the will of God that kings reign and princes decree justice, Paul gives this charge to Timothy exhort therefore that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men," -without any distinction of character; for foes as well as friends; for the turbulent as well as the peaceable; for distant nations as well as for our own land. To which he adds, and, "for kings and for all that are in authority;" giving this substantial reason for the performance of this duty– "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

While the governing power was Pagan and persecuting, he gave this admonition to the Christians at Rome, "Obey the government, for God is the one who put it there. All governments have been placed in power by God. So those who refuse to obey the laws of the land are refusing to obey God, and punishment will follow. For the authorities do not frighten people who are doing right, but they frighten those who do wrong. So do what they say, and you will get along well. The authorities are sent by God to help you. But if you are doing something wrong, of course you should be afraid, for you will be punished. The authorities are established by God for that very purpose, to punish those who do wrong. So you must obey the government for two reasons: to keep from being punished and to keep a clear conscience. Pay your taxes, too, for these same reasons. For government workers need to be paid so they can keep on doing the work God intended them to do. Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and import duties, and give respect and honor to all to whom it is due."

With equal force he inculcates on the Corinthians the duty of contentment in the station in which God had placed them. This admonition is the more striking, as the word rendered servant, in our version, signifies a slave, "You should continue on as you were when God called you. Are you a slave? Don’t let that worry you—but if you get a chance to be free, take it. And remember, if you

were a slave when the Lord called you, the Lord has now set you free from the awful power of sin. And if you were free when the Lord called you, you are now a slave of Christ. God purchased you at a high price. Don’t be enslaved by the world. So, dear brothers and sisters, whatever situation you were in when you became a believer, stay there in your new relationship with God." What a disregard is here manifested to outward worldly distinctions, so opposite to the spirit which actuates professing Christians in general.

To Timothy he also writes, "Christians who are slaves should give their masters full respect so that the name of God and his teaching will not be shamed. If your master is a Christian, that is no excuse for being disrespectful. You should work all the harder because you are helping another believer by your efforts."

The Apostle considered it of such importance to the peace of society, and so accordant with the spirit of the Gospel, not to render its professors dissatisfied with their social stations, that he adds- "These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing. From such withdraw yourself." So advised Solomon, "my son fear the Lord and the king; and meddle not with those who are given to change."

Writing under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter strongly enforced the duty of subjection to the existing powers, on the Christians who were scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, "For the Lord’s sake, accept all authority—the king as head of state, and the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish all who do wrong and to honor those who do right. It is God’s will that your good lives should silence those who make foolish accusations against you. You are not slaves; you are free. But your freedom is not an excuse to do evil. You are free to live as God’s slaves. Show respect for everyone. Love your Christian brothers and sisters. Fear God. Show respect for the king."

And then, in his second Epistle, he cautions believers against such as were presumptuous, self-willed, despising government, and not afraid to speak evil of dignities. "It is the corruption and misery of man’s nature" as Leighton observes, "that he does not know, and can hardly be persuaded to learn, either how to command aright, or how to obey; and no doubt many of those that can see and blame the injustice of others in authority, would be more guilty that way themselves, if they had the same power. It is the pride and self-love of our nature that begets disobedience in inferiors; and violence and injustice in superiors, that depraved temper, that ties to every kind of government a propensity to a particular evil; that makes royalty easily degenerate into tyranny, and the government of nobles into faction, and popular government into confusion. As civil authority and subjection to it, is the institution of God; so the peaceable correspondence of those two, just government and due obedience, is the especial gift of God’s own hand, and a prime blessing to states and kingdoms. And the troubling and interruption of their course is one of the highest public judgments, by which the Lord oftentimes punishes the other sins both of rulers and people. And whatever be the cause, and on which side soever be the justice of the cause, it cannot be looked upon but as a heavy plague and the fruit of many and great provocations, when kings and their people, that should be a mutual blessing and honor to each other, are turned into scourges one to another, or into a devouring fire, as it is in the parable of Jdg 9:20– Fire going forth from Abimelech to devour the men of Shechem, and fire from Shechem to devour

Abimelech."

May the God of Britain preserve our nation from so awful a catastrophe, by uniting the hearts of all, as the heart of one man, in holy obedience to himself, in loyal attachment to our king, and in brotherly love to one another.

It may be asked; did not Paul violate his own precepts when he so awfully denounced the high-priest? If the circumstances of the case be considered, it will be found that he was not aware that Ananias, then sitting in judgment, was the legally appointed high-priest. Ananias was acting contrary to the law, in commanding the Apostle to be beaten before he was found guilty. Paul, who knew his hypocritical character, under the influence of a prophetic spirit, pronounced his doom, "God shall smite you, you whited wall."

On being informed that Ananias was the acting high-priest, the Apostle instantly declared his reverence for the office, saying, "I knew not, brethren, that he was the high-priest, for it is written; You shall not speak evil of the ruler of your people." Hence it is evident, that he would not thus have spoken, had he known that Ananias was at that time the officiating high-priest in Jerusalem.

The following historical fact will serve to elucidate the Apostle’s conduct. Soon after the holding of the first council at Jerusalem, Ananias was deprived of the high-priest’s office for certain acts of violence, and sent to Rome, where he was afterwards released, and returned to Jerusalem. Between the death of Jonathan, who succeeded him, and was murdered by Felix, and the high-priesthood of Ishmael, who was invested with that office by Agrippa, an interval elapsed in which this dignity was vacant. This was the precise time when Paul was apprehended; and the Sanhedrin, being destitute of a president, Ananias undertook to discharge that office. It is probable that Paul was ignorant of this circumstance. With respect to Paul’s denunciation, God did smite Ananias in a remarkable manner; for about forty-five years after this, after his house had been reduced to ashes, in a tumult raised by his own son, be was besieged and taken in the royal palace; where, having attempted in vain to hide himself, he was dragged out and stain. "Verily, there is a reward for the righteous; verily he is a God that judges in the earth."

The genius of the Gospel is love and unity. These fruits of the Spirit were the subjects of our Lord’s last discourses, and the matter of his intercessory prayer. In the first ages of Christianity, prayers and tears were the only arms of the Church, whereby they long defended it from ruin, and at last advanced it to the most glorious prosperity. The shadows of the night do not more naturally vanish at the rising of the sun, than the darkness of Pagan idolatry and superstition fled before the light of the Gospel. In those days of the Church’s first love, no labor was deemed too great, no sacrifice too costly, to evangelize the world. Thousands gladly embraced the crown of martyrdom, rather than deny their precious Savior. Their constancy and patience extorted the admiration of their enemies; the joyfulness with which they sealed the Truth with their blood, won over many of their persecutors to the faith of Christ.

With such lively hopes did they descend into the tomb, that the day of their death was celebrated by their surviving brethren, as the birthday of their martyrdom; for so the primitive Christians used to call the day of their death; looking upon it as the true day of their birth, when they were delivered from this valley of tears– these regions of death, and born again unto the joys and felicities of an endless life. Happy would it be, were this primitive spirit universal. It is fervent prayer, faithful

preaching, and the heavenly lives of Christians, that must, and will, through the blessing of God, evangelize both our country and the world.

May all who bear the name of Christ, bear also his holy image. As subjects of the Prince of Peace, let us study to promote the blessings of peace. While thus diffusing around us a spirit of Christian charity, we shall hasten on that blissful period, when the din of war shall be exchanged for the harmony of praise; when men shall love as brethren; and when Jesus shall reign in every heart-the UNIVERSAL KING.

"Jesus, immortal King, go on;

The glorious day will soon be won;

Your enemies prepare to flee,

And leave a conquered world to thee.

Gird on your sword victorious Chief,

The captive sinner’s sole relief;

Cast the Usurper from his throne,

And make the universe your own.

Your footsteps, Lord, with joy we trace,

And mark the conquests of your grace;

Finish the work you have begun,

And let your will on earth be done.

Then shall contending nations rest,

For love shall reign in every breast;

Weapons designed for war shall cease,

Only then, be implements of peace."

Hark! how the hosts triumphant sing!

’The Lord omnipotent is King.’

Let all his saints rejoice at this,

The kingdoms of the world are his!

Hallelujah! Amen!"

01.12. Chapter 12.

Chapter 12.

THE OUTLINE OF THE APOSTLES PREACHING.

HIS DESCRIPTION OF THE HEATHEN.

HIS DESCRIPTION OF THE NOMINALLY CHRISTIAN WORLD.

Though virtue be exhibited in all her loveliness, and vice in all its deformity; though everything attractive be brought before the sinner, to win him over to the charms of moral excellence- yet, eloquence, with all its powers, can never change the heart. The moral essay, by its musical cadence and well-selected words, may please the ear and gratify the taste; but Satan despises such a feeble effort to overthrow his kingdom. It is as weak as chaff before the wind. With undisturbed repose he keeps his goods in peace, and still remains secure within the citadel of the heart.

What power, then, can dislodge this mighty foe? What voice can bid the dying sinner live? Important question! The preaching of Christ Crucified, through whom grace abounds to the chief of sinners, is the weapon with which the Almighty Spirit destroys the powers of darkness- the instrument which he employs to new-create the soul. No human eloquence can effect so great a work. The glory belongs to Him, who said, "Let there be light and there was light." The power is from him who is pleased through the "foolishness of preaching, to save those who believe." How all-commanding are the words of Jesus, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live."

"Unlike human discipline, which advances by a slow and imperceptible progress, gaining at one time and losing at another, the Gospel works a radical change of the heart, and accomplishes such a revolution in its principles, that the effect immediately appears in the reformation of the life. Philosophy, with much labor, may extort from the barren soil, a few dwarfish and sickly plants; but the Gospel makes a rich harvest of heavenly graces and virtues spring up in the desert of the soul." O that every heart may experience this glorious change!

Let us unite with the spouse in her ardent longings after Christ, "Awake, O north wind, and come south; blow upon my garden that the spices may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits." Were this the universal prayer, the Church would soon experience the gracious presence of her Lord, and taste the sweetness of his love, "I have come into my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honey-comb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk; eat, O friends; drink, yes, drink abundantly O beloved." Lord, do not delay your coming. Visit every heart with your salvation; and fill the world with the blessings of your grace.

RUIN, REDEMPTION, and REGENERATION are three comprehensive words, which form the great outline of Gospel Truth. The amplification of the truths which are contained under these

terms, with all their various bearings on the present and future destiny of man, composed the substance of the great Apostle’s preaching.

How humbling are his views of mans APOSTASY from God- "We are by nature the children of wrath. All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. Death has passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

How consoling are his views of man’s RECOVERY through Christ- "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. He gave himself a ransom for all. We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. We are justified freely by his grace. He has made peace through the blood of his cross. He is made unto us, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. He is all, and in all."

How purify in- are his views of man’s RENEWAL unto holiness. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord."

This minister of righteousness, receiving his commission immediately from Christ, proclaimed, through divine inspiration, these glorious doctrines of grace; preaching everywhere, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ The Spirit accompanied the Word by his sovereign power, and multitudes became obedient to the faith.

The doctrine of a Redeemer, obeying the Law, and dying on the cross for man, is the very hinge of all evangelical revelations; the very life of all evangelical blessings. The doctrine of the atonement, is the grand peculiarity of the Gospel; it is the central point in which all the lines of duty unite, and from which all the rays of consolation proceed.

Faith draws all its hope, strength, and assurance; from the word, the fullness, and the promises of Christ. It receives from him, pardon with the one hand, and holiness with the other; both, being equally the design of his mediatorial work, and equally the desire of every new-born soul. Paul had no greater joy, than to set forth the glories of his Redeemer. Knowing where lay the blessed spring of all his privileges and comforts, his heart glowed with delight, when engaged in making known to others the unsearchable riches of Christ. By blessed experience, he had learned, that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin has reigned unto death, so now grace reigns through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore he could tell every weeping penitent, these glad tidings of great joy, that, Jesus is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them.

And what returns did such ambassadors of Christ receive? From the world, hatred and persecution; from false brethren, grief and treachery; but from the faithful in Christ Jesus, an abundance of love and reverence. Pastors and ministers were then looked upon as the common parents of Christians, whom, as such, they honored and obeyed; and to whom they applied for counsel and direction in all important cases. A pious and faithful minister was in those days dearer to them than the most valuable blessings upon earth; and they could lack anything rather than be without them. When Chrysostom was driven by the Empress Eudoxia into banishment, the people, as he went along, burst into tears, and cried out, "It were better the sun should not shine, than that John Chrysostom should not preach." They could not then lose their spiritual guides, without

looking upon themselves as widows and orphans, bewailing their death with a general sorrow, as if they had lost a common father. Such was the love which cemented ministers and people together in those early ages of the Christian church.

How transforming are the doctrines of grace, when applied by faith to the conscience, through the power of the Holy Spirit. They remove the burden of sin by revealing a sin-bearing Savior; they strip man of his boasted excellence, by laying him low at the foot of the cross; they change him into the image of Jesus, by shedding abroad the love of God in his heart; they destroy the weeds of selfishness and strife, by sowing the gracious seeds of unity, peace, and concord in the soul. The moral wilderness becomes the garden of the Lord; the desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose. What but Almighty energy could produce so great a change. Man is naturally proud; the Gospel makes him humble. Man is naturally carnal; the Gospel makes him spiritual. Man is naturally worldly; the Gospel makes him heavenly. Man is naturally dead in sin, and blind to his condition; the Gospel quickens him to a life of holiness, and enlightens his mind to know himself, and Christ as his only Savior.

The Gospel is good news to poor sinners; the proclamation of a full and free forgiveness of all sin, through faith in a crucified Redeemer. The Gospel is the most glorious Revelation of God to man; the brightest display of his Justice, Holiness, and Love, ever vouchsafed to intelligent beings. Here, we behold the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, planning, executing, and applying the gracious work of human redemption. In the Gospel we have the strongest motives to gratitude and obedience. It is full of the sweetest promises to every penitent believer, who flies to Jesus for life and salvation.

Let us enquire how this Gospel has come to us. Has it convinced us of our lost condition? Has it truly humbled us in the sight of God? Has it made us apply to Christ in faith, and earnest supplication? Have we experienced a change of heart, being renewed in the spirit of our mind? Do we feel joy in the Holy Spirit, and peace with God through Jesus Christ?

It is easy in these days of the Church’s quiet, to pass for religious characters, since few events occur to try the principles of professors. But all is not sterling that dazzles the eye. Many seem to take delight in religious institutions, and to be on friendly terms with their religious neighbors, who yet remain, through life, satisfied with barren notions of the Gospel, and strangers to its renovating power. May the Holy Spirit preserve us from this fatal error. Let us beware of false marks, of a false peace, and groundless hopes; for this truth stands immovably fixed in the Word of God- "Those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them are not Christians at all."

The doctrines of grace, systematically arranged in the mind, while the heart is estranged from God, will profit us no more than the idea of a valuable estate would benefit a person on the verge of bankruptcy, because its fields, woods, and mansions were vividly painted on his imagination. Without a personal interest in the merits of Christ, and an experimental acquaintance with his salvation, it is vain to expect admission into the celestial city.

Nominal Christianity neither receives nor confers a blessing. Thousands pride themselves in the name of Christian, as if that were sufficient to secure salvation, in the absence of every holy affection. Blessed are they, who can unite with John in all the fullness of his assurance; "We have known and believed the love that God has to us. We know that we are of God. We know that the

Son of God has come and has given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ."

As fallen creatures, we need a spiritual discernment, and a spiritual taste. Without the former, a thick darkness respecting the things of God would ever shroud the understanding; without the latter, no real delight in the riches of his grace would be felt in the soul. When these blessings are imparted, we then love Christ above every other object, and obey his will above every other principle.

Pride and the lust of the flesh, are continually opposing the humbling and the holy doctrines of the Gospel. Salvation by grace, through faith, is offensive to our pride. Salvation by grace, through the sanctification of the Spirit, is equally distasteful to our fleshly mind.

The leaven of pride is not wholly eradicated, even in the bosom of the humble Christian. There are seasons when it works with painful violence; and then, the darkness of our minds, and the deadness of our hearts, indicate that the Holy Spirit is grieved, and that Satan has gained an advantage over us. Spiritual pride is a subtle evil. It slides into our prayer, and entwines itself about our praise. It spoils our best duties, and creates that fondness for human approbation, which puffs up the heart, and steals it away from God.

When the Gospel of Christ, that word of life and reconciliation, shall be exhibited in its spirit and power by all professing Christians, happy indeed will the period be! Then the knowledge of the Lord will overspread the earth; for many will go to and fro in the name of the Lord, and knowledge shall be increased.

But have we attained this consummation, so devoutly to be wished? Is this the aspect of the nominally Christian world? Can we say, that in every place, "judgment runs down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream?" Alas! we have to mourn over thousands, who, while they eagerly grasp after the fruit of the tree of knowledge, despise the infinitely richer fruit of the tree of life. If knowledge is power, how important, for the well being of society, that it be founded upon, and drawn from, the Word of God. Unsanctified knowledge puffs up. It engenders schisms in the Church, and disorders in the state.

As a Christian people, we may value ourselves upon our benevolent institutions and religious societies, and think we have done much good in aiding their establishment and enlargement; but has inward piety been the spring of our outward exertions? Has love to Christ been our daily constraining motive? "Bodily exercise profits little, but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." This, says the Apostle, is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance.

Let us view the two portraits of mankind as drawn by the pencil of eternal Truth, by which we shall see that man, while unconverted to God, is the same internally, whatever change may have taken place in his outward condition.

Behold first the picture which Paul draws of the Heathen world, and which is a faithful representation of modern Paganism- "When they refused to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their evil minds and let them do things that should never be done. Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, fighting, deception, malicious

behavior, and gossip. They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They are forever inventing new ways of sinning and are disobedient to their parents. They refuse to understand, break their promises, and are heartless and unforgiving. They are fully aware of God's death penalty for those who do these things, yet they go right ahead and do them anyway. And, worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too."

O what a deluge of evil has sin brought upon the earth! Surely, where the Gospel shines, the prospect will be cheering. Happy could we find it so.

Look at the picture which the Apostle again draws of the nominally Christian world, and the heart must sicken at the view. "You should also know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control; they will be cruel and have no interest in what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act as if they are religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. You must stay away from people like that."

How awful in their features of evil, are these two portraits of mankind. The Heathen world, and the nominally Christian world, are essentially the same. Have we not entered upon these predicted times of peril? Does not iniquity, to a frightful extent, abound among us? Are not the elements of confusion now at work? Do not these detailed enormities, both disfigure and convulse the nations of Christendom? The Papal apostasy is gathering its forces against the truth of the Bible; infidelity is waving its banners in proud defiance. Worldly mindedness and indifference are sapping the foundations of the visible Church. Sensuality and profaneness stain the Christian name. Pure and undefiled religion is branded as wild enthusiasm while the humble follower of Christ, who mourns in secret over his country's crimes, and pleads for God before a sneering world, is made a butt for ridicule, and the sport of scorn.

The heart of man naturally revolts against this faithful exposure of its enormities. Our pride fondly shelters itself under the 'dignity of human nature'. We cannot bear to be told how wicked we are, how very far gone, even as far as possible, from original righteousness. But the Bible is no flatterer; it is a faithful mirror, in which we may clearly see, (if we have eyes to see) our real state, divested of all paint and covering. This offends our pride; we cannot endure the sight; therefore we turn away with disgust from this Holy Book, and consider it our enemy, because it tells us the truth.

Is not the language of our hearts too much in unison with those of old, "They tell the prophets, "Shut up! We don't want any more of your reports." They say, "Don't tell us the truth. Tell us nice things. Tell us lies. Forget all this gloom. We have heard more than enough about your 'Holy One of Israel.' We are tired of listening to what he has to say."

And, are there not too many ministers who apply the flattering ointment to the conscience, like those, of whom the Lord thus speaks, "These evil prophets deceive my people by saying, 'All is peaceful!' when there is no peace at all! It's as if the people have built a flimsy wall, and these prophets are trying to hold it together by covering it with whitewash! Tell these whitewashers that their wall will soon fall down. A heavy rainstorm will undermine it; great hailstones and mighty

winds will knock it down. And you shall know that I am the Lord!"

How awakening is the command of Jehovah to all his ministering servants, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins. Blow the trumpet, in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord comes, it is near at hand." But, when the alarm is sounded, and when sinners are warned to flee from the wrath to come, they treat both the messenger and his message with contempt. They are like the sons of Lot, of whom it is recorded, "And Lot went out, and spoke unto his sons-in-law who married his daughters, and said up, get out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law."

As it was in the days of Lot, even so it is now. When the faithful servant of Christ, with the Bible in his hand, and the love of souls in his heart, lifts up his voice, saying, "Arise , and depart; for this is not your rest; because it is polluted, it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction;'' his voice is unheeded; and with Isaiah he has to mourn- "Lord, who has believed our report? I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people."

Regardless alike of the displeasure of the world, or worldly- professors of godliness, Paul boldly declared, "God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap. he who sows to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption. When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, your lives will produce these evil results: sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God."

Let us compare these works of the flesh which exclude the soul from heaven, with the already enumerated sins of the heathen, and of the nominally Christian world, and we must tremble for the millions who are living in the constant indulgence of these iniquities, and who are traveling, if grace does not intervene to save them, to eternal ruin. It may sound uncharitable to the fastidious ear, but the Word of God cannot be broken, "He that believes not shall be damned. If you live after the flesh ve shall die."

How faithful is the pen of inspiration. The very evils which we now lament, prove the truth of that Book, which has foretold those miseries that are coming upon the earth. But let us not despond, "The Lord reigns, be the earth ever so unquiet." He guides the complicated machine of human events, and can, by his overruling power, make all these evils finally to promote the spirituality and enlargement of his Church.

Is any thing too hard for the Lord, whose wisdom is as infinite as his power, and whose love is commensurate with eternity? Let us then, with fervency pray for the gracious outpouring of the Holy Spirit, for that promised season of refreshing from His presence, which, descending in showers of blessings upon our country and the world, will transform the moral desert into the garden of the Lord.

Blessed Jesus! look in mercy upon your inheritance; cause your face to shine, and we shall be saved. Show your servants your work, and their children your glory.

"From your seat of mercy bending,

Where you sit enthroned on high,

Lord, in pity condescending,

Hear a helpless sinner’s cry.

By unwearied foes surrounded,

Without strength to fight or flee,

Let me never be confounded,

For my hope is placed on thee.

In the hour of tribulation,

To your promise, Lord I cling;

From the storm of fierce temptation

Shield me with your guardian wing.

Let the weight of earthly trials

Drive me nearer to your breast

And afflictions, bitter trials,

Make your blessings doubly blessed.

Then, though dangers’ troubled ocean,

Threat me with its rudest shock,

Safe I view its wild commotion

Anchored on the Eternal Rock."

01.13. Chapter 13.

Chapter 13.

PAUL’S PROPHETIC VIEW OF THE SECOND ADVENT OF CHRIST.

HIS CAUTIONS AGAINST UNBELIEF AND SPIRITUAL PRIDE.

While drawing the features of our fallen race, the inspired apostle dipped his pencil in the darkest colors- but, when consoling the suffering Church, he, like the ancient prophets, presented to the eye of faith the brightest views of future glory.

Wrapped in mystic vision, Paul saw the blessedness of heaven, and rejoiced in the hope of glory soon to be revealed. With sacred delight he proclaimed the divine purpose and grace, which are now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. It was this glorious hope, this hope full of immortality, this blessed, this lively hope, yes, this good hope through grace, which supported the persecuted saints, and enabled them to take joyfully the confiscation of their goods, knowing in themselves, that they had in heaven, a better, and an enduring substance.

O! how cheering to the wearied traveler, is the rest of home; how delightful to the captive, is the air of freedom. Though painful, it will yet be profitable to reflect upon those trials which the early Christians so nobly underwent for Jesus sake.

Cyprian, the venerable bishop of Carthage, thus describes the sufferings of the primitive believers: "They were scourged, and beaten, and racked, and roasted, and their flesh pulled off with burning pincers, beheaded with swords, and run through with spears, more instruments of torment being many times used the man at once than there were limbs and members of his body; they were robbed and plundered, chained and imprisoned, thrown to wild beasts, and burned at the stake. And when their persecutors had exhausted all their old methods of execution, they studied and thought of more. Nor did they only vary, but repeat the torments; and where one ended, another began. They sometimes tortured them without killing them, and added this cruelty to all the rest, to stop them in their journey to heaven. Many who were importunately desirous of death, were so tortured, that they might not die- they were purposely kept upon the rack, that they might die by gradually, that their pains might be lingering, and their sense of them without intermission; they gave no intervals, or times of respite, unless any of them chanced to give them the slip and expire in the midst of torments. All which did but render their faith and patience more illustrious, and make them more earnestly long for heaven. They tired out their tormentors, and overcame the sharpest weapons of execution, and smiled at the busy officers that were raking in their wounds; and when their flesh was wearied, their faith was unconquerable. The multitude beheld with admiration these heavenly conflicts, and stood astonished to hear the servants of Christ in the midst of all this, with an unshaken mind, making a free and bold confession of Him, destitute of any external support, but armed with a divine power, and defending themselves with the shield of faith."

Can it be a matter of wonder, that the blood of the martyrs should have been the seed of the Church. To animate believers under all their sufferings, the blessed Paul lighted up their path to the lions and to the stake, by the fullest of assurances of their eternal glory.

Oh! that we, like them, may value the Gospel above every earthly treasure. The Gospel speaks pardon and peace through the blood of Jesus; the Gospel unfolds to our view a day of wonders; a day, which, like the pillar of the cloud, will give light to the children of God, while his enemies shall be enveloped in darkness. The glories of that day, when Christ shall appear in his majesty to judge the living and dead, were revealed to the favored Apostle in all their grandeur.

When writing to the Church of Corinth he was permitted to draw up the tremendous veil which hides futurity from our view- But let me tell you a wonderful secret God has revealed to us. Not all of us will die, but we will all be transformed. It will happen in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, the Christians who have died will be raised with transformed bodies. And then we who are living will be transformed so that we will never die. For our perishable earthly bodies must be transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die. When this happens—when our perishable earthly bodies have been transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die—then at last the Scriptures will come true: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

With equal sublimity he makes known these wonders to the church at Thessalonica, "I can tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not rise to meet him ahead of those who are in their graves. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the call of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, all the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever. So comfort and encourage each other with these words."

To the Philippians he also gave this animating hope, "But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take these weak mortal bodies of ours and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same mighty power that he will use to conquer everything, everywhere."

What a revelation of grace and mercy is the Gospel of Jesus Christ! "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." A glorious brightness will illumine the morning of their resurrection, when they shall be called to swell the train of the all-conquering Messiah. But oh! how awful will be the gloom which awaits the resurrection of the wicked! If there be a glare of light, darting through the darkness of that momentous period, it will be the light of vengeance, emanating from the insulted Majesty of heaven, "for our God is a consuming fire." To the wilful abusers of divine mercy, there will then remain nothing but judgment and fiery indignation. The despisers of godliness will find, when too late, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Jesus has graciously forewarned us of the suddenness of his approach. "When the Son of Man returns, the world will be like the people were in Noah’s day. In those days before the flood, the people enjoyed banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat and the flood came to destroy them all. And the world will be as it was in the days of Lot. People went about their daily business—eating and drinking, buying and selling, farming and building— until

the morning Lot left Sodom. Then fire and burning sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. Yes, it will be just like this right up to the hour when the Son of Man returns."

Taught by the Spirit of Christ, Paul thus warns the churches, "The day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night; for when they shall say, peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."

The deluge came with fury poured out, sweeping away whole nations, until all the shrieks and groans of drowning millions were silenced in the deep. Equally overwhelming will be the second coming of Christ; "For the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all those who believe."

The earth, with all its idolized possessions, shall then perish in the general conflagration. At the very time, when worldly minds are in eager pursuit after wealth and honor- the day of the Lord will come. It will come as a snare upon all the inhabitants of the earth- it will come as a thief in the night. But oh! who shall abide, its coming, when the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and everything in them will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be exposed to judgment." Carnal men may ridicule the warning voice, but He, who cannot lie, has proclaimed, through His Word, this awakening truth; that, "God has also commanded that the heavens and the earth will be consumed by fire on the day of judgment, when ungodly people will perish."

Death and destruction will be the end of sin and sinners. But God is love. Every truth of His Gospel, when received in faith, has a sanctifying influence on the heart. These sublime revelations of the second coming of Christ, were therefore employed by the Apostle as powerful excitements to the duty of personal holiness; "it is high time to awake out of sleep; the night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast of the the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; for we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord we persuade men." Peter, like his beloved brother, exhorted believers to the practice of universal holiness, "Since everything around us is going to melt away, what holy, godly lives you should be living! You should look forward to that day and hurry it along—the day when God will set the heavens on fire and the elements will melt away in the flames."

Will the Church of Christ suffer loss by this awful devastation? Far otherwise. The sinner’s downfall will be the day of the believer’s exaltation. How cheering to every child of God, is the assurance and exhortation of Peter, "But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world where everyone is right with God. And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to live a pure and blameless life."

Oh! that the Eternal Spirit may awaken our solicitude and quicken our steps to the only Ark of safety. Jesus is the sinner’s refuge from the coming storm. Abiding in him by faith, we shall be quiet from fear of evil, amid the melting elements, and a burning world. When the wicked are

calling upon the rocks and hills to cover them, and to hide them from the face of Him that sits upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, the righteous shall lift up their heads with joy; for He, who summons the world to judgment, is their friend and Savior.

To the Apostles, the second coming of Christ was, therefore, a, period of joyful expectation. When they would support believers under the pressure of affliction, they did not draw their consolation chiefly from the prospect of death, as being the termination of their bodily sufferings; but from the glorious appearing of their God and Savior, who would re-animate their sleeping dust, and complete their glorification in his eternal kingdom. They calmly reposed all their hopes upon the faithfulness of Jehovah; and knowing in whom they lead believed, they could strengthen the weary pilgrim, by the sweetest assurance of final rest.

Filled with these bright expectations of future glory, founded on the promises of Jesus, the happy Paul animated the Philippian converts- "Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. I always pray for you, and I make my requests with a heart full of joy because you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again. It is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a very special place in my heart. We have shared together the blessings of God, both when I was in prison and when I was out, defending the truth and telling others the Good News."

Being well acquainted with the innate evils of the heart, his Epistles are models for ministerial faithfulness; in which, to guard us against false security and presumption, caution is blended with encouragement- warnings with promises- and fear with hope.

Many are the hindrances, and many the snares which beset us on our way to glory. The corruption of the heart- the subtlety of Satan- the power of temptation- the fear of man- the allurements of the world- are continually, in one way or other, opposing our journey heavenward. But Christ is our Savior. His wisdom is engaged to guide us, and his power to uphold and defend us.

Happy then is the man, whom grace has united to the Friend of sinners. Because Jesus lives he shall live also. While in the body he lives by faith in the blood of Jesus- by faith in the power of Jesus- by faith in the promise of Jesus; and when out of the body, his perfect spirit shall forever dwell with Jesus.

Drawing back from God is drawing onwards to perdition. The further we depart from God the nearer we approach to ruin. How important then is the grace of perseverance. The distinguishing mark of true believers consist in their abiding in Christ, and evidencing that union by the fruitfulness of their lives. Mere outward profession is no certain indication of inward piety, neither is a long continued profession any safeguard against declension or final apostasy. Who would have thought, that Solomon, the wisest of men, who built so magnificent a temple for the worship of Jehovah, and who prayed so fervently at its dedication, would, in his old age, have been turned away after other gods, and been led even to build high places for the abomination of the Heathen! Surely he who trusts his own heart is a fool.

After many years of promise, the heart may discover its insincerity, should God be pleased to bring the professor of his religion into the furnace, either of prosperity or of adversity. Demas fell through the love of this present world. The stony ground hearer withered away, beneath the scorching

beams of persecution. Nothing but the grace of God can keep us from falling, either partially or finally. Can we then be surprised, that the well instructed Paul, who preached the Gospel of the grace of God with such unmixed purity, should guard its possessors against the wiles of Satan, and the remaining corruption of their hearts?

Having explained to the Corinthians the spiritual privileges of the Israelites, he tells them- "Yet after all this, God was not pleased with most of them, and he destroyed them in the wilderness. These events happened as a warning to us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did or worship idols as some of them did. All these events happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us, who live at the time when this age is drawing to a close. If you think you are standing strong, be careful, for you, too, may fall into the same sin." Then, for their confidence in the faithfulness of their Redeemer, he adds, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

In like manner the Apostle showed the Hebrew converts the danger of unbelief, as exemplified in their own history- "With whom was he grieved forty nears? Was it not with those who had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he sware that they should not enter into his rest, but to those who believed not? So we see that they could not enter in, because of unbelief."

With close self-application, he then presses this fact on their consciences- "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. Let us labor to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief- for there remains a rest to the people of God."

Lest an undue fear of losing heaven should arise in their hearts from the awful examples which he had brought before them, and so cause their hands to wax feeble, and their feet to grow weary; how delightfully does he compose their apprehensions by a view of the tenderness and the all-sufficiency of Christ- "That is why we have a great High Priest who has gone to heaven, Jesus the Son of God. Let us cling to him and never stop trusting him. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it." "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence, steadfast unto the end."

What a wonderful display of mercy and judgment is also revealed to us in the eleventh chapter to the Romans. The Apostle himself was so overpowered by the view of the divine sovereignty, that, like a person standing on the brink of some vast abyss, he exclaimed, "Oh! the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

The Jews, as a people, having rejected their Messiah, were to be cut off because of unbelief; while the Gentiles, embracing the offers of mercy through faith in the blood of Christ, should be grafted into the good olive tree- the Church of God. But, lest this grace should be abused through spiritual pride, the Apostle, with his wonted fidelity, guards them against an evil so offensive to God- "But you must be careful not to brag about being grafted in to replace the branches that were broken

off. Remember, you are just a branch, not the root. "Well," you may say, "those branches were broken off to make room for me." Yes, but remember—those branches, the Jews, were broken off because they didn't believe God, and you are there because you do believe. Don't think highly of yourself, but fear what could happen. For if God did not spare the branches he put there in the first place, he won't spare you either."

Is then the promise trade to Abraham come utterly to an end? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Can his truth fail? Paul answers these questions- "I want you to understand this mystery, dear friends, so that you will not feel proud and start bragging. Some of the Jews have hard hearts, but this will last only until the complete number of Gentiles comes to Christ. And so all Israel will be saved. As concerning the Gospel, they are enemies for your sakes; but as touching the election, they are beloved for the Father's sake; for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

To the disputer of this word, who impiously cavils at the dispensations of Jehovah, and measures His dealings by the scanty lines of human reason, we would say with Zophar- "Can you solve the mysteries of God? Can you discover everything there is to know about the Almighty? Such knowledge is higher than the heavens—but who are you? It is deeper than the underworld—what can you know in comparison to him? It is broader than the earth and wider than the sea."

True humility is the basis of excellence in the Christian character. The humble believer will not dare to arraign the eternal God before the bar of his finite understanding. His language and feelings are those of the Psalmist, "Righteous are you, O Lord, and upright are your judgments;" while with the lowly minded apostle he asks with profound admiration, "For who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who knows enough to be his counselor? And who could ever give him so much that he would have to pay it back? For everything comes from him; everything exists by his power and is intended for his glory. To him be glory evermore. Amen."

True humility is ever accompanied by a patient continuance in well-doing. How important to all who desire an interest in those blessings which shall terminate in eternal glory, are the words which Jesus spoke to the Jews who followed him- "If you continue in my words, then are you my disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.''

To continue in the Word of Christ, we must first know it; and in order to know it, we must diligently study it. But as a distinguishing state of heart is required to the right understanding of the Word of Christ, which we have not naturally, we must be earnest in prayer for the sacred influences of the Holy Spirit. As newborn babes we must desire the sincere milk of the Word, that we may grow thereby. In the spirit of children, we must receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save our souls. With humility and teachableness we must sit at the feet of Jesus, and listen to his voice.

But, to receive rightly the word of God, we must abide in the doctrine of Christ. We must continue steadfast in the profession of the Truth. We must not be carried about by every wind of doctrine, but have our hearts established, and our hopes rooted and built up in Christ. We must walk with holy perseverance in the precepts of the Gospel, not running amiss like a broken bow, nor drawing back unto perdition; but going on with progressive step from grace to grace, until we appear before God in glory. If we are enabled, through the power of the Holy Spirit, thus to study, receive, and abide in the Word of Christ, evidencing our union to Jesus by the fruits of righteousness, we shall

be privileged to enjoy the sweet promises of the Gospel; for our Lord has declared, "Then are you my disciples indeed."

How expressive is the word, 'indeed'. It implies, that all who seem to be disciples, are not disciples indeed. This was the case with some of those Jews who surrounded our Savior when he made this declaration- "They were offended at his doctrine, and walked no more with him."

Are no such instances of defection to be found among us? Do we never see some, who, having run well for a season, turn back again into the world? When Jesus appeals to our affection, as he did to that of his disciples, "Will you also go away?" can we reply with Peter's sincerity, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Stability in the truth of the Gospel, and continuance in well doing, are essentially requisite if we would be disciples indeed. To the persevering believer, Jesus has promised eternal glory, "He who endures unto the end shall be saved. To him who overcomes, will I grant to sit with me in my throne. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life."

The question, then, for self-examination is not so much what we were, as what we are. If we are now cold, indifferent, and worldly, it matters not how zealous we might once have been. Our former state of zeal and active exertion can yield us no present profit, except as it thunders in our ears, "Remember from where you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works."

The tinseled Christian may gain the admiration of those who regard the outward appearance, but he will never be approved of by Him who looks at the heart. O! may we never substitute knowledge for grace, profession for principle, words for practice, nor zeal for love.

When God teaches, he teaches to profit; and the effect of his teaching is visible to all, by the renewal of the heart unto holiness. Hence our Lord does not say merely, "You shall know the truth;" but, as if he intended particularly to guard his followers against resting in barren speculations, he subjoins, "And the truth shall make you free."

The truth, received into the heart, makes the believer free, from the condemning power of the law, from the pollution of sin, from the tyranny of Satan, from the fascinations of the world, from the fear of death, from the torments of hell.

Learn then, O follower of the lowly Savior, to bear contempt with cheerfulness, when contempt is poured upon you because you are a disciple indeed, and boldly confess your faith and hope in the atonement of Jesus.

It is easy, in a circle of Christian friends, to admire humility, and to talk upon the duty of bearing reproach with patience; but when we find ourselves really despised- when we are set at nothing, where we expected to be honored- then is the time when pride and mortified self-love will rankle in our bosom, and when our utmost vigilance will be required to overcome these evil workings of the flesh.

At seasons like these, let us look unto Jesus. Let us consider him, who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest we be weary and faint in our minds. Let us remember what he suffered for our sakes, though Lord of all, that we may be abased at the sight of ourselves, and lie in self-abhorrence at the foot of the cross. And for our encouragement to persevere, let us never forget his own gracious words, "Whoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess

before my rather who is in heaven."

How blessed then is the Christian indeed. He follows the Lord fully; his every power is devoted to his service. He knows the truth through the teaching of the Spirit; he receives the truth in the simplicity of a little child; he continues in the truth, amid errors of every name; and abiding therein, firm unto the end, he obtains, at length, through the merits of his Savior, that crown of glory which fades not away.

O that we may be Christians indeed; the meek and lowly followers of the Lamb, bearing his image in humility, love, and purity, until we each resemble him in his perfection of beauty, when we shall see him as he is, in his eternal kingdom.

"And while on him we gaze,

And while his glorious voice we hear,

Our spirits are, all eye, all ear,

And silence speaks his praise.

Oh! might I die, that awe to prove,

That bliss of pure ecstatic love

Before the Great Three One!

To dwell in his eternal joy,

To find an ever sweet employ

In songs around the throne."

01.14. Chapter 14.

Chapter 14.

PAUL’S DOCTRINE ON JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

The doctrine of justification by faith, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, is the grand characteristic of the Gospel, which distinguishes it from all ’human’ schemes of salvation. It is the revelation and work of God himself. Its design is– to humble the sinner, to exalt the Savior, and to promote holiness. This doctrine is founded on the Fall of Man, and on the Justice of God; for while God demands a sinless obedience to his holy Law, man is utterly unable to satisfy the least of its righteous claims.

Through the Fall, we lost the image of God, and all power to serve him aright. Being destitute of every holy principle, and enslaved by every evil passion, we can neither atone for past transgressions, nor perform one act of acceptable obedience.

Foreseeing our wretched state, through original and actual sin; a God of love has provided a RANSOM, a RIGHTEOUSNESS and a REFUGE for us. Paul was honored of God to proclaim these heavenly truths- "There is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a RANSOM for all, to be testified in due time." "Of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us RIGHTEOUSNESS." "We have strong consolation, who have fled for REFUGE to lay hold upon the hope set before us." O that our hearts could expand with faith and hope, then, with the Apostle we should delight to dwell upon this exhaustless theme, and with feelings of the liveliest joy, should thank our God for his Unspeakable Gift.

Being taught by the Spirit to know himself as a sinner, this enlightened Apostle had learned to value Christ as a Savior. Wholly weaned from self, this heart was fixed upon Christ, the true foundation. With uncompromising firmness he could therefore assert, "A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ; even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

This glorious truth of the Gospel, so opposed to all his ancient views and feelings, he saw with a distinctness which no carnal reasoning could obscure. Beholding by the light of Revelation, the wide extent of Adam’s transgression, he could unite with David in declaring. "There is none righteous, no not one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks after God; they are all gone out of the why, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that does good– no not one." Hence the Apostle was led to this humbling confession; "The law has concluded all under sin, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God."

Hearing the voice of justice in all its awfulness, with Job he abhorred himself in dust and ashes. Hearing the voice of mercy speaking peace through the blood of Jesus, with Mary he rejoiced in God his Savior.

Full of grateful love, he went forth into all lands, to make known these unsearchable riches of Christ– that Jesus is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believes- that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us- that all who believe, are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified, by the Law of Moses- that, the righteousness of God, which is by faith in Jesus Christ, is unto all, and upon all those who believe, for there is no difference; for the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on him shall not be ashamed'- that, there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all who call upon him; for whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Knowing these statements to be the Truth of God, and knowing also the legality of the natural heart and its enmity to the doctrines of grace, he boldly asks the self-righteous opposer, "Do we then make void the Law through faith?" Do we lessen the sanctions, or lower the standard of a Law so holy in its nature, so just in its requirements, so good in its tendencies? "God forbid- yes, we establish the law;" -we maintain its unalterable holiness, its inflexible justice, its irreconcilableness to the smallest transgression.

Through the light of the Holy Spirit, he saw with an inspired clearness of perception, that no sinner can be saved by any obedience of his own; since, "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags," unable to screen us from the wrath of God, who has declared, "the soul that sins it, shall die." He therefore fled to Christ for refuge; found shelter under the covering of his perfect righteousness, and rejoiced in hope of the glory of God.

This fundamental doctrine of the Gospel, so destructive to pride and self-sufficiency, this divinely taught Apostle found to be the very source of consolation, strength, and hope.

Having given the church at Philippi a catalogue of those things which once constituted his Pharisaical treasure, he makes the noble declaration, "I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own goodness or my ability to obey God's law, but I trust Christ to save me. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. As a result, I can really know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I can learn what it means to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that, somehow, I can experience the resurrection from the dead!"

Then, with his usual humility and self-abasement, he acknowledges his need of still increasing supplies of spiritual blessings; "I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. 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."

If the Apostle, than whom perhaps no saint was ever more holy, thus confessed his shortcomings; if he regarded his attainments as nothing, when compared with what remained to be attained; if all his hopes of heaven were reposed upon the finished work of his beloved Savior; how humble, how

dependent ought we to be, who stand at so great a distance from the honored servant of Christ!

Yet how encouraging is the view of his character and experience. He, who converted Saul of Tarsus, can now change the heart of the hardest sinner! Let none then despair of mercy, who feel a longing desire after salvation.

"Let not conscience make you linger;

Nor of fitness fondly dream;

All the fitness he requires,

Is to feel your need of him;

This he gives you;

’Tis the Spirit’s rising beam."

The "offence of the cross" has not yet ceased, nor ever will, so long as pride bears its sway in our hearts. We cannot part with the fond conceit which we naturally have of our own works. If Christ must be our justifier, we hope, at least, to have some share in the meritorious act of justifying. We cannot brook the thought of being wholly indebted to another.

Owing to this proud attachment to our supposed goodness, much error exits in the Christian world. The great doctrine of justification by faith only, cannot, therefore, be too clearly and scripturally stated. How many, even in this our day, darken counsel by words without knowledge. They are blind guides, groping, as in the dark, amid the full blaze of Gospel, light. With all humility of mind, and earnest prayer, we should seek for light to discover the Truth, and for a heart to embrace it when discovered.

Let us then consider in what way a sinner is justified in the sight of God, that we may rightly apprehend and thankfully embrace, through the Spirit, this inestimable blessing.

1. We are justified MERITORIOUSLY, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, who became obedient unto the Law for man; and who, while we were yet sinners, died for us, that being justified by his blood, we might be saved from wrath through Him.

2. We are justified INSTRUMENTALLY, by faith alone, which is the gift of God, the hand that receives the blessed Jesus, and puts him on with all his saving merits, as the robe of righteousness, the garment of salvation.

3. We are justified DECLARATIVELY by good works, which are the fruits of faith, and evidence our union to Jesus Christ as living branches in the true vine.

Every blessing flows from the throne of mercy through Jesus Christ, who is the only medium of communication between earth and heaven; while all our services ascend with acceptance, only as they are covered with his infinite merits, and washed from their pollution through his precious blood.

Jesus is the Lord Our Righteousness; he is made unto us righteousness; and we are made the righteousness of God in him. Hence God can be just, and yet the justifier of all who believe in

Jesus. The way of access is now opened. In Christ, we have boldness and access with confidence, to the Father of mercies; and obtain, through faith in his blood, a right and title to the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. Thus we are made complete in Him, and the kingdom of heaven is opened to all believers. It must, however, never be forgotten, that there is nothing meritorious in faith. Faith is a grace, wrought in the heart of the sinner, through the power of the Holy Spirit, whereby he apprehends Christ, and is made an heir of God, through Him.

We have nothing whereof to glory, being "justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." The language of our heart must ever be, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to your name give glory, for your mercy, and for your truth's sake."

As faith is the gift of God, and the root of holiness, so works which do not spring from faith, cannot be acceptable to God; because, without faith it is impossible to please him.

By nature, our hearts yield nothing but evil fruit, and this evil produce continues, until we are united to Christ by faith. When grafted by the Spirit, into Jesus the living vine, we receive a new nature, and bring forth new fruit, in all goodness, righteousness, and truth. This good fruit manifests itself by holy obedience to the will of God; it is declarative of our interest in the righteousness of Christ through faith, and prepares us for the enjoyment of heaven.

From this scriptural view of a sinner's acceptance with God, it is evident, that we cannot be justified without faith; and yet, we must not look to our faith as that which justifies us. Our eye must be fixed on the righteousness of Christ only. When our acts of faith are the strongest, we must not rely upon them, as yielding any merit, or as recommending us to God. Our language must then be; I have believed in Christ, and God has justified me; but I will not believe, that God has pardoned the for my faith; I know that I must trust in Christ, if I am accepted of my Judge; therefore I will banish forever, all thoughts of my being pleasing to God, for the sake of my act of believing.

Whoever steers this course will provide for his present comfort, and future safety; for it is only men's ignorance of themselves, of the Law, and of the essential righteousness of God, that puts them upon trusting in anything they can do for their justification before God, and hinders them from submitting to the righteousness of Christ.

Faith resigns up the soul to the mercies of God, and the infinite merits of Christ, and has no confidence in the flesh; it brings the sinner to look on all things as nothing, and not fit to be joined to Christ, who is the only foundation for his reliance; and then his care is, how to be found in the righteousness of Christ, and to place the crown of glory on the head of his Redeemer. This was the experience of Paul, who counted all things but loss for Christ, desiring only that he might be found in Him.

If the doctrine of justification by faith were therefore rightly apprehended, as set forth by the great Apostle under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it would prevent that unscriptural mixture of faith and works, as the ground of our acceptance with God, which destroys its nature, tarnishes its glory, and endangers our salvation.

"O how unlike the complex works of man,

Heaven's easy, artless, unencumbered plan.

Its stand like the cerulean arch we see,

Majestic in its own simplicity.

Inscribed above the portal from afar

Conspicuous as the brightness of a star.

Legible only by the light they give,

Stand the soul-quickening words- Believe and live!

Too many shocked at what should charm them most,

Despise the plain direction and are lost."

Although Paul was the champion for this glorious doctrine of justification through faith, yet with equal ardor he enforced the necessity of holiness on the hearts and consciences of believers.

As those who preach the Gospel with faithfulness, should exemplify its excellence by their superior sanctity, the apostle exhorted Titus to the practice of universal holiness- "Speak the things which become sound doctrine; in all things showing yourself a pattern of good works."

Equally comprehensive was his charge to this young minister of the Gospel, whom he called his son after the common faith- "These things I have told you are all true. I want you to insist on them so that everyone who trusts in God will be careful to do good deeds all the time. These things are good and beneficial for everyone." "Put them in mind to be ready to every good work."

This faithful pastor over the Lord’s flock closed his Epistle with a general admonition both to ministers and people, who professed an attachment to the Gospel of Christ- "Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives." So decided were his views respecting the nature and necessity of sanctification, that, in perfect accordance with the doctrine of grace, he declared- "For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, it makes no difference to God whether we are circumcised or not circumcised. What is important is faith expressing itself in love. For it makes no difference whether or not a man has been circumcised. The important thing is to keep God’s commandments." "For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with self-control, right conduct, and devotion to God, while we look forward to that wonderful event when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing what is right."

With these earnest desires for the fruitfulness of believers be prayed in behalf of the Hebrew converts, "May the God of peace, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever."

Some people, who are opposed to the doctrine of free justification, endeavor to set James in array against his brother Apostle, as if he were anxious to counteract Paul’s statements, and to disprove his conclusions. If they will study the Epistles of Paul and James, with simplicity and prayer, they

will soon find that there is neither antinomianism in the one, nor any ground for legality in the other- but that the Apostles are in perfect agreement with each other. Like the radii of a circle, they meet in one common center. They both select the case of Abraham. Paul says; "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." James says; "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness;" each quoting the words of Moses, "He believed God, and he counted it to him for righteousness."

Thus they conjointly build on the same foundation, that is, that Abraham was justified by faith. Where then is the difference of their statements? It arises from the abuse which was made of this divine truth. Paul declared, that all works, whether ceremonial or moral, are excluded from the office of justifying the sinner in the sight of God; that we are justified freely by his grace, as the source, and by the blood of Christ, as the meritoriously procuring cause.

But this blessed doctrine, so full of comfort to the broken-hearted penitent, was soon perverted by men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth. They slanderously affirmed, that Paul had said- "Let us do evil that good may come;" -and hence, they took occasion to sin, on the impious principle that grace might abound. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, expresses his abhorrence of such vile inferences, drawn from his preaching; and strenuously enforces the necessity of good works. James, with equal force, levels his Epistle, not against the holy doctrine preached by Paul, but against those abusers of divine grace, who, under pretense of exalting Christ, only wanted a license to sin. So early did Satan labor to bring an odium upon the Gospel, by the unholy lives of hypocritical professors.

To counteract this evil, James declares that the faith which justifies is a working faith- that as kind words, and good wishes will not feed a starving brother, while unaccompanied with the needful supply, so neither will faith profit us, if it has not works; for as the body, without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also; that by works, faith is made perfect; and therefore, that such a barren faith, as these corrupters of the truth propagated, could never save the soul; since by works a man is justified, or declared to be in a state of justification, and not by faith alone, (that is, a faith unproductive of good works).

The sum of the matter then is this; What God has joined, none must divide; and what God has divided, none must join. He has separated faith and works in the business of justification, according to Paul, and none must join them in it. He has joined them in the lives of justified people, as James speaks, and, there we must not separate them. Paul assures us, that works have not a co-efficiency in justification itself; but James assures us, that they may and must have a co-existency in those who are justified.

It is evident, therefore, from the scriptures of Truth, that neither faith nor works can procure our admission into the heavenly temple. Christ, as our Great High Priest, can alone enter by his own blood into the Holy Place. In heaven he sits as a priest upon his throne, and there, appearing in the presence of God for us, his living care will perfect, what his dying love began. Through him then we must approach the mercy-seat; by him we must enter into the celestial city. O! how precious is our Almighty Savior. To him we must look- on him we must depend- from him we must draw every needful blessing. His name is as ointment poured forth. He is the balm of Gilead and physician there.

O that our hearts may ever be in tune, to sing the praises of the Lamb who was slain, and has redeemed us unto God by his blood, until we join the universal chorus in the world above, and crown him Lord of all!

01.15. Chapter 15.

Chapter 15.

ON JUSTIFICATION (continued)

The doctrine of free justification, through faith in the blood of Jesus, was the Gospel Axe which Luther applied with powerful arm to the root of human merit, whose fibers had struck deeply into the Papal soil. "When I consider," said this champion for the Truth, "the infinite profanation which always has raged in the Church of God, against this only and well-grounded rock, which we hold to be the article of our justification, (that is to say, how not by ourselves, neither by our works, which are less than ourselves, but by another help, even the Son of God, Jesus Christ, we are redeemed from sin, death, and the devil, and are made partakers of eternal life,) I am compelled boldly to speak upon it." And he did speak with a voice of thunder. Through the power of Truth, he made the Papacy tremble. By the light of Truth, he exposed the hidden abominations of the Man of Sin.

Yet, while he declared, that the doctrine of justification by faith without works, is the only Solid Rock, the true test of a standing, or of a falling church; like Paul he was equally anxious for the interests of holiness. He knew the blindness of the natural heart, and its enmity to the truth. He knew also the darkness which remains in the minds of the regenerate, even after they have been enlightened by the Spirit of God.

Hence, he foresaw that diversity of sentiment and statement which would arise in the Church, according to the degrees of light or darkness which each of its members might possess. Under this conviction, he honestly confessed that, "to teach this doctrine, and at the same time, to insist on the necessity of good works, is a matter of considerable difficulty and danger. For unless the ministers of Christ be wise and faithful dispensers of the divine mysteries, and know how to divide the Word of Truth rightly, the distinct provinces of faith and works will be confounded." Both these provinces should be explained, and impressed on the mind with the greatest diligence, yet in such a manner, that each of them may preserve its proper bounds. Otherwise, if works only are taught, as is the case in the Pope’s kingdom, faith is lost. Again, if nothing but faith is inculcated, carnal men soon begin to dream, that there is no need of good works."

Well acquainted with the corruption of the heart, Luther thus guards the Church against the abuse of this vital doctrine– "There is danger on both sides. If the doctrine of faith is not preached, no man can be saved; for it is faith alone that justifies and saves. On the contrary, if faith be preached, as of necessity it must be, the greater part of mankind will interpret the doctrine in a carnal way, and so understand spiritual liberty as to allow indulgences of the flesh. This we may see in all ranks of life, high as well as low. Many make a profession of the Gospel, and boast of Christian liberty, and yet, serving their own lusts and inclinations, they give way to covetousness, pleasure, pride, envy, and such other vices, and none of them does his duty faithfully. It is impossible that people of this description should prove to be governed by the Gospel of peace."

The church of England, in unison with the other Reformed Churches, firmly holds this important branch of the Christian faith. In her eleventh Article she declares– "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification."

The clear and scriptural language of the Homily referred to, is as follows– "The Apostle touches specially three things, which must go together in our justification. Upon God's part, his great mercy and grace; upon Christ's part, justice, that is, the satisfaction of God's justice, or the price of our redemption by the offering of his body, and shedding of his blood, with fulfilling of the law perfectly and thoroughly; and upon our part, true and lively faith in the merits of Jesus Christ, which yet is not ours, but God's working in its.

"The grace of God does not shut out the justice of God in our justification, but only shuts out the justice of man, that is to say, the justice of our works, as to be merits of deserving our justification. And, therefore, Paul declares here nothing upon the behalf of man, concerning his justification, but only a true and lively faith, which, nevertheless, is the gift of God, and not man's only work without God. And yet, that faith does not shut out repentance, hope, love, dread, and the fear of God, to be joined with faith in every man that is justified, but it shuts them out of the office of justifying. So that, although they be all present together in him who is justified, yet they justify not altogether; neither does faith shut out the justice of our good works, necessarily to be done afterwards of duty towards God, (for we are most bounden to serve God in doing good deeds commanded by him in his Holy Scripture all the days of our life,) but it excludes them so, that we may not do them to this intent, to be made just by doing them."

What language can more fully and explicitly convey to our minds this fundamental truth of the Gospel? May the Eternal Spirit impart unto every reader of these humble pages, if he has it not, this blessed gift of faith, and abundantly increase it, where it has been graciously bestowed.

Hooker breathes the same apostolic language; "Christ has merited righteousness for as many as are found in him. In him God finds us, if we be faithful, for by faith we are incorporated into Christ. Then, although in ourselves we be altogether sinful, yet even the man that is impious in himself, full of iniquity, full of sin, being found in Christ through faith, and having his sin remitted through repentance, him God beholds with a gracious eye, puts away his sin, by not imputing it, takes quite away the punishment due thereunto by pardoning it, and accepts him in Jesus Christ as perfectly righteous, as if he had fulfilled all that was commanded him in the Law. Faith is the only hand which puts on Christ unto justification, and Christ the only garment which, being so put on, covers the shame of our defiled natures, hides the imperfection of our works, preserves us blameless in the sight of God, before whom otherwise the weakness of our faith were cause sufficient to make us culpable, yes, to shut us out from the kingdom of heaven, where nothing that is not absolutely holy can enter."

Such were the views which Luther, the Fathers of the English Church, and Hooker entertained, in perfect accordance with the great Apostle, respecting the all-important doctrine of justification by faith. "The Devil directs his fierce batteries against those doctrines in the Word, and those graces in the heart, which most exalt God, debase man, and bring men to the lowest subjection to their Creator. Such is the doctrine of justifying faith." May this jewel of the Reformation never be

covered with the worthless paint of human invention, but ever shine in all our churches with its native luster.

Christ is the enricher of the believing soul. He is the pearl of great price. It is not the hand which receives an offered treasure that makes the receiver rich, but the treasure itself. So neither do works, nor any act of faith justify us, but Christ Himself, whom we apprehend. And this faith, be it weak or strong, is yet able to receive the righteousness of Christ, just as a palsied hand may receive a jewel from a king, as truly, though not so firmly, as the hand which is sound. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, and receive a new and divine life in our souls.

Peace of conscience, tranquillity of mind, strength to resist sin, delight in holiness, and the hope of glory, are some of 'the precious fruits of faith'. Love accompanies faith, as the light does the sun, and faith working by love evidences our adoption into the family of God, and proves that we are truly born from above. Do we live in the daily enjoyment of this blessedness? Are we sealed by the Spirit of God unto the day of eternal redemption? "The kingdom of grace," as an old writer beautifully observes, "is the suburbs of the kingdom of glory; he therefore who walks not through the suburbs shall never enter into the holy city. A man must be in the kingdom of grace, or else he shall never be ad admitted into the kingdom of glory. No grace, no glory. No holiness, no happiness. No regeneration, no heaven, nor heavenly honor. For, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God, neither in this world, nor in the world to come. It is then an infallible sign of holiness, when a man does more and more strive against his own unbelief, and labors continually to draw nearer and nearer unto God by holiness.

"To feel our inward corruptions, to desire a deliverance from them, to avoid occasions of sin, to be angry with ourselves for our sinning, is an evidence that the Spirit of God has taken possession of our hearts, and has begun to work a most happy change within us. Where these graces are, there is also the God of grace, the spirit of grace, a man of grace, a true dying unto sin, and a living unto God. Sin is dismounted, the soul is renewed, for God's image is restored."

Thus all who are justified are sanctified, and shall be finally glorified. The renewal of our nature is so essential to happiness, and so indispensably requisite as a preparation for heaven, that without it we cannot be saved. The pure in heart only shall see God; they shall see his face; they shall dwell in his presence; and reign with him forever and ever.

How bright is the glory which encircles the cross of Christ. There, all the divine perfections meet and harmonize. There, the robe of righteousness is imparted to every believing sinner. With the fullest assurance of hope, the blessed Apostle felt his personal interest in this righteousness of the Redeemer; and could say with unwavering confidence, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Happy Paul! who in the midst of all his sufferings could thus realize his union to Christ by faith.

Are we, like him, crucified with Christ, and become dead to sin and to the world? Does Christ live in us by his Spirit? Are we daily living a life of faith in the Son of God? Can we, with sweet assurance say, "Who loved me, and gave himself for me?" This believing appropriation of the Savior's merits, is the spring of comfort, and the root of holiness.

This blessedness Paul experienced, when Jesus revealed himself in all the fullness of his grace. Under every varying scene of life we also shall partake of this felicity, if with him we can say, "The love of Christ constrains us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead, and that he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again."

O how peaceful and fruitful is the believer, when daily living under the influence of the constraining love of Christ! It is the love of Christ, felt and enjoyed, which softens the roughness of life, and smooths the ruggedness of the way to glory. Sin produces thorns which pierce the heart with many sorrows. But Jesus, by removing the evil, fills the soul with gladness. When he gives quietness, who then can make trouble? As the heart knows its own bitterness, so a stranger does not intermeddle with its joy.

How humbling is the language, how self-abasing are the feelings of the believing sinner, when contemplating these wonders of redeeming love. Methinks I hear such a one thus pouring out his heart in secret– I am indeed a guilty, corrupt, and ruined creature, unable to appease a justly offended God, or make the least atonement for my violations of his law. I am in myself helpless and hopeless. Ah! where then, shall I turn my eyes for support? Can any of my fellow-mortals deliver me out of the wretched condition into which I am plunged, through my original and actual transgression? They are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable; there is none that does good, no not one.

Shall I turn my eyes toward the angelic host, and crave the assistance of the highest seraphim? It is hopeless expectation. I have sinned against an infinite God, who demanded an infinite satisfaction. They are creatures like myself, and have nothing infinite to offer.

To whom then must I look? May I for a moment hope, that the infinite God before whom the angels veil their faces, will condescend to save me from merited destruction, by giving the required satisfaction to his own adorable perfections? But how can God, who is a spirit, make atonement for my sins, since he has declared, "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." Will the eternal Jehovah stoop so low, as to take upon him my nature, and suffer in my stead? Will He become a son of man, that I may be made a child of God?- "Hear, O heavens! give ear O earth! for the Lord has done it."

Such condescending mercy could never have been conceived by men or angels, had not God himself revealed this mystery of love in the volume of his grace. His own arm has brought salvation. He has visited and redeemed his people. He has magnified the Law, and made it honorable. He is become the Lord Our Righteousness; the justifier of the ungodly. O wonder of wonders!

"Not to be thought on, but with tides of joy,

Not to be mentioned, but with shouts of praise."

O rich salvation of mercy! "In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and he was God. So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father. Jesus, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no

reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham. He was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death; and, being the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when be had, by himself purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, being so much better than the angels, as he had by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. Therefore God has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things that are under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Almighty God, enable me, through the mighty power of your Holy Spirit, to believe in Jesus; to love him with all my heart; to trust in him as my atoning sacrifice, my justifying righteousness; my purifying fountain, my hope of glory. Give me a growing delight in your holy Word, which reveals these riches of your grace to sinners. May I prize it as my greatest treasure, and study it as my highest wisdom. Impart, to me the spirit of illumination to understand its truths, and to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that I may be filled with all the fullness of God. Give me more and more of your quickening grace; stir up my languid affections, subdue my inward corruptions, and enable me to persevere in the ways of holiness, until death is swallowed up in victory; and grace is ripened into glory.

"Great God, when I approach your throne,

And all your glory see;

This is my stay, and this alone,

That Jesus died for me.

How can a soul condemned to die

Escape the just decree?

A vile, unworthy wretch am I,

But Jesus died for me.

Burdened with sin's oppressive chain,

O how can I get free?

No peace can all my efforts gain,

But Jesus died for me.

My course I could not safely steer

Through life's tempestuous sea;

Did not this truth relieve my fear,

That Jesus died for me.

And Lord, when I behold your face,

This must be all my plea;

Save me by your almighty grace,

For Jesus died for me."

01.16. Chapter 16.

Chapter 16.

PAUL’S EXPERIENCE IN THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT.

Through the remaining darkness of our minds, how many conflicting opinions divide the Christian world. Each disputant claims truth to be on his side, and is ready to anathematize all who differ from him. Many, by fanciful interpretations of Scripture, darken the Truth, and disseminate error. Others, assuming a dogmatical spirit, lord it over their brethren, as if, "They were the people, and wisdom would die with them." How different is the temper and conduct of the humble Christian. Being clothed with humility, he thinks lowly of himself, goes daily to Christ for spiritual light, reads his Bible in a prayerful spirit, and exercising charity towards others, grows in grace, is established in the Truth, and adorns the doctrine of God his Savior in all things.

As we have a natural fondness for novelty, we readily seize upon any new thought which impresses our minds, and believing it to be the true sense of our favorite passage, with Samson-like arm, we try to make all others bend to our own view of the subject. The late Mr. Cecil justly observed, "Some men get hold of an opinion, and push it so far, that it contradicts other opinions fairly deducible from Scripture." This error has been the occasion of much dissension in the Church of Christ. How greatly we need that wisdom which is from above. It would be well, if the following excellent and important suggestion, drawn from the experience of that able minister of the New Testament, Henry Venn, was acted upon by our modern discoverers of the Truth– "To guard against dangerous perversions, it may be laid down as a maxim in divinity, that it is necessary not only to hold the doctrines of the Bible, but also to view those doctrines in the same light in which the inspired writers viewed them, and to make only the same inferences from those who they did. For there is scarcely any truth which may not be held in a partial manner, or seen through a distorting medium; so that we then only believe as the Apostles did, when we receive their tenets in the same full comprehensive meaning in which they delivered them, dwell upon them in the same proportion to other truths, and draw the same conclusions from them."

It is most important, then, rightly to explain the Word of Truth; for much diversity of sentiment arises from the different modes of interpreting Scripture. To every attentive student of the Bible it must be evident, that while numerous passages have a literal, others have a symbolical- others a figurative- and others a comparative meaning.

Thus, the declarations of Paul; "If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his;" "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord," must be understood in their plain literal sense.

When we read, that "Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body," -we do not, as Protestants, understand these words in their literal, but in a symbolical sense. We do not believe that Christ actually gave his body which was then at the table with his disciples, to be eaten by them; but the natural bread and wine, which he appointed to be the symbols of his body that should be broken, and of his blood that should be

poured out for the remission of sins; and "which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord’s Supper."

When our Lord said, "If your hand or your foot offend you, cut them off and cast them from you; If your eye offend you, pluck it out and cast it from you;" we do not receive this as a direct command, in the literal sense of the words, to cut off and cast away the various members of our bodies; but rather as a strong figurative expression, to impress upon our minds this important truth– that if sin, though dear to us as a hand, a foot, or an eye, be not cut off and cast away from us, we cannot enter into life eternal.

When to the Pharisees, Jesus said, "Honor your father and mother;" -and to the multitudes which waited on him- "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, he cannot be my disciple," -are we to understand our Lord as commanding us both to honor and hate our parents? While the first command is positive, and the duty of all, as Paul expresses it, "Children obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord," -the second declaration must surely be understood in a comparative sense; as if our Jesus had said, "If any one would come by faith to me, would make a profession of my name, and cleave to me for the blessings of my kingdom, he must practice such self-denial, and submit to such hardships and persecutions for my sake, as show, that he prefers me to all the dearest comforts and relations of life, such as parents, wives, children, brethren, and sisters, yes, even life itself; and must be ready to part with them, and to be separated from them at my call; as if he really hated them; and must be indeed averse to them, and to his own enjoyment of them, so far as they would hinder his faith, and love, and faithfulness to me."

John, in like manner, enforces the two following important truths, which seem at first sight to militate against each other, but when understood experimentally, they are found to be in perfect agreement. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." "Whoever is born of God does not commit sin, for his seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." By the first, the Apostle plainly pronounces it self-deception to suppose that man can attain, in this life, to a state of sinless perfection; and this assertion he strengthens, by including himself, the beloved disciple of his Lord– "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." -By the second, he as plainly declares it to be contrary to the nature of a child of God to commit sin, which, to be in agreement with the truth of the former passage, must mean, to live in the allowed and habitual indulgence of any sin.

The scriptural evidence of our being born of God, and of his seed remaining in us, does not therefore consist in an absolute and entire freedom from all sin while in the body; but in our abhorrence of it, in our fighting against it, and in our not living in the habitual practice of it.

John Guyse, an eminent divine, contemporary with Watts and Doddridge, thus expresses himself in his Exposition of the New Testament; "We are not to imagine the Apostle’s meaning to be, that a true Christian never sins, for this would be to make him directly contradict what he had said about deceiving ourselves, if we say that we have no sin; and about the duty of confessing our sins, which supposes us to have occasion so to do. Therefore, the words ’he cannot sin’ must be understood in some such sense as this; he cannot deliberately, habitually, presumptuously, and willingly sin. The expressions in the Greek are very strong, and signify committing it, as practisers, workers, or doers of it, with freedom and choice, like people who make a trade of it; and it is the

very same expression which our Lord used, when he said- 'Whoever commits sin is the servant of sin.' Our Apostle therefore says– 'He who commits sin is of the devil;'- but 'Whoever is born of God does not commit sin;' -for that principle of grace which is infused into him by means of the incorruptible seed of the Word, has an abiding root and residence in him, to rule and govern him; and he has such a thorough hatred of all iniquity, that he cannot give himself liberty to sin with deliberation and full consent as he used to do; he cannot love, and live in sin. As a child of God, and born of the Spirit, he has received a principle of grace that wills and works in direct opposition to all sin, as sin; much less can he sin upon the score of his being born of God, as though his new-birth were a license for it, or had any tendency towards it."

To an antinomian question Paul gives a Gospel answer, "Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid! Know you not, that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." "We know," says John, "that whoever is born of God sins not; but he that is begotten of God keeps himself, and that wicked one touches him not." -For, "He that does righteousness is righteous, even as God is righteous." Nothing is so abhorrent to the renewed mind, as the workings of corruption. The pure in heart love purity, and long and pray for a constant increase of it. Their earnest desire is, that they may be sanctified wholly, in body, soul, and spirit, that all carnal affections may die in them, and that all things belonging to the Spirit, may live and grow in them. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, they are enabled to ascend higher and higher in the scale of Christian holiness; to obtain a greater victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; and to glorify God with their bodies and with their spirits which are his.

Those who are regenerated, may be termed 'perfect', as being complete in Christ, and perfectly justified through faith in his blood. They may be called perfect, when compared with the wicked, who wallow in sin, and bear the image of Satan. The advanced believer, who is matured in knowledge and experience, in grace and holiness, may be styled perfect, in comparison with young and weak Christians. Yes, even a babe in Christ, may be considered perfect, with respect to his new nature, inasmuch as he has all the parts of a Christian, though not the full development of those parts- for, being born of God, he is a child of God, and daily increases in wisdom, and spiritual stature, and in favor with God and man.

All the seeds of grace are sown in the hearts of true believers. Repentance, faith, love, obedience, patience, hope, joy, and peace are all experienced by the young convert, but, like the vegetable process, they do not shoot up into instantaneous ripeness. In same they advance slowly, in others they make more rapid growth; but in all, there is first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear. Their graces, constantly unfolding themselves, attain to higher degrees of ripeness, until they reach the heavenly world, where only the perfection of unsullied holiness can be found. There the spirits of just men made perfect, surround the throne of God; and, having washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, they serve Him day and night in his temple.

While in the body, we must experience that conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, which marks out the true believer, from those who are the captives of Satan, and from those also who are at ease in Zion. This conflict occasions much joy or pain, in proportion to the strength or weakness of these opposing principles. The life of the Christian is a daily combat. Those people are little acquainted with it, who feel no inward struggling between nature and grace. It is true, that some

pious people are less exercised than others with internal conflicts; but every view which the Scriptures give us of a life of faith is connected with exertion and opposition both from within and from without. It is called a race- a warfare- a pilgrimage. Hence believers are exhorted to run, that they may obtain the prize; to fight, that they may gain the crown; to persevere, that they may reach their promised rest. For, "as the soul of the sluggard desires and has nothing, so the soul of the diligent shall be made fat."

The Christian has been compared to a boat placed upon a rapid river, which, if it is not advancing against the current, must, of necessity, be carried down by it. To oppose the stream, would require a power not its own. Just so it is with the believer. He has to contend against a torrent of inward corruptions, known, perhaps, only to God and his own heart; and having lost, through the fall, all spiritual strength, he feels utterly unable of himself to resist them. He therefore looks continually unto Jesus, and being strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, is enabled to stem the stream, and thus to prove that he possesses spiritual life and vigor.

Sanctification is, therefore, the gracious work of God, transforming the soul of the sinner into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Holiness is essential to our happiness; for joy springs out of that faith, which works by love, purifies the heart, and overcomes the world.

The mortification of sin is compared by Paul to crucifixion, which was a painful lingering death; "Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts." Blessed are they who can unite with the holy Apostle in his truly Christian experience, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet, not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

How characteristic of the church in her militant condition, is the description which Solomon has clothed in the richness of Eastern imagery– "Who is she that looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" "The sun," as Leighton beautifully remarks, "is perfectly luminous, but the moon is but half enlightened; so the believer is perfectly justified, but sanctified only in part. His one half, his flesh, is dark; and as the partial illumination is the reason of so many changes in the moon, to which the sun is not subject at all; so the imperfection of a Christian's holiness, is the cause of so many waxings and wanings, and of the great inequality of his performances; whereas, in the meanwhile, his justification remains constantly like itself. This is imparted. This is inherent."

Equally characteristic of the helplessness of the Church is the interesting enquiry- "Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" Is Christ the beloved of our souls? Do we behold in him infinite beauty, grace, and power? Are we reposing our souls upon his faithfulness and truth; leaning only on the hope of his heavenly grace? Drawn by the Spirit, are we coming up from this wilderness world, a world of sin and sorrow, and journeying, through the strength of Jesus, to the paradise above?

Some people, unacquainted with the depth of human corruption, think, that to be good, is an easy attainment. The standard of goodness, which consists in amiability of temper, a freedom from grossly vicious habits, and a benevolent desire to relieve the indigent; our fallen nature may reach. A well directed education, the moral tone of the circle in which we move, and a decorous observance of the outward forms of religion, have each a tendency to civilize the mind, and to give

a certain air of excellence to the character. But all this is very far below the standard of evangelical holiness.

Barnabas was called a good man, because, "he was full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." Paul, who was no flatterer, bore this testimony to the Roman Christians, "I am persuaded of you, my brethren, that you are full of goodness." On what he founded this assertion, he himself informed them, "You are the called of Jesus Christ- Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world- Your obedience is come abroad unto all men."

How opposite is the goodness which the world admires from that which God approves. The one like the morning cloud and early dew, passes away; the other, like the rising sun, shines more and more unto the perfect day.

The love of God in Christ, a conformity to his image, a hatred of all sin, a renunciation of worldly lusts, and an entire devotedness of heart to the divine will, constitute that goodness which is pleasing unto God, and which can only spring from an union to Christ, by faith, through the power of the Holy Spirit. This happy state is attended with much conflict, arising from the remainders of sin in the regenerate. A battle must be fought, but the believer who dies fighting against sin, will die conquering, through the blood of Jesus.

The experience of eminent Christians is always interesting and instructive. All have to pass through the strait gate, and to travel along the narrow way. Many are discouraged, because they think their trials are peculiar to themselves, and such as no spiritually-minded believer can experience. Being afraid to disclose their griefs, they suffer much inward distress from the dread of self-deception and hypocrisy. Satan, taking advantage of this state of mind, strives to confirm their fears, by casting his fiery darts into their souls, and impelling them onwards to the brink of despair.

But Jesus will not allow his sheep to perish. What Satan meant for evil, he overrules for good. These trials, though severe, cut up self-righteous hopes by the root, and lead the trembling believer, under the guidance of the holy Spirit, to the foot of the cross, where peace, and strength, and victory are obtained.

They can now with freedom open their hearts to some fellow-pilgrim, and are surprised to find, that the same afflictions are accomplished in their brethren who are in the world. Thus they are comforted and encouraged to persevere.

May every Christian reader take encouragement when thus tried, for the God of all grace, who has called us, (if believers in his dear Son) unto his eternal glory by Jesus Christ, will, after we have suffered a while, establish, strengthen, settle us. To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Paul, when he became a subject of divine grace, was made to groan under the burden of indwelling sin, which, in his unconverted state, sat but lightly on his conscience. The unregenerate, who are reveling in sinful pleasures, can form no idea of the pain which a holy mind feels, when an impure thought is presented to the imagination. Those things which the wicked dwell upon with delight, are distressing to the pure in heart. When, therefore, we hear the believer in Jesus, mourning over his corruption, and loathing himself for all his abominations, it is not because he has, in every instance, cherished iniquity, but because it is offensive in all its actings to his

new-born soul. With the tried Apostle he can say- "We that are in this tabernacle, do groan, being burdened- and are willing to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."

In Rom 7:1-25, this spiritual conflict is described in such humiliating terms, that by some it is supposed to relate to an awakened Jew, seeking justification by the works of the Law; or, to an unconfirmed believer, struggling with feeble strength against the power of indwelling sin. They cannot conceive that Paul is relating his own experience, when, in his advanced state of Gospel sanctification, he says, "I am carnal, sold under sin."

As the design of this little work is to be experimental, and not controversial, and as the holy Apostle makes use of the first person, we will take it for granted, that he is speaking of himself, and thus endeavor to draw that benefit from his experience which we believe he intended to convey to the Christians at Rome.

Having declared, that believers are dead to the Law by the body of Christ; and that the Law, so far from subduing the evil passions, is the innocent occasion of stirring up their opposing lustings, the Apostle asks, "Is the Law sin? God forbid. No, I had not known sin, but by the Law; for I had not known lust except the Law had said, You shall not covet." Here he probably describes his earliest convictions. It was then the Tenth Commandment, reaching to the desires of the heart, which brought him to a sense of guilt and condemnation. For, he declares, "I was alive without the Law once, but when the commandment came, (perhaps the Tenth Commandment more especially, in all its spirituality and power) sin revived, and I died; and the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death."

In his unenlightened state, he was evidently working for life, instead of from life received. He was forming a righteousness of his own, grounded on his obedience to the outward letter of the Law, and which he conceived to be blameless, as he told the Philippians, when summing up his Pharisaical merits. But, when his eyes were opened to see his guilt and pollution, he found this very Law in which he trusted, and from which he expected so much reward, to be unto death, condemning him, as a breaker of it, to eternal destruction. "For sin." he adds, "taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me." O that we may learn true wisdom from this experience. Sin first deceives, and then slays the soul. Well might the Apostle warn the Hebrew converts, lest any of them should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

How carefully does this experienced Christian guard the Church at Rome against the least idea of the Law being the cause of sin; for he immediately declares; "The Law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me; God forbid." Sin is the only cause of death. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." If Adam had never sinned, death would never have reigned over the human race. "But," says the Apostle, "sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me, by that which is good, that sin by the commandment" (contrasted with it spotless nature) "might become exceeding sinful."

It is sin then, and not the holy Law of God, which works death in the soul, and effects its ruin. The Law convinces and condemns. Sin defiles and destroys. So frightful is sin in its nature and consequences, that nothing but itself can adequately express its vileness– "that sin might become exceeding sinful." Surely none but fools would make a mock at sin, or treat with levity the

awakened sinner, who is seeking deliverance from its guilt and power.

The Apostle proceeds, "For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am carnal." Here he draws a contrast between the purity of the Law, and the carnality of his fallen nature; and when brought to this standard of perfect holiness, he perceived at once, through the light of the Spirit, of the pollution of his best action. But how strong the expression which he now uses, "sold under sin.'' What? the Lord's freeman, sold under sin! Could he, like Ahab, sell himself to work wickedness? Impossible.

The believer, whose experience is here described is not said to sell himself, he 'was sold' under sin. This implies something passive, rather than active. We may be said to be sold, with respect to original sin, which taints our whole nature, before we can perform one act of the will. When we have attained to the exercise of our mental faculties, and are duly awakened to a sense of our abject condition, we resemble slaves, who are longing for deliverance, and yet cannot emancipate themselves from their hated bondage. Through the remainders of corruption, we have to struggle and fight against the sin that dwells within us, and which is ever seeking to entrap us by its deceitful wiles; but, as the servants of Jesus Christ, we can never be the willing slaves of sin; this is totally adverse to the spirit of the Gospel, and marks with awful blackness the subjects of Satan's kingdom.

This seems to be the meaning of the Apostle's declaration; for he adds with much simplicity and sincerity, "For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that do I." Thus confessing how much it distressed his renewed mind, to feel this inward struggle against the holy principle of grace. The whole bent of his mind and will was toward God and holiness; therefore, he could affirm for his own comfort, "If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the Law that it is good."

His will was averse from sin and inclined to the holy law of God; on which account he could declare without hesitation- "Now then, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me." As if he said– It is not the newly implanted principle, the new man in Christ Jesus which thus labors to throw off the restraining power of the Law, but sin, the unrenewed part of my nature, which still dwells within me "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, (my corrupt and unregenerate nature) dwells no good thing; for to will, (through the power of converting grace) is present with me, but how to perform that which is good (through the remainders of corruption) I find not."

How important is self-knowledge. "I know," says this experienced saint, "that in me dwells no good thing." This is not the language of a proud Pharisee, or of a self-righteous professor of Christianity, but of a humble believer, taught of God to know himself, to feel the plague of his own heart, and to bewail his corruptions with unfeigned sorrow.

How did the Apostle know, that in him dwelt no good thing; that is, as he himself explains it, in his flesh or unrenewed nature? Because he was constrained to acknowledge- "The good that I would do, I do not; but the evil which I would not do, that I do." He therefore places this distressing experience to the account of indwelling sin, "Now if I do that which I would not do, it, is no more I (my renewed nature) that does it, but sin that dwells in me."

At length he comes to this conclusion– "I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me." I cannot shake off this hated inmate, nevertheless, "I delight in the Law of God after the

inward man." This proves that the experience here stated, is that of a truly converted person, under the teaching of the Spirit; for an unregenerate man could not delight in the Law of God after the inward man, that is, with all the powers and affections of the renewed mind. "But," he adds. "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members." Thus while grace was urging on to higher and higher degrees of holiness, these 'Canaanites in the land' were opposing his progress, and trying to bring him into their hated captivity.

Feeling most deeply his utter helplessness under these distressing conflicts, he is compelled to cry out with doleful lamentation, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Who shall rescue me from this loathsome body of sin, which I feel so closely attached to me, and from which 1 cannot escape?

Job, and David, and Isaiah, and other eminent saints, have been forced to make a similar cry, when laboring under the conscious burden of indwelling sin. But, what joy, does the Gospel bring to the heavy-laden soul; what relief to the disquieted conscience! One believing glance of a crucified, exalted Savior, can drive away a legion of inbred evils, and deliver the oppressed soul from all its burdens.

The happy saint, having, by an act of faith, reached the foot of the cross, now breaks forth into an ecstacy of delight, "I thank God, who gives me the victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Every fresh application to the blood of the Atonement, brings fresh peace and strength to the soul, and is the sovereign antidote to the evil of sin. For the consolation of every tried believer, who has thus to endure the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, the Apostle draws his blessed conclusion, "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death. The law of Moses could not save us, because of our sinful nature. But God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent his own Son in a human body like ours, except that ours are sinful. God destroyed sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the requirement of the law would be fully accomplished for us who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit."

Happy is the believer, who, taught by the Spirit to know and to feel his own unworthiness and nothingness, goes daily, to his crucified Lord for an increase of faith and love. It is an awful deception to imagine, that because sin is never wholly destroyed while we remain in the body, that therefore we may feel easy about its dwelling within us. This is not the feeling of a child of God. Every perception, every motion, every acting of sin, however inward or unperceived by others, is painful and humbling to the new-born soul. Having received a new nature, the believer has received a new bias, new affections, and new desires. He pants after God. He longs to be conformed to the perfect image of his Savior. He delights to do the will of his heavenly Father. Though pardoned through faith in the blood of Jesus, he still loathes himself on account of his iniquity, and watches, and prays, and strives against the sin which does so easily beset him.

By the light of the Gospel Truth, he searches his heart, and takes a survey of those temptations and snares which surround his path. Ceasing from man, he trusts in the faithfulness of his Covenant God. Renouncing his own righteousness, he looks unto Jesus, and labors, through the

Spirit, to follow his steps. As a person ascending a lofty mountain sees the prospect widen before him, the nearer he approaches its summit; so the true believer, as he advances in his Christian course, obtains a more expanded view of the perfections of Jehovah, of the purity of the Law, and of the holiness of the Gospel. Hence forgetting those things which are behind him, and reaching forth unto those things which are before him, he daily pursues his upward walk, until, passing through the gates of death, he attains the summit of his desires, when, standing upon Mount Zion, with palms of victory and songs of praise, he beholds Jesus in the fullness of His glory, and is made like Him in the perfection of His holiness, when he sees Him as He is.

A consciousness of indwelling sin should therefore drive us to the cross; make us value the finished work of our Redeemer, and excite us to more fervent supplications for growth in grace-knowing that this is the will of God, even our sanctification; and, that if we ask any thing according to his will he hears us.

How great then is the privilege of the sanctified believer. He walks in the light of the Divine Countenance, and enjoys communion with God. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses him from all sin; while the Holy Spirit dwells in him, as in a temple consecrated to the Divine glory. Yet, writes John, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." O that we may come to Christ, as little children, subjecting our minds to his will and our reason to his Word. then shall we know the truth as it is in Jesus, and be governed, and guided, and sanctified by it.

Christian reader, are your feelings in unison with those of the Apostle? If you can not read your experience in this Seventh Chapter to the Romans, you have no right to the comforts of the Eighth.

When the motions of sin are felt within you, how do you act respecting them? Are they allowed to work unmolested in your heart; or, are they, when perceived, immediately resisted by the prayer of faith? Do these perceptions of inward corruption give you pain; or are they treated with indifference, so long as the inward evil does not become an outward sore? Can you say with the Apostle, "to will is present with me. I consent unto the Law that it is good; I delight in the law of God after the inward man." And, when the cry of agony- ’’O wretched man that I am,’’ is extorted from you under the pressing burden of conscious corruption, does a believing view of Jesus, as your righteousness and strength, become, at once, the death of your sins, and the life of your hopes? If so, then take the full comfort of the Apostle’s assurance, that to you, there is no condemnation, while you evidence your union to Christ, by walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

It has been quaintly, but truly remarked, that the Cross-bearer shall be the Crown-wearer. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the outward trials which they have to encounter in common with the rest of mankind, would be easily borne, were it not for the plague of their own hearts, which greatly adds to the weight of temporal affliction.

Their desire is to have their wills swallowed up in the will of God, and with filial affection to kiss the hand that smites. But alas! too often they have to mourn over a rebellious spirit, which makes sad inroads into their spirituality and peace.

Being taught of God to know themselves, and to abhor sin, they daily wrestle with this inbred evil. The weapons of all-prayer and faith in the blood of Jesus arm them for the combat. Looking unto Jesus, the Captain of their salvation, and confiding in his love, whose grace is sufficient for them,

and whose strength is made perfect in their weakness, they endure unto the end, and obtain a crown of glory that fades not away.

Such are the conflicts and such the conquests of every true believer. With Paul, he can say, "Without are fightings, within are fears;" and with this holy man he can glory in tribulation. Beholding our danger and our refuge, have we fled with anxious haste to the cross of Christ, and there, through faith, obtained the pardon of our sins, the robe of righteousness, the spirit of adoption, the renewal of our nature, the peace of God, the foretaste of heavenly bliss!

"Happy are you O Israel, who is like unto you, O people saved by the Lord. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment, you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, with the Lord."

"O vain heart, where are you roving;

What proud wishes in you swell?

Can you hope for God’s approving?

Are you fit with him to dwell?

Do those empty joys ensnare you

Which frail mortals prize so high?

Or do faith’s bright visions bear you

To the portals of the sky?

There are times when I can cherish

Fondest hopes of heavenly rest;

Soon, too soon, they fade, they perish;

All is gloom within my breast.

O how desolate and dreary

Are those hours of lonely grief,

When the mind, depressed and weary,

Seeks, but cannot find, relief.

Gracious Lord, your righteous dealings

With our sinful race below,

Prove you faithful, though our feelings

Like the ocean, ebb and flow.

Hear my fervent supplication,

And your strength and peace restore;

Fix me on a firm foundation,

That I may be moved no more.

01.17. Chapter 17.

Chapter 17. ON THE SPIRITUAL CONFLICT (continued)

We have seen the sentiments of the Saxon Reformer respecting that corner-stone of the Reformation, the doctrine of justification by faith; how zealous he was for the absolute freeness of Divine grace, and yet how zealous for the interests of holiness. We will now consider his views and feelings with regard to the Christian's conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, "It is very useful," says Luther, "for sincere and pious people to know and meditate on Paul's doctrine concerning the contest of the flesh and the Spirit. It is an admirable comfort to the tempted. When I was a monk, if at any time I happened to feel the motions of a bad passion, I used to think the prospect of my salvation was completely over. I struggled in a variety of ways both to overcome the bad passion, and to quiet my conscience. All in vain. The lust of the flesh returned, and I was harassed with thoughts of this sort– You have committed this, or that sin; you are impatient, you are envious; in vain have you entered into holy orders. Now if I had rightly understood Paul's doctrine of the flesh lusting against the Spirit. I should not so long and so miserably have afflicted myself. I should have reflected, and said, as I do at this day in similar situations– Martin, as long as you remain in the flesh, you will never be entirely without sin; you are now in the flesh, and therefore you must experience a contest with it; and this is agreeable to what Paul says, the flesh resists the Spirit. Despair not then, but strive manfully against all carnal dispositions, and fulfill not their lustings. Do this, and the Law shall have no condemning dominion over you."

In the same self-abasing spirit, he speaks of himself and his fellow-laborers in the ministry- "We ourselves, the ministers of the Gospel, are not so active and zealous in doing our duty, now that we have the light of truth, as we were before, during the darkness of our ignorance. We are grown cold and negligent in handling the Word, and in prayer also; and lastly, both in well-doing and in suffering; insomuch, that if Satan did not torment us internally, with spiritual temptations, and externally, with hostile persecutions, and above all, with the contempt and ingratitude of our own congregations, we should become, I fear, quite careless, and lazy, and lost to every good work."

Happy would it be for the Church, if this picture did not apply to modern times. But, blessed be God, we still have men among us, who, like Luther, are valiant for the truth upon the earth; who contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints; and who are not ashamed to confess Christ before a sinful and adulterous generation. May their number increase a thousand-fold.

Luther labored to bring back the Christian Church, not only to the purity of the faith, but to the practice of piety. "The whole man," writes this enlightened Reformer, "must, in the Gospel, stoop and become new. He must put off, as it were, the old skin, as the serpent does. For when its skin is old, the serpent seeks out a narrow hole of a rock, and forces itself into it, and draws its old skin off from itself, and leaves it outside the hole. So must a man yield himself to the Gospel and God's Word, and boldly follow, and draw off, as it were his old skin, and leave outside, his knowledge, his thoughts, his will, his love, his pleasures, his words, his works; and become entirely a new man, who sees all things differently from what he did before, judges differently, feels differently, thinks

differently, chooses differently, speaks differently, desires differently, pursues and works differently." "Truly religious people," he justly remarks, "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts; and hence their sins do not finally ruin them. For, if they obey the flesh by gratifying its concupiscence, they infallibly lose their faith and the Holy Spirit. Moreover, if they do not abhor their sins, sincerely repent, and return to Christ, that they may recover their faith and the Holy Spirit, they will die in their sins. Wherefore I can speak no comfort to those who dream they have faith, and yet live in sin." Against all such there is a dreadful sentence in force; namely– Those who live after the flesh shall die. And further, the works of the flesh are manifest; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, and such like; they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

Luther then shows in what way true believers are kept from falling into gross sins, and how they are enabled to persevere even unto the end, "The severe threatenings of Almighty God against sin," he observes, "have a due effect upon the minds of true believers, so as to deter them from breaking his laws. They arm themselves with the word of God, with faith, and with prayer, and do not give way to the lusts of the flesh. ln fact, they so resist the flesh, as to nail it to the cross with all its sinful desires. Hence it is, that the flesh, though yet alive, and capable of showing some signs of motion, cannot perform what it would; being bound hand and foot, and nailed fast to the cross. Such are the principles, and such is the practice of truly pious people. The same important truths may be expressed a little differently thus– The faithful, while they live on earth, do actually crucify the flesh; that is, though they are sensible of its lustings, they do not obey them. Furnished with the armor of God, namely, faith, hope, and the sword of the spirit, they oppose the natural or carnal man; and with these spiritual arms, as it were, with nails, fix him to the cross of Christ, and compel him against his will, to be subject to the spiritual man, or new creature. Afterwards when they die, they entirely put off the carnal man, and they will rise from the dead, with a body incorruptible, and free from sinful affections and lusts."

Thus clearly did this zealous Reformer declare, in unison with the Apostle, that, there are two principles of action within us, flesh and spirit; and though we cannot entirely put off the flesh or kill it, we must fight against it, and strive to subdue it, until we put off our mortal body, and enter that blessed state, where,

"Flesh and sin no more control.

The sacred pleasures of the soul."

The Church of England maintains the same truth with equal clearness in one of her Collects– "O Lord, raise up your power, and come among us, and with great might support us; that whereas through our sins and wickedness, we are sorely hindered in running the race that is set before us, your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us."

Also, in the ninth Article– "Man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusts always contrary to the Spirit. And this infection of nature does remain in those who are regenerated, whereby the lust of the flesh is not subject to the law of God."

This remnant of corruption in the converted sinner is powerfully pressed upon our consciences, as a cause for deep humiliation in the Homily on the misery of man– "Let us all confess with mouth

and heart, that we are full of imperfections; Let us know our own works, of what imperfection they be, and then we shall not stand foolishly and arrogantly in our own conceits, nor challenge any part of justification by our merits or works. For truly there are imperfections in our best works; We do not love God so much as we are bound to do, with all our heart, mind, and power; We do not fear God so much as we ought to do; We do not pray to God, but with great and many imperfections; We give, forgive, believe, live, and hope imperfectly; We speak, think, and do imperfectly; We fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh imperfectly. Let us therefore not be ashamed to confess imperfection even in all our best works."

Becon, one of the most active of the English reformers, and who, by his writings, contributed much to the diffusion of the Truth, in his "Dialogue between the Christian Knight and Satan," makes his Christian warrior say, "In myself I am a sinner, but in Christ, my righteous Maker, I am righteous. For he has forgiven me all my sins and has taken me into his grace, favor, and tuition. He is always ready to help me; he forgives me the remnant of my sins, and purges them in me daily, until he makes me altogether new. Although I fulfill not the commandments of God in the Law with my own works, yet I fulfill them in the Gospel with the most perfect works, and the satisfaction of Christ, in whom I believe. This faith is reckoned to me unto righteousness, although my works of themselves be imperfect. All these things can I prove by the Word of God.

"With this do I comfort myself; I have sins indeed, but yet, for Christ's sake, in whom I believe, there is no condemnation for me. The Law is good and holy, but it can justify no man. It cannot change our stony heart, or give us a softer heart, or purify our sinful nature and renew it, or take away sins; this the Spirit of Christ alone can do. In myself I am a sinner; but this is not to walk after the flesh. For to walk after the flesh is, without all fear, stubbornly and proudly to fulfill the lusts and desires of the flesh, and all that our sinful nature desires, and of itself is bent unto. I fall indeed into sin, but yet after the inward man I hate sin; I desire nothing more than to be clean, and utterly delivered from sin; and I am sorry, even from the very heart, that I have sinned, and do sin against God. I cannot of my own natural strength, without the Spirit of God, hate sin and resist it, seeing, that even together with nature, it is born into the world with me. He that hates sin, has the Spirit of Christ, yes, he is Christ's. Paul therefore confesses that in all godly people the remnants of sin do remain, against which the Spirit strives. But he adds words full of high consolation, even that for all this, there is no condemnation to them. And this privilege and prerogative have they in Christ, that Righteous One, in whom they are engrafted through faith, and whose merits they do enjoy, and by them are saved from their sins."

Thus, our venerable Reformers were experimentally taught of God to know themselves, as well as to understand the Truths which they cheerfully sealed with their blood. While they pressed upon men's consciences the absolute necessity of universal holiness, as essential unto salvation; saying with Paul, "This also we wish, even your perfection;" they at the same time declared with Solomon, "There is not a just man upon earth that does good and sins not;" "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin;" and with James, "In many things we stumble." If then all, even the best of us, are conscious of so many slips and falls, ought it not to make us very humble and modest in our thoughts of ourselves, and sparing in our censures of others? Surely spiritual pride cannot luxuriate in such a soil as this. The deeper are our views of the sin that dwells in us, the more humbly we shall think of ourselves, and the more gratefully we shall prize our salvation by Christ. What Paul felt in his own experience, he strongly enforced upon others. To

the Christians of Galatia he writes, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you would. But if you are led of the Spirit, you are not under the Law. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." This is true blessedness, to live tinder the daily influence of the Holy Spirit, and through his power to overcome the lustings of the flesh.

The consciousness of indwelling sin made the Apostle say to the Corinthians, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away." What need would there have been for this self-government, if he had attained to a state of sinless perfection?

Were sin wholly destroyed in the hearts of believers, and in consequence of this happy liberation from evil, were they delivered from the fear of falling, Paul would not have given this admonitory exhortation to the Thessalonian Christians; "This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication; that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor, not in the lust of concupiscence even as the Gentiles, who know not God; for God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." The knowledge where his strength lay, enabled this good soldier of Jesus Christ to declare, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience to Christ."

Satan, taking advantage of these remnants of evil in the hearts of believers, is constantly laboring to excite opposition against the holy principle of grace implanted in the soul. Hence Paul, whose care over the infant churches was incessant, thus admonishes the Christians at Ephesus, "My brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

Believers then must be strong in the Lord, for they have to encounter a mighty adversary in an evil day. But let them not fear; for through the power of Jesus they shall prevail, since He, who is in them, is greater than he that is in the world.

As a father exhorts his child, so does the tenderhearted Apostle his beloved Timothy; "My son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." And like a general, experienced in this holy warfare, he animates the Christians at Corinth to the spiritual combat, "Watch, stand fast in the faith, act like men, be strong."

But who is sufficient for these things? What feeble arm, or what human weapon can successfully oppose the powers of darkness; He who calls us to the combat, opens the spiritual armory, and bids us equip ourselves for the fight. "Stand, therefore," says the Apostle, "having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. Above all, taking the shield of faith, with which you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the

sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance." Being himself well acquainted with the efficacy of believing prayer, he feelingly adds, "And supplication for all saints, and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds, that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."

With equal force, he urges on the Thessalonians to spiritual combat- "Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation." How invincible is the believer, when thus clad. And, as the hour of dissolution advances, how unspeakably blessed, when, in the triumph of Christian hope, he can exclaim, "O death where is your sting. O grave, where is your victory. Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." May every reader experience this full assurance of hope which upheld the conquering Apostle while passing through the deepest waters, and which cheered his soul in the darkest seasons of affliction.

Too many resemble the character of Pliable, so admirably drawn by Bunyan in his Pilgrim’s Progress. They are delighted with the glowing descriptions which are given of heaven by the inspired writers, and long to behold the golden streets, the pearly gates, the crystal streams, the unwithering tree of life, and all the glories which compose that blissful place. But when they fall into the Slough of Despond, that mire of inward corruption, with which they were hitherto unacquainted; and have to struggle with doubts and fears, raised by Satan and their own unbelieving hearts; they are offended, and gladly run back again into the world, just as the dog returns to its vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

The true believer, on the contrary, like Christian, is bent upon advancing toward the wicket-Gate. He is escaping for his life from the City of Destruction, this present evil world, and therefore dares not tarry in the plain, much less turn back to the place front where he came. He may, for a time, sink deep in desponding fears, arising from indwelling sin and obscure views of the grace and glory of Jesus, but having received a new nature, he ardently longs after the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwells righteousness. He cries for help, and help is vouchsafed front the Lord, whose well-timed promises, like the steps across the Slough of Despond, support his feet, until he reaches the firm ground nearest to the Shining light, and thus evidences the reality of his conversion to God. Though much discouraged because of the difficulty of the way, he is still determined to persevere; and obtaining a clearer view of the cross of Christ by the exercise of a stronger faith, every spiritual blessing is imparted to him, and he finally enters with joy into the Celestial City.

The amiable and pious Leighton has forcibly described this chequered experience of the true believer, which is so compounded of joy and sorrow. "Inward corruptions," as he truly observes, "clog and trouble the believer, and he cannot shake them off nor prevail against them, without much pains, many prayers, and tears. And many times, after much wrestling, he scarcely finds that he has gained ground; yes, sometimes he is foiled, and cast down by them; and so in all other duties, such a fighting and continued combat with a revolting backsliding heart, the flesh pulling and dragging downwards. When he would mount up, he finds himself as a bird with a stone tied to its foot; has wings that flutter to be upwards, but is pressed down with the weight fastened to him.

What struggling with wanderings, and deadness in hearing, and reading, and prayer.

"How much pain to attain anything, any particular grace of humility, or meekness, or self-denial; and if anything is attained, how hard to keep and maintain it against the contrary party. How often are the righteous driven back to their old point! If they do but cease from striving a little, they are carried back by the stream; and what returns of doubtings and mischief, after they thought they were gotten somewhat above them; insomuch that they are at the point of giving over, and thinking it will never do for them. And yet, through all these, they are brought safely home. There is another strength which bears them up, and brings them through; but these things, and many more of this nature, argue the difficulty of their course, and that it is not so easy to come to heaven as most imagine."

The heavenly-minded Leighton, no doubt, included himself in this experience of the righteous, though Burnet has left his record of his superior sanctity, "I can say with great truth, that in a free and frequent conversation with him, for above twenty-two years, I never knew him speak an idle word, that had not a direct tendency to edification; and I never once saw him in any other temper, but that in which I wished to be in the last minutes of my life."

If then, the righteous scarcely are saved; if so many sufferings, temptations, and difficulties surround their path; if so many enemies are up in arms to impede their progress; and so much evil still remains from the fleshy principle within; requiring incessant watchfulness and prayer; how shall the sinner and the ungodly stand in judgment? Awful indeed will be the end of those, who have either rejected or neglected the grace of God, so freely offered in the Gospel of his Son.

There are, it is true, many shades of character, some darker and some fainter, but still they are shades of evil. The Bible speaks of no middle character, no neutral state between the righteous and the wicked. We must be either believers or unbelievers, saints or sinners, the friends or the enemies of Christ. We cannot serve God and Mammon. The line of demarcation between the true Church and the world, is broadly and distinctly drawn in the Word of God. The blessed Jesus has declared, "He that is not with me is against me." This important distinction was also clearly made when tho, gracious commission was given to Paul at the period of his conversion, "Now I send you to the Gentiles, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

This transforming power accompanied the preaching of the Apostle. Hence he could say to the Ephesians, "You were once darkness, but now are you light in the Lord, walk as children of light." Also, to the Thessalonians. "You are all the children of light, and the children of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness."

Clement of Alexandria gives this short account of the primitive Christians, "As the fairest possession we give up ourselves to God, entirely loving him, and reckoning this the great business of our lives. No man is with us a Christian, or accounted truly rich, temperate, and generous, but he that is pious and religious; nor does any further bear the image of God, than he speaks and believes what is just and holy. So that this, in short, is the state of us who follow God; such as are our desires, such are our discourses; such as our discourses, such are our actions; such as are our actions, such is our life; so universally good is the whole life of Christians." Certainly none were ever greater enemies to a naked profession, and the covering a bad life under the title of

Christianity, than these early followers of the Savior.

Do any live otherwise than Christ has commanded? It is a most certain argument that they are not Christians, though with their tongue they smoothly profess the Christian doctrines; for not mere professors, but those who live according to their profession, shall be saved. So careful were the primitive believers to avoid all sin, that they stood at the greatest distance from anything, however lawful in itself, which seemed to bear the appearance of evil, or which might offend the weakest of their brethren.

"Who," says Clement, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, "that has ever been among you, has not experienced the firmness of your faith, and its fruitfulness in all good works- and admired the temper and moderation of your religion in Christ? All of you were humble minded, not boasting of anything; desiring rather to be subject than to govern; to give than to receive; being content with the portion God has dispensed to you- and hearkening diligently to his word; you were enlarged in your affections, having his sufferings always before your eyes. Thus, a firm and blessed, and profitable peace was given unto you; and an inestimable desire of doing good; and a plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit was upon all of you. You were sincere, and without offence towards each other; not mindful of injuries; all sedition and schism was an abomination unto you. You bewailed every one his neighbor's sins, esteeming their defects your own- you were kind one to another without grudging, being ready to every good work- and being adorned with a conversation altogether virtuous and religious, you did all things in the fear of God, whose commandments were written upon the table of your hearts."

Such was the lovely portrait, drawn by the early Fathers of the Christian Church. In those days, religion consisted not in talking finely, but in living well. We, alas! are not now, what these primitive Christians were– burning and shining lights. The lamentation of the prophet is sadly too descriptive of our state- "Our silver has become dross, and our wine is mixed with water." The world has tainted the Church by its unhallowed admixture. Where is the simplicity, the self-denial, the zeal, the entire devotedness of these first Christians to be found? Certainly not among the great mass of religious professors. Long continued prosperity has induced a spirit of slumber. The visible Church planted in our countries has had a long season of repose. No storm of violent persecution has been permitted to assail it. We have grown up within its bosom during a period of religious liberty unknown to former ages. From our infancy we have heard, in a greater or less degree, the glorious truths of the Gospel. They have become familiar to our ears, but they have not proportionally affected our hearts. Hence, without considering what is the nature, the operation, and the requirements of the Gospel, we have substituted the form for the power, the notion for the spirit of Christianity; contenting ourselves with the circumstance of being born in a Christian country, and belonging to a Christian Church; as if the initiatory rite of baptism would amply secure our admission into heaven.

Without any breach of that charity which hopes all things, we are compelled to declare this painful truth; that thousands who are moral, and regular in all the outward duties and decencies of religion, are still as far distant from the spirit and practice, the principles and feelings, of the true believer, as the East is from the West. Do any startle at this plain assertion? Where, would ask, is their deep contrition, their sincere repentance, their hatred of sin, their application to the Savior, their love to his name, their delight in his service, their attachment to him, their self-denying

obedience, their renunciation of the world, their patience under suffering for the Gospel's sake? Where, in short, is the new creature in Christ Jesus to be seen in them? It has no existence. They have a name to live, being called Christians, and professing to believe in Jesus, but they are dead. The general truths of the Gospel may dwell in their understandings, but they have no abiding place in their hearts. Their notions may make them moral, but they do not transform their souls into the holy image of Christ. The Apostle has well described the character of these nominal Christians- "they profess that they know God; but in works deny him. They have the form of godliness, but, deny the power thereof."

These are the people who, frequenting the House of God, sneer at conscientious piety, and sarcastically pity the weakness of "the saints." Yet, they have full confidence in the mercy of God, and deem it most uncharitable, even to breathe a hint that they are in danger of eternal perdition. But, when death seizes upon them, when the world is found to be an idol which cannot save, and worldly friends but miserable comforters; when conscience fastens upon them as its prey, and tears their souls with inconceivable anguish, (awful presage of the worm that never dies;) O what would they not give for that sweet assurance of hope, that real Christianity, which supports and gladdens the despised believer, as he passes through the cold stream of death to his eternal rest. Unbelief blinds their minds, and hardens their hearts. While in the enjoyment of health and plenty, they can sport with thoughtless gaiety on the brink of hell. The sun of prosperity shines upon them, and all around is pleasant. Then why should they forebode the death-bearing storm, or sigh in the midst of laughter? Sickness or poverty, in their estimation, is the proper time for reflection, because at such gloomy seasons, the opportunities for pleasure are gone. They may, perhaps, be induced to bestow a few thoughts upon serious things, but they never do it with a serious spirit. At the grave of some beloved friend, they drop the tear of affection, and for the moment feel the vanity of earthly things; but soon, the tide of occupation and of pleasure returns, and the faint impression is obliterated from their minds.

Like Felix, they dismiss, as soon as possible, the unwelcome visitor, and quiet their consciences by this message, "When I have a more convenient season I will call for you." Have we never imitated Felix in his dangerous procrastination? When will this more convenient season arrive? Will tomorrow find us more disposed to repent than today? As we grow in years, will our hearts grow softer, or the world less powerful in its influence over us? No! may not the same motives which occasion our delay today, prevail with us on the morrow, to procrastinate until the day ensuing, and thus lead us onwards to the verge of life, unprepared to meet our God?

O how awfully great is our insensibility to eternal things. Rising from their beds in the vigor of health, what numbers have been struck by the dart of death, and hurried, in a few hours, into the presence of their Judge. This day may be our last. What season then, is convenient as the present? Other opportunities may be less favorable; none can be more advantageous; for now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation. Now the door of mercy stands open, but it will shortly be shut. Now the scepter of mercy is held out, but soon it will become a rod of vengeance. Now we hear the voice of love, but before long we shall behold the wrath of the Lamb. Now the invitation is "Come unto me and I will give you rest;" speedily we shall hear in dreadful thunder, "Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire." O that every slumbering sinner may be aroused to a sense of his danger. Has God said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man;" has he pronounced his righteous judgment upon procrastinating sinners, "Because I have called, and you

refused. I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded. I will also laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear comes," -then let us tremble, lest His insulted and grieved Spirit should never more vouchsafe his convictions; lest this awful seal of perdition should be placed upon us. "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone."

While in the pursuit of earthly things, or distracted by worldly cares, what thousands are deceived through the subtlety of Satan to their eternal ruin. They intend to repent, and are resolved to be godly. They resolve, and re-resolve, and die the same. Blest with a profusion of worldly goods, which a bounteous Providence has heaped upon them, what multitudes of professing Christians are thus unmindful of the Giver of their mercies, forgetful of their responsibilities, neglectful of their souls, yes more, rejecters of Him who died to save them, who is even now waiting to be gracious, who calls to them by his ministers, who invites them by his Word, who strives with them by his Spirit.

Should any one cast his eyes upon these humble pages, whose conscience bears testimony to the truth of these reflections, I pray that the Divine Spirit of all grace, may bless the faithful admonition to his heart. O that these solemn truths may be received in the same spirit of love in which they were written; for, as "the ear that hears the reproof of life abides among the wise;" -so, "he that hates reproof shall die."

Whatever human reason may suggest as the way to heaven, the Bible plainly declares, that there is no salvation for sinners but through the mercy of God in Jesus Christ; and no other way of coming to Christ, as a Savior, but by believing on him; that, faith is the gift of God, the work of his Spirit in our hearts; and that, for this inestimable blessing, we must pray without ceasing. To encourage us to the performance of this duty, with what inimitable tenderness has Jesus appealed to our hearts, "If you, being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven, give good things to those who ask him."

Can we remain insensible to this inconceivable lovingkindness of our God and Savior? God is love, and has manifested his love towards us, by sending his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. God is love, and has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. How importunate are his calls of mercy- "Why will you die, O house of Israel? Will you not be made clean? When shall it once be? O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your vain thoughts lodge within you? I, even I, am he that blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember your sins."

May this exhibition of redeeming love soften our hearts, and lead us to the mercy-seat where God waits to be gracious. There, with an earnestness of desire, and deep feeling of our need, let us ask, that we may receive; seek that we may find, knock that it may be opened. "For this," says John, "is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us; and if we know that he hear us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."

"Why should earthly beauties tear me

From the fountain of all bliss,

From that Lord, who waits to bear me

To a happier land than this?

Faith already seems beginning

To approach that land of rest,

Where I shall be done with sinning

And with endless peace be blest.

Hasting to those heavenly treasures,

Lower joys I leave behind;

Earth with all its boasted pleasures,

Shall not move my steadfast mind."

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Chapter 18.

PAUL’S SOURCES OF CONSOLATION–

THE COVENANT TITLES OF JEHOVAH,

THE IMMUTABILITY OF THE DIVINE COUNSEL,

THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE SAVIOR’S GRACE,

THE EFFICACY OF HIS POWER,

THE ASSURANCE OF FUTURE GLORY.

Nothing can be more interesting to a Christian, whose heart is filled with holy love, than the contemplation of the Divine Perfections, as displayed in our redemption by Jesus Christ; and of that work of grace, which is wrought in the heart of the sinner, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Well might David strike his harp with joyful notes "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God, while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet. I will be glad in the Lord."

Every other subject is light and trifling compared with this; for, however wonderful are the works of God, He, who made them, must infinitely surpass them all in glory. "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all those who have pleasure therein." But, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable."

What can be more ennobling to the soul of man, than spiritual meditations on that Infinite Being, who made, redeemed, and sanctified us; whose watchful care ever protects us, and whose love is engaged to preserve and bless us.

O! how delightful is the thought, that he who inhabits eternity, who clothes himself with light as with a garment, who rides upon the wings of the wind, before whom all nations are less than nothing and vanity, who beholds, at one glance, all things past, present, and to come, is our FATHER and our FRIEND. What can harm us, while sheltered under his wing! What can grieve us, while dwelling beneath his smile? He, who rules over all worlds, has promised to make all things work together for good to those who love him. If we love God, he will make good this sweet promise even unto us.

How secure, how peaceful, how blessed, is the true believer in Jesus. His heart can joyfully respond to these soul-reviving questions of the Apostle– "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any tiling to the charge of God’s elect? It is Christ who died; yes, rather who is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution,

or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

With an eye fixed on the everlasting Covenant, the Apostle rose superior to every misgiving feeling. Happy Paul, who in the fullness of faith could thus triumph in Christ. When assailed by inward temptations and outward trials, can we strike a chord in unison with his, and in the full assurance of hope, exclaim, amid threatening dangers, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

O glorious triumph of faith! Well might Jesus say, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." As there is no condemnation, so there shall be no separation between Christ and his people. Their union is firm as the everlasting hills- and unending as the days of eternity. What then can exceed the blessedness arising from a firm hold on the promises of God in Christ? All earthly supports shall finally forsake us, but the Word of Christ will never fail. He has himself given us this blessed assurance, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Must it not then be dishonoring to Jesus, for one moment to doubt his word, which is firm as the everlasting pillars which support his throne.

Earth would once more resemble Paradise, did the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ produce its full effect on every heart. The religion of Jesus is a religion of love; and love works no ill to his neighbor. It is a religion of peace, and peace would convert spears into ploughshares. It is a religion of purity, and purity, would banish every unclean passion from the earth. To extend the blessings of this heavenly religion was the heart’s desire of Paul; to make known its riches was his delight, though his efforts were too often repaid by ingratitude, and attended with unnumbered sufferings.

Earth will not always groan under the weight of sin, as now alas it does! The page of prophecy unfolds an age of brightness to our view, when the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the channels of the sea; when the wolf and the lamb shall feed together; and when they shall neither hurt nor destroy in all God’s holy mountain. Then truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Violence shall no more be heard in our land; neither wasting nor destruction within our borders; for the Lord shall be our everlasting light, and the days of our mourning shall be ended. His people shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever, that he may be glorified.

Blessed Jesus! why are your chariot wheels so long in coming? Make haste, my Beloved, and be like a roe or a young deer upon the mountains of spices. You have said, "Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

How truly wonderful is the Spirit’s operation in the heart of the believer. The more we meditate upon it as exhibited in the character and experience of the great Apostle, the more we shall admire the wisdom, power, and love, which shone forth in his conversion and establishment in the faith. His whole experience is profitable to us. We behold successively his conflicts, comforts, and his conquests. Perhaps no man ever suffered more in the cause of Christ, enjoyed more abundant consolations, or obtained more glorious victories over the powers of darkness. We have already

seen an ample detail of his trials, as recorded by himself; trials which would have daunted the most courageous, unaided by strength from above.

With beautiful humility, so characteristic of his mind, he sans to the Corinthians, "Jesus was seen by me, as of one born out of due time; for I am the least of the Apostles, who am not fit to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." So careful was this holy man to place the crown of glory upon the head of Jesus, whose power and love had been magnified in his conversion to the faith which once he destroyed.

The consideration of those sources of consolation, from where he derived so much joy, and which sustained him under the vicissitudes of his eventful life, will afford another proof of the blessedness of faith in Christ. During his abode at Corinth, at Jerusalem, and while traversing the ocean on his voyage to Rome, this faithful servant of Christ was favored with encouraging visions. "I am with you," were words of unspeakable comfort, when spoken in the hour of trial by the Savior whom he loved. The titles which are given to the Almighty in his Epistles to the different churches, contain within them the sweetest consolation.

When exhorting the Christians at Corinth, he says, "Finally, brethren farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you."

To the Romans he writes,"Now the God of patience and consolation, grant you to be like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind, and one mouth, glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit."

In the fullness of his heart, he breaks forth into a song of praise, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God; for as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ." How endearing is the view here afforded us of our Almighty Creator; how blessed is the assurance of his good-will toward us through Christ Jesus.

It is peculiarly affecting to the heart of every contrite believer to be thus privileged to call upon his God as- the God of love and peace- the God of patience and consolation- the God of hope- the Father of mercies- and the God of all comfort. O that we could feel the overflowings of gratitude for such superabundant grace.

Nothing more awfully manifests the hardness of the heart, than insensibility to the loving-kindness of God, whose tender mercies are over all his works, and whose very chastisements are blessings in disguise.

The heart of Paul was deeply impressed by a view of the Divine Goodness. This made him exclaim, "O the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ which passes knowledge." To the wicked, he put this awakening question, "Do you despise the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" To the righteous, he used this affectionate entreaty "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable

unto God, which is your reasonable service."

This view and these feelings of a Savior's love, enabled him to console the suffering saints. He could speak from sweet experience both of mercy and judgment. To the Christians at Corinth, the comforted Apostle thus unfolded the divine dealings, "So when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your benefit and salvation! For when God comforts us, it is so that we, in turn, can be an encouragement to you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. We are confident that as you share in suffering, you will also share God's comfort." Blessed indeed is that shepherd, who can thus strengthen the faith, and encourage the hope of his flock, by revealing to them the sources of his own consolation, and by leading them into the green pastures, and beside the still waters of the Gospel of Christ.

It is the will of God, that in everything we should give thanks; that we should glory in tribulation; and count it all joy when we fall into diverse temptations, knowing this, that the trying of our faith works patience. But alas! we live very much below our duty and our privileges. We love ease and an exemption from trial; we shrink from suffering, and cannot bear the weight and shame of the cross. And why are we thus? Because the world has struck its roots into our hearts, which, like the deadly cancer, is consuming the vital principle.

The deeply-tried Apostle had to weep over one whom he once reckoned among the saints- "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world." Jesus also gave this solemn warning, "Remember Lot's wife." May the all-gracious Spirit revive his work, as in the days of old, lest our end should resemble that of the seven churches, to whom John delivered the Savior's rebuke, and from whom the light of evangelical truth has long been removed.

The foundation of all that spiritual joy which animated the breast of Paul, was the immutability of the Divine Counsel. God's faithfulness was his best security. He knew whom he had believed, and through grace, enjoyed the full assurance of hope. This blessed truth the Apostle admirably unfolded to the Hebrew converts, to promote their stability in the faith- "God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. So God has given us both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can take new courage, for we can hold on to his promise with confidence. This confidence is like a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain of heaven into God's inner sanctuary. Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the line of Melchizedek."

Our finite capacities cannot comprehend the fullness of grace which is contained in these sublime words; for, "Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" We must die, to know the vast extent of redeeming love! Here, we can only see as through a glass darkly, but in heaven we shall have a full view of that covenant of peace, which is from everlasting to everlasting.

How wonderful is the divine condescension. Surely a simple promise from the lips of Eternal Truth ought to fill our hearts with joy. But so slow of heart are we to believe all that the Lord has spoken, and so weak is our faith in seasons of darkness, that God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath. Thus, when God

made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing, I will bless you, and multiplying, I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

Can we then doubt, after such a confirmation as this? Is not Jehovah in all ages the same covenant-keeping God? Are not his promises as lasting as the days of heaven? Has he said, and shall he not do it? Has he spoken, and shall he not make it good? O! the desperate vileness of our ungrateful unbelieving hearts! With tears may each say, with the father of the poor afflicted child, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief;" and with our Christian Poet–

"Why should I shrink at your command

Whose love forbids my fears?

Or tremble at the gracious hand

That wipes away my tears?

Wisdom and mercy guide my way,

Shall I resist them both?

A poor blind creature of a day,

And crushed before the moth.

But ah! my inward spirit cries,

Still bind me to your sway;

Else the next cloud that veils my skies,

Drives all these thoughts away."

We resemble mariners, navigating a tempestuous ocean, the waves of trouble are ever rolling around us; deep calls unto deep, while the tempest-tossed believer, like Peter, is compelled to cry out, "Lord save me, or I perish;" and with David, "All your waves and billows are gone over me."

But in the midst of this tossing, how consoling is the assurance, that in Christ Jesus the soul is as safe as if it were crossing a sea without a wave. While the worldling is driven by fierce winds here and thither, and is at length engulfed in the mighty waters; the true believer, secured by the Anchor of Hope, is firmly moored to the Rock of Ages.

Can we then be surprised that the delighted Apostle, thus preserved by the strength and faithfulness of his Savior, should feel exceeding joyful in all his tribulation? Blessed indeed was his Christian Experience. None can understand it aright, none can feel it fully, but those happy souls in whom Jesus takes up his abode, and manifests himself as he does not unto the world. Reader, can you participate in this Gospel blessing? Do you cast anchor within the veil? The knowledge of ourselves is a most difficult science, owing to the vanity of our minds, and the influence of self-love. We are blind to our own faults, but quick-sighted to the failings of others. The mote in our brother’s eye is readily discerned, while we are unconscious of the beam so apparent in our own.

Humility is the basis of Christian excellence. It is a grace of peculiar beauty in the sight of Him who was meek and lowly in heart, and who has declared, that "he who humbles himself shall be exalted." Those people, therefore, who imagine, that they have obtained such a victory over their corruptions, as will free them from the trouble of watchfulness and circumspection, have attained unto a higher degree of sanctification, than ever the holy Paul professed to have done. Let us learn humility and self-knowledge by the experience of this eminent servant of Christ.

We have a beautiful instance of this Christian state of mind, recorded by himself in his second epistle to the Church at Corinth; "I knew a man in Christ," writes the Apostle, "whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell, God knows; such a one was caught up to the third heaven, into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." Paul was this man, although with admirable humility he endeavored to cast a veil over himself. He could have revealed a scene of wonders, which would have raised him still higher in the estimation of the churches; but, says he, "I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he sees me to be, or that he hears of me."

Could any spark of pride or vain-glory exist in such a lowly bosom? Could he, who as a sinner, declared himself to be the chief, and as a saint, less than the least, be in danger of the swelling of high-mindedness? Let us hear what he says of himself, "Lest I should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the Revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."

Surely no one, after such a confession, will dare to say- I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin; I am removed from the fear of evil. Was it needful for the humble, self denying Paul, to have a thorn in the flesh, to keep him in the valley of humiliation, and to remind him that he was still in the body, and therefore subject to temptation? Then where is the Christian, who has reached to such a height of perfection, as to be wholly removed from the buffetings of Satan, and the lustings of the flesh? "For this," said the Apostle, "I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." This trial, whatever might be its nature, was distressing to him. It was a thorn. He felt its painfulness, and prayed earnestly for its removal.

Was he left without a word of comfort under this unexpected trial? O! how compassionate is Jesus to his suffering servants. With infinite loving-kindness, he opened to him this source of consolation- "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

So contented was the happy saint with this Divine answer to his prayer, that although the thorn was not removed yet the assurance of receiving a sufficiency of grace in every time of need, enabled him to say with feelings of exultation, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me; for when I am weak, then am I strong."

What can any suffering or tempted believer want more, for strength and comfort, than the all-sufficient grace of his Savior? Having this, he has every thing; lacking this, he is poor indeed. Delightful promise! "My grace is sufficient for you." Jesus gives strength equal to our day. However dark the dispensation, or difficult the path; whether we be in the sun shine of prosperity, or amid the storms of adversity- in the activities of life, or on the bed of death, the promise is never failing- "My grace is sufficient for you." May every reader enjoy in all its fullness this source of consolation, so highly valued by the great Apostle of the Gentiles.

While laboring with all cheerfulness in the vineyard of his Lord, Paul had to endure many privations. We have seen how he suffered in the course of his ministry, both hunger, and cold, and nakedness. Yet none of these things moved him. He was willing to endure all things for the elect's sake, that they might obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. When the Gentile churches manifested their affection towards him, by ministering to his necessities, he received the expression of their love with thankfulness. This grateful feeling he strikingly exhibited in his Epistle to the Philippians, "How grateful I am, and how I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but for a while you didn't have the chance to help me. But even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty. As you know, you Philippians were the only ones who gave me financial help when I brought you the Good News and then traveled on from Macedonia. No other church did this. Even when I was in Thessalonica you sent help more than once. I don't say this because I want a gift from you. What I want is for you to receive a well-earned reward because of your kindness. At the moment I have all I need—more than I need! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable to God and pleases him. And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus."

Such was the Christian spirit which displayed itself in the conduct of this holy man under every trying circumstance of life. Humility, patience, faith, and love shone brightly in him at all times; and more especially when under the pressure of affliction. No repining ever escaped his lips; for his heart cheerfully acquiesced in all the will of God, and suffering was converted into pleasure, when endured for the Gospel's sake. If he spoke of his necessities, it was not with the view of compelling the churches to relieve them. His soul abhorred so mercenary a motive. He therefore says to the Philippians, "Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need."

What an antidote is divine contentment to the ills of life. This rare attainment can only be made in the school of Christ. Happy indeed is the man, who under every changing scene, in humble dependence upon a Savior's grace, has learned to be content.

It was not human power nor human reasoning which thus enabled the apostle to support with lightsome heart the burden of the Cross. Faith in the power of Christ was the great secret of his consolation, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Have we attained to this happy state in our Christian experience? Can we say in sincerity and truth, I have learned in whatever state I am, therewith to be content?

Few, as Bunyan expresses it, descend into the Valley of Humiliation without a slip or two. However much we may trust to the strength of our principles, we shall always find, by experience, that it is easier to talk about resignation than to be resigned. Paul could say, "I know how both to be abased and I know how to abound. I am instructed both to abound and to suffer need." Blessed instruction! invaluable knowledge! which thus enabled him to bear prosperity and adversity with a Christian spirit. Those who know themselves the best, know how difficult it is, because of the pride and earthliness of their hearts, in whatever state they are, therewith to be content. The Spirit of

Christ alone can teach us the art of divine contentment. If He instruct us, we shall be able to learn the hardest lesson. Let us then sit daily at the feet of Jesus, where, imbibing his Spirit, and receiving his grace, we shall rise superior to every trial and be enabled to unite with Paul in his assurance of faith, "I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength."

The prospect of death, so terrible to many, was to the Apostle a scene of brightest expectation. The man who could say, "I die daily; I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; being willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord;" -must have rejoiced at every approach towards the consummation of his wishes. When death knocks at the door and shakes his dart, the sinners tremble for fear. So did not Paul. While his outer man was daily tending to decay, his inner man was advancing toward perfection. He could triumph over death in its most frightful form, and find, in the worldling's terror, a source of the highest consolation. The opening grave, with its accompanying gloom, may sadden a heart wrapped up in the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, but all its darksome horrors vanished before the bright assurance of the Apostle, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

Faith is the eye which pierces the clouds and fixes itself upon the hidden glories of Emmanuel's kingdom. This faith, ever in vigorous exercise, upheld the great Apostle, and like the pillar of fire in the wilderness, shed a brightness over all his path. Possessing this gift of grace, which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, he felt his affliction to be light, and its duration momentary. With steadfast faith, he looked, not at the things which are seen and are temporal, but at the things that are not seen, and are eternal; he therefore gradually advanced in a fitness for heaven, and gloried in those tribulations, which, through the Spirit, wrought out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

What a blessed gradation there is in the scale of mercy! For affliction there is glory. For light affliction a weight of glory. For light affliction which is but for a moment, an eternal weight of glory! Here then we perceive another source of the Apostle's consolation, for the joy of the believer, passing the boundary of time, reaches into eternity.

Like a true pilgrim, this apostolic missionary had no certain dwelling-place. He renounced those treasures which engross the worldling's mind, for a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. He gave up all, to possess all. He became poor, that he might be rich. "We who are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened," was his experience. "We look for the Savior, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body," was his earnest expectation, and his hope.

How different is the state of unconverted men. They hug their chain, though they sigh under its weight; they cherish the viper, though it may sting them to death. True happiness cannot possibly be found in any of those earthly things which so much occupy the time, and captivate the hearts of dying mortals. Pleasures may fascinate, riches may dazzle, honors may inflate; but what can these sources of supposed comfort yield in the hour of death and judgment?

Miserable comforters are they all at such a season of real anguish. The Gospel, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can alone impart genuine happiness. A heart, wholly given to God through faith in a crucified Savior, is the truly happy heart. If there be a pleasure in this lower world, which can

impart a sweet without an excess, it is the pleasure of communion with God through Christ. If at God’s right hand, there are pleasures for evermore; if in his presence there is fullness of joy; then every approach to Him must be an approach to happiness; and communion with Him must be the foretaste of eternal bliss.

"This world", as Hooker has feelingly expressed it, "is made up of perturbations." The curse has made the cross. Had man never sinned, he would never have suffered. No thorns or thistles would have sprung up beneath his feet. Now, they cover the earth, as perpetual emblems of man’s misery, and of God’s displeasure. In every thorn and thistle we may read the fall of man. Through Christ, the promised seed of the woman, the curse is now removed from every believing sinner; and though the cross remains, yet its bitterness is extracted, and it is made to yield the wholesome fruit of patience, self-denial, and deadness to the world.

The covenant love of God sweetens every cup of suffering, and lightens every burden of affliction. Hence, the way, though thorny, is rendered pleasant; and trials, though sharp, are gloried in, for Jesus’ sake. Who then is the truly happy person, in this world of sin and sorrow? It is the genuine believer in Jesus; he, whose faith is not speculative, but practical; whose love is not transient, but abiding; whose hope is placed, not upon created things, but on Christ the sure foundation.

From Jesus, he receives pardon and peace, righteousness and strength, grace and glory. Streams of mercy are ever flowing around him. He sees love inscribed on every dispensation; and like the martyr, can kiss the faggot prepared to consume him, crying "Welcome Cross-Welcome Cross."

The great Apostle of the Gentiles, was honored of God to proclaim this blessedness to the world. Being taught by the Spirit to know the Truth, and to feel its power, he saw with unclouded vision the glories of the Gospel, and daily lived under the consoling influence of its heavenly light.

To the Corinthian church, he poured forth his stores of Gospel tidings, "All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others. We are Christ’s ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you. We urge you, as though Christ himself were here pleading with you, "Be reconciled to God!" For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ."

With such divine supports, such sources of consolation, Paul was enabled to encounter the fiercest opposition; and at midnight, to sing praises to his God in the dungeon at Philippi. Have we attained to this height of blessedness? Can we extract sweetness from the bitterness of death- and consolation from the worldling’s source of sorrow?

While meditating upon these riches of sovereign grace, these abundant consolations provided for suffering saints let us strike our harps with David and sing, "How precious are your thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them. If I should count them they are more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with you. How excellent is your loving-kindness, O God, therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of your house, and you shall make them drink of the river of your pleasures. For with you is the fountain of life, and in your light, we shall see light."

"When the world my heart is rending

With its heaviest storm of care,

My glad thoughts, to God ascending,

Find a refuge from despair.

There’s a hand of mercy near me,

Though the waves of trouble roar;

There’s an hour of rest to cheer me,

When the toils of life are o’er.

Happy hour! when saints are gaining,

That bright crown they longed to wear;

Not one spot of sin remaining,

Not one pang of earthly care.

O! to rest in peace forever,

Joined with happy souls above;

Where no foe my heart can sever

From the Savior whom I love.

This the hope that shall sustain me

Until life’s pilgrimage be past;

Fears may vex, and troubles pain me,

I shall reach my home at last."

01.19. Chapter 19.

Chapter 19.

PAUL’S DESCRIPTION OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

ON SELF-EXAMINATION.

The doctrine of the Cross shines with peculiar luster in the writings of Paul. Its sublimity far surpasses the conception of the strongest intellect; while, through its simplicity, the most unlettered peasant is made wise unto salvation. Love to God, producing love to man, is the blessed fruit of faith in a crucified Redeemer. Nothing can equal the master-strokes of the great Apostle in his portraiture of Christian love. They discover a mind enlightened from above- a heart clothed with humility. While charmed with the beauty of the picture, we must feel abased at our own little resemblance to it. Oh! that our whole soul may be molded into this heavenly grace.

Spiritual gifts, so highly valued by the primitive churches, were as nothing in the estimation of this eminent saint, if unaccompanied by love. With what peculiar force does he express this feeling to the Corinthian Christians, "If I could speak in any language in heaven or on earth but didn’t love others, I would only be making meaningless noise like a loud gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I knew all the mysteries of the future and knew everything about everything, but didn’t love others, what good would I be? And if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, without love I would be no good to anybody. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn’t love others, I would be of no value whatever."

How all-pervading in the Christian system, is love. As the sap, which circulates unseen, causes the fertility of the tree; so is this hidden principle the cause of fruitfulness in the believer. Earth would resemble heaven, were all who call themselves Christians, the living exemplars of this lovely grace. But alas! how widely different from celestial love, is the prevailing spirit of the Christian world. The spiritual foe is fearfully at work. Union in the camp of Satan, and disunion in the Church of God is most portentous of approaching evil. The enemies of Christ are making one common cause against His Truth- while his professing people are allowing jealousies and mistrusts to separate them from each other. Oh! that a spirit of love may be speedily poured out upon all our churches, lest the Holy Dove should flee away from these scenes of strife, and leave us to the miseries of a fallen people.

Let us contemplate the features of Christian charity as drawn by the masterly hand of the Apostle, and then look at those of our fallen nature- and though painful be the contrast, may it lead us in self-abasement to the Cross of Christ, where love is displayed in its divinest form.

Love is patient and kind. We are quick in our resentments, slow in our reconciliations, and backward to repay an injury with kindness.

Love does not envy. We look with envious eye on the possessions and preferments of others; and cannot bear to be outshone by the superior talents of our neighbor. The Scripture says not in vain, "the spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy; and where envy is, there is confusion and every evil work."

Love does not boast, it is not proud. We are naturally vain and self-sufficient, proud of our gifts, and wise in our own conceits.

Love is not rude. We transgress the bounds of decency and propriety; and fail in that reverence which is due to our superiors.

Love is not self-seeking. We are selfish, regarding our own interest and pleasure; caring not who sinks, if only we swim.

Love is not easily angered. We take fire at the least offence; making a man an offender for a word allowing anger to rest in our bosoms; and letting the sun go down upon our wrath.

Love thinks no evil. We readily indulge in evil surmisings, and unfounded censures; sitting in judgment on the motives of others, and condemning those as hypocrites whom the Lord does not condemn.

Love rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. We take a secret delight in the falls of those whom we dislike; and find a pleasure in hearing and propagating the tale of slander.

Love bears all things. We do not bear unkind treatment with meekness, nor cover the defects of others with the veil of love.

Love believes all things. We are unwilling to put the best construction on our neighbor’s actions, and to give him credit for his good intentions.

Love hopes all things. We seldom anticipate good from the conduct of those, against whom we have imbibed a prejudice.

Love endures all things. We cannot endure with patience undeserved reproach; nor be willing, at all times to suffer, rather than to inflict an injury.

Thus we are by nature, the very reverse of this holy charity; for having, through the fall of our first parents, lost the image of God, who is love, we bear the image of Satan, who is the author of envy, malignity, and pride. "Whoever has watched the sun in his declining course, and has seen him sink into the horizon, must sometimes have observed dark clouds gathering round him, as if to blot out and extinguish his rays; but instead of effecting this, the sun throws on them the brightness of his own pure light, and reflects upon the dark face of the hostile clouds, the radiant colors of his own splendor. They glow with borrowed hues of glory. This will be the effect of Christian Charity also. If any assail us with dark suspicions, doubts, and fears, let us spread over them the light of Christian love; let our example be as pure as the object is holy; thus shall we tinge them with better colors; they will catch the same glow, and be excited to better purposes."

Divinely glorious is that principle, which can effect such happiness. In the midst of manifold changes and dissolutions- Charity never fails. Prophecies shall be fulfilled- Tongues shall cease- Knowledge, like the scaffolding, shall be removed- Faith shall be lost in vision- Hope, in

enjoyment- but Love shall never fail. This grace will flourish with immortal vigor in the Paradise above; forever expanding its beauties, and filling the redeemed with eternal joy, the nearer it approaches the untreated Fountain of Light and Love.

How divinely glorious is the Gospel. Its effects on the human heart are truly wonderful. It may well be called the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes. The Gospel, when cordially received, begets such a gracious temper of mind, as makes us humble, amiable, and charitable; forbearing and forgiving; ready to do every good work. It smooths the ruggedness of our natural disposition; banishes selfishness from our hearts; and infuses that gentle and loving spirit which sheds a blessing wherever its influence is felt. This new-creating power of the Gospel was most visible in the first and best ages of Christianity. No sooner did the Gospel fly abroad into the world upon the wings of love, than the charity of Christians became notorious even to a proverb. The very Heathens, who raged against them, were compelled to exclaim, "See how these Christians love one another." Clement, of whom Paul speaks so highly in his Epistle to the Philippians, styling him his fellow-laborer, whose name is in the book of life, enforces the duty of Charity with an almost apostolic authority in his Epistle to the Corinthian church, "He that has the love that is in Christ," says this truly Christian Bishop, "let him keep the commandments of Christ. For who is able to express the obligation of the love of God? What man is sufficient to declare, as is fitting, the excellency of its beauty? The height to which Charity leads, is inexpressible. Charity unites us to God; Charity covers the multitude of sins; Charity endures all things, is patient in all things. There is nothing base and sordid in Charity. Charity lifts not itself up above others; admits of no divisions; is not seditious; but does all things in peace and concord. By Charity were all the elect of God made perfect; without it nothing is pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God. Through Charity did the Lord join us unto himself; while for the love that he bore towards us, our Lord Jesus Christ gave his own blood for us, by the will of God; his flesh, for our flesh; his soul, for our souls. You see, beloved," continues this Primitive Father of the Christian Church, "how great and wonderful a thing Charity is; and how that no expressions are sufficient to declare its perfection. But who is fit to be found in it? Even such only as God shall vouchsafe to make so. Let us therefore pray to him, and beseech him, that we may be worthy of it; that so we may live in charity, being unblameable, without evil propensities, without respect of persons. All the ages of the world, from Adam, even unto this day, are passed away; but they who have been made perfect in love, have, by the grace of God, obtained a place among the righteous; and shall be made manifest in the judgment of the kingdom of Christ. Happy then shall we be, beloved, if we shall have fulfilled the commandments of God, in the unity of love; that so, through love, our sins may be forgiven us. For so it is written- Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputes not iniquity, and in whose, spirit there is no guile. Now this blessing is fulfilled in those who are chosen by God through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

If the first duty of the Christian be Charity, without which all our doings are nothing worth; if faith, working by love, be the only saving faith- how important is Paul’s admonition to the Corinthian church, and to all the churches of Christ in every succeeding age– "Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves; know you not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobates."

With much humility, sincerity, and prayer, we should enter into our own bosoms, and there, search the secret recesses of our hearts, to detect each lurking evil, and to know the worst of our selves. This self-knowledge, though a difficult, is an indispensable attainment. No labor should be deemed too great, no discovery too humiliating in the prosecution of this inward search. May the Divine Spirit teach us by his illuminating influence. We are naturally blind to our real state and character- but God fully knows the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of our heart.

The following considerations are submitted to the pious reader, in the humble hope, that they may, in some measure, conduce to this desirable end, through the blessing of Him from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed.

ON THE NATURE OF GOD.

When I meditate upon the greatness and glory of God, on his infinite and adorable perfections, what effect has this knowledge upon my heart? Do I reverence this Holy Lord God? Do I love him above all created beings? Am I anxious to please, and fearful to offend him? Does a sense of his Omniscience restrain me from secret sin? Does a conviction of his Omnipotence inspire me with confidence in the hour of danger? Does a firm persuasion of his Omnipresence encourage me to bear up under outward trials, and to press forward on the way to glory.

ON ORIGINAL SIN.

When I reflect upon the introduction of moral evil into the world, and all its dire calamities; temporal, spiritual, and eternal; what are my feelings on this mysterious subject? Do I receive this truth in the simplicity of faith, not desiring to be wise above what is written? Feeling the effects of sin, by painful experience, am I desirous to obtain the remedy which a gracious God has provided in the Gospel of his Son? Am I more anxious to extinguish the destructive fire, than curious to know how it was first kindled? Does a consciousness of sin humble me before God, and empty my soul of all hope of self-justification in his sight? Can I rest satisfied with the Divine Revelation, that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death has passed upon all men, for that all have sinned?"

ON THE FALL OF MAN.

When I think upon man’s apostasy from God- the total corruption of my heart- the hardening, polluting, and blinding nature of sin; what is the influence of these momentous truths? Do they lay me in the dust before God, and cause me to cry out- Unclean, unclean! Woe is me! I am undone! Behold I am vile! Have they made me to despair of salvation by any righteousness of my own; and filled me with shame in the presence of Infinite Purity? With self-abhorrence do I cast myself on the unmerited mercy of God in Christ, daily praying with the broken-hearted Publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner?"

ON SALVATION BY JESUS CHRIST.

When I survey the freeness and fullness of Divine grace, the suitableness and sufficiency of Christ’s salvation, the efficacy of his blood, the value of his righteousness, the prevalency of his intercession, and the sweet and precious promise of eternal life through him; how am I affected by these glorious truths? Do I feel a spring of delight rising up within me, at the sound of these glad tidings of great joy? Have I felt my need of this grace? And, in humble penitence and faith, have I

come to Christ as my only Savior, to be redeemed from present sin and future misery?

Renouncing all self-dependence, and casting myself upon Christ for righteousness and strength, have I experienced a change of heart, and found sin to be exceeding sinful? Does my soul sink deeper in humility, while beholding my just desert in the agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion of my compassionate Redeemer? Does gratitude continually ascend, like holy incense from my heart, when reviewing the Savior's dying love? Is my benevolence toward man more enlarged, and my obedience to God rendered more lively and sincere, from these precious views of the grace of Christ?

ON THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

When I view the work of the Spirit, his mighty energy in opening the blind eyes to see the glory of Jesus; in unstopping the deaf ears to receive the sweet sounds of salvation through him; in making the tongue of the dumb to sing his praise, and the feet of the lame to run in the paths of willing obedience- When I dwell upon his powerful operations in breaking the chain of sin, destroying the strongholds of Satan, convincing the rebel of his ingratitude, inclining him to accept the offered mercy, and to become the willing subject of the Prince of peace; what effect have these all-important truths upon my heart?

In this rebel, do I behold myself? With full conviction of my depravity, do I earnestly seek, through Christ, for the aid of the Holy Spirit? Have I hitherto experienced anything of this mighty change, this growing renovation of heart? Is sin less powerful in my soul? Do I feel its force decreasing, and the power of grace, the love of holiness, acquiring strength? Through the influence of the Spirit, can I renounce the vain and empty pleasures of the world, its carnal company, its sinful ways? Have I resigned my all to God, desiring that his will should rule, and his Spirit guide, my every thought and action? Are all my hopes of heavenly glory derived from, and resting upon Jesus, as my Prophet, Priest, and King! Has the Divine Spirit made me willing to kiss the scepter of his grace, and to take my station beneath the banner of the cross? Through his Almighty strength have I become a faithful soldier of Jesus Christ? Do I now wage war against the world, the flesh, and the devil, with whom I was once in league against the Majesty of Heaven? Conscious of my utter inability to withstand these foes without the power of Christ, am I continually going to the Strong for strength, and thus living in humble dependence on his grace, do I come off more than conqueror, through Him who loved me and gave himself for me?

ON PERSONAL HOLINESS.

When I consider the dangers which surround me, and the sin which still dwells within me; do I pray for grace, to keep my heart with all diligence, to walk along the slippery path of life with circumspection, and to cultivate a spirit of humility and godly fear? Am I kind to those who treat me with contempt, because I profess myself an unworthy follower of a crucified Redeemer? Have I indulged any murmuring thoughts at my present condition, or envied the possessions, or attainments, of those whose superior wealth or knowledge cast me into the shade? Am I willing to be nothing in the sight of men, if so I may, through Christ, be admitted into favor with God? Is this the language of my heart– "Make me little and unknown, Loved and prized by God alone." Is it my daily prayer and study to recommend the Gospel by gentleness, kindness, and courtesy; thus silencing those who would accuse the religion of Jesus as tending to foster uncharitable feelings,

moroseness of spirit, disagreeableness of manners, and discord in domestic life?

When little provocations occur, which, in some shape or other will perpetually happen, through the perverseness of those with whom we dwell; is my temper easily ruffled?- Or an I maintain a spirit of self-possession, when tempted to anger by more serious causes, being wishful to reprove in love, rather than in a spirit of bitterness?

Have I any pleasure in hearing or speaking evil others; or do I cast a veil of charity over their failings, being willing at all times, when an action will admit of two constructions, to hope the best?

Is it a grief when evil thoughts arise in my mind and are they at such times my burden and cross? Do I pray and strive through the Spirit to subdue them? Do I fly to the blood of Jesus to be cleansed from every pollution of sin?

Am I distressed when I hear of abounding wickedness? Is my soul pained within me, when I behold the falls of professors, the backslidings of God's children, and the reproach which they bring upon the Gospel of Christ? Have I a holy joy when sinners are converted, when the cause of Truth is triumphing, and when the Gospel is extending its influence throughout the earth?

ON RELATIVE DUTIES.

When I learn from Scripture the necessity of good works- that holiness is an essential part of Christ's salvation- that to be really holy, is to be relatively holy; when I meditate on the duties of man to man, on brotherly affection, and on all the charities of social life; when I dwell upon those obligations which are laid upon me as a Christian, to fulfill the law of love; and contemplate the happiness, connected with a strict obedience to the precepts of the Gospel, the blessedness arising from a kind endeavor to make others happy, and the felicity, flowing from a consciousness of desire to promote by prayer, by influence, by precept, and example, the salvation of my fellow sinners; when I read in my Bible, the reciprocal duties of rulers and subjects, of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of masters and servants, of ministers and people- what effect have these important duties on my life and conversation? Am I walking with steady step in this path of holy obedience; aiming, in a spirit of love, to fulfil the duties of my station; seeking to attain to higher, and still higher degrees of holiness; and devising plans of usefulness, which may promote the temporal and eternal interests of mankind?

These questions, put honestly to the conscience, may lead us, through the light of the Spirit, to form some judgment of our state before God. The difficulty of ascertaining our true character, arises from the blinding influence of self-love. We have, naturally, a fond conceit of our own excellence, and cannot believe that our hearts are so bad as the Bible declares them to be. We can speak humbly enough of ourselves, even when pride is whispering that we are better than thousands around us; but we cannot bear to hear our conduct condemned by others. Nothing is more common, and yet nothing more dangerous, than self-deception. The faithful Apostle gave this caution to the Corinthian church, "Let no man deceive himself." How dreadful, when the soul is first awakened from its delusion in the place of torment.

This self-deception is very prevalent. Jesus said to his disciples, "Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? And in

your name have cast out devils? And in your name have done many wonderful works? And then, will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me, you that work iniquity."

The foolish virgins, with their exhausted lamps and empty vessels said, "Lord, Lord, open to us." But the door was shut; and being once closed, was closed forever! These virgins, justly called foolish, were self-deceivers. They represent, by parable, thousands of nominal Christians, who rest contented with the light of outward profession, without examining whether they possess the grace of the Spirit in their hearts. These people, having a name that they live, build upon a vague hope of mercy, while utter strangers to the sanctifying influence of the Gospel, and thus perish in their sins.

The religion of Jesus reveals the remedy for all these evils. Grace, abounding to the chief of sinners, through the blood and righteousness of Christ, was the theme which kindled into a flame all the energies of Paul; and if, like him, we are taught of God to know the truth, and to feel its power, it will kindle ours.

What joy springs up in the soul of a sinner, when Jesus is preached in all the fullness of his salvation, and received in the simplicity of faith. Christ crucified is the magnet which draws away the heart from earthly things, and fixes it on things above. To feel the holy influence of this mystery of love, is to feel our heaven begun.

Sovereign grace is the source of holiness; for what is grace, but the favor of God, whereby he freely imparts to perishing sinners, every spiritual blessing through the atonement of Jesus Christ.

Out of Christ, God is a consuming fire. In Christ, he is the Father of mercies.

Out of Christ, we are ignorant, guilty, polluted, and enslaved. In Christ, we are enlightened, accepted by God, purified, and redeemed.

Out of Christ, we are hastening fast to hell. In Christ, we are journeying toward the bliss of heaven.

Out of Christ, eternity is full of torment. In Christ, it is filled with unspeakable joy.

Oh! that every dying sinner would reflect on these things before it be too late. Many, during the joyous season of health and plenty, treat subjects such as these with a scornful smile. But their summer-days will not last forever. The wintry season of affliction will quickly come, when blooming health must be exchanged for pallid sickness, and splendid opulence for a noisome grave.

The rich worldling died- and oh! how altered his condition! His remains were drawn to the tomb with all the pomp of a funeral procession- but his soul was hurried to the place of torment. The wretched Lazarus died; poor but pious. No stately hearse conveyed his body to the grave, but waiting angels carried his spirit to the joys above. Each left the world as he came into it- bringing nothing in, he carried nothing out. The beggar left his rags, the rich man his estates behind him. Rank and wealth, though ordained of God for useful ends, are but temporal distinctions. They cease at the hour of dissolution. Riches cannot arrest the stroke of death, nor procure for their possessor a passport to heaven. Poverty cannot sharpen its sting, nor subtract one joy from the poorest saint’s eternal happiness. One moment in heaven will convince the believer, that his afflictions upon earth were light. One moment in hell will convince the pleasure-loving sinner, that it would have been good for him, if he had never been born.

Ah, who can grasp the thought of never-ending joy, or everlasting woe! The mind labors to conceive, and yet can never reach beyond the first impression of eternity. Numbers, years, ages, all, all are lost in the immeasurable, unfathomable abyss!

The riches of grace are the only durable riches, without which the mightiest monarchs of the earth are poor. When earth with all its glories shall have passed away, the lowly followers of Jesus will abide forever, and shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father.

How difficult it is to get heart-affecting views of sin, of Christ, of hell, and of heaven. We talk about them, but alas! how little are we practically affected by them. But what is knowledge without practice or feeling, without conversion of the heart to God? Nothing but the Spirit of Christ can open our eyes to see the deformity of sin- the preciousness of the Savior- the misery of hell- the bliss of heaven.

"Quick as the apple of an eye;

O God my conscience make;

Awake my soul, when sin is nigh,

And keep it still awake.

O may the least omission pain,

My well-instructed soul;

And drive me to the blood again

Which makes the wounded whole."

If every motion of the soul, which does not spring from love to the Savior, be sinful, then, what innumerable sins crowd into the space of every fleeting hour! What an immense amount at the close of a long life! This view is indeed overwhelming. Oh! that it may at once humble us, and lead us to the Lamb of God, whose blood can wash away our guilty stains, whose love can cast our sins into the depths of the sea.

Who can adequately conceive of hell, and all its horrors? or of heaven, and all its glories? We are now standing on the brink of death. Before us, lies an eternal world. Soon we must enter into it. But how shall we enter it? As we die, so shall we appear at the throne of God. We may die this very day. What then is our present state? Are we prepared by deep repentance, humble faith, and holy love, to meet our God? Oh! let us not allow one fleeting hour to escape, until the important enquiry be solemnly made; and an answer of peace be graciously obtained. Let us now go to Jesus– bow lowly at his feet- place ourselves beneath the droppings of his blood- cast our eyes upon him in faith, and fix them there, until he remove us to that blissful place where we shall forever dwell beneath his smiles, and grieve him by our sins no more.

"What love, what pleasure, what surprise,

Shall fill the enraptured heirs of heaven,

The day the Savior meets their eyes,

The day the promised rest is given.

Their love is kindled here below,

The Author of their hope they love;

A purer, brighter flame will glow,

In yonder glorious world above.

Of pleasure too they taste below,

But pleasure not unmixed with pain;

In yonder world ’twill not be so,

For there no sorrow will remain.

And if obscure and transient views

Of heavenly things give such surprise,

What wonder must the sight produce,

When God appears before their eyes?

O joyful sight? O glorious day,

When God the Savior shall be seen;

When earthly things shall pass away,

And heaven’s unchanging state begin."

01.20. Chapter 20.

Chapter 20. ON GOSPEL SANCTIFICATION.

Like a wise master-builder Paul laid the true foundation– Jesus Christ; and built thereon a sacred edifice of heavenly graces, more valuable than gold and silver and precious stones. Those who study the nature of the Gospel, and live under its power, both know, and can enter into its blessed design. All its doctrines, precepts, and promises, are calculated to abase the pride of man, to exalt the glory of Christ, to reveal the malignity of sin, the beauty of holiness, the vanity of the world, the bliss of heaven; to show the sinner his utter helplessness, and to reveal to him an all-sufficient Savior- for proud man must be humbled, the idol self must be dethroned.

Hence; we find that human merit is altogether excluded from the system of Paul’s theology. Being illuminated by the Holy Spirit, he preached the truth without any mixture of error. There are no disproportions, no disfiguring features in his portraiture of Eternal Truth. Perfection in all its parts bespeaks its Divine original. With uncompromising firmness he declares- that faith is the gift of God; that we are justified by faith; that Christ dwells in our hearts by faith; that we walk by faith; that we are the children of God by faith.

It was therefore to the faithful in Christ Jesus, that the Apostle wrote with such affectionate entreaty, "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

How powerfully does he inculcate the duty of universal holiness, "Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned from me and heard from me and saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you."

With such exhortations to holy obedience, how strange that any reflecting mind should, for a moment, charge the doctrines of grace with having a licentious tendency. Yet, there were people, as we have already noticed, who were base enough to abuse the grace of the Gospel. The champion for the Truth hesitated not to call them, "the enemies of Christ, whose end is destruction." So carefully did he guard believers against those evils of our nature, which, when brought into contact with the Gospel, destroy its sufficiency by self-righteousness; its purity by antinomianism.

With peculiar emphasis, almost bordering on indignation, he asks these abusers of the Gospel; "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" And then, after showing the sanctifying nature of true faith in Christ, he gives the believer this blessed assurance; "Sin shall not have dominion over

you, for you are not under the Law but under grace."

In all periods of the Church, Satan has sown his tares among the wheat. This state of the visible Church, is declared by our divine Savior, in various parables of exquisite beauty. The good and bad fishes -the wise and foolish virgins- the fruitful and barren branches- the guests with, and the one without, a wedding garment; are all designed to illustrate this truth- that as they are not all Israel, which are of Israel, so neither are they all true Christians, who profess to be members of Christ. Paul, with his usual discrimination of character, has given us the distinctive features of these two classes; the one holding the Truth in unrighteousness; the other, holding the Mystery of the Faith in a pure conscience.

O! that we could enter, by sweet experience, into the Apostle's charge to the Christians at Philippi– "In everything you do, stay away from complaining and arguing, so that no one can speak a word of blame against you. You are to live clean, innocent lives as children of God in a dark world full of crooked and perverse people. Let your lives shine brightly before them. Hold tightly to the word of life, so that when Christ returns, I will be proud that I did not lose the race and that my work was not useless. Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel."

How meek and gentle, how harmless and unoffending were these early followers of the lowly Jesus; and yet, how bold and fearless in their confessions of Christ, before an ungodly world. They shrunk indeed from sin, but not from suffering for the Gospel's sake. O that we could resemble these primitive believers who were the lights of the world, and the salt of the earth. Their spirituality of mind, their joy through believing, their renunciation of self and worldly greatness, formed those lovely features of the new creature, which the Apostle so admirably described when drawing his own character to the Philippian converts– "For we who worship God in the Spirit are the only ones who are truly circumcised. We put no confidence in human effort. Instead, we boast about what Christ Jesus has done for us." O that the Spirit may be poured out upon all our churches; then the world would once more see the beauty of Christianity in the holy lives of its professors.

These extracts, though forming a small part of those exhortations to holiness, and cautions against sin, with which his Epistles abounded, show the infinite value of the Book of God- that storehouse of heavenly wisdom. Following its holy light, through the guidance of the Spirit, the believer is led into all truth, comforted under trials, guarded against temptations, directed to the right performance of relative duties, and taught how he might to walk and please God.

"The blessing of heaven resting upon the devout study of the Bible, often induces those long dead in trespasses and sins to turn from the errors of their ways, and save their souls. The Ethiopian may change his skin, and the leopard his spots, because the Agent of the transformation is Almighty; and they may also do good, who are accustomed to do evil. If we expect a moral and religious population, we must lay the foundation deep in an early acquaintance with the sanction of the Law, and the merits of the Gospel. We must endeavor to impress the lessons of Divine Truth upon the minds of the young, while their attention is pliant and their affections warm; while they are yet, as much as possible unspotted from the world, and before contact with sinful seductions shall have diffused its chilling influence over their hearts. If the duty be important, it should be early commenced; if the undertaking be difficult, it should be entered upon without delay. If we have run

with the footmen, and they have wearied us, then how can we contend with horses? and if in the land of peace wherein we trusted they wearied us, then how shall we do in the swelling of Jordan?"

We cannot sufficiently value the Records of Eternal Truth. The more we love the Bible, the more will its holy influence be visible in our lives.

The true believer in Jesus, when living under the influence of the Holy Spirit, is clothed with humility; the love of God is shed abroad in his heart; the peace of God rules within him; he is adorned with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit; he rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory; he abounds in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit; and receives the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul. Such will be our character, and such our privileges, if like him we feel the power of grace in our hearts.

If our affections are set on things above, we also shall be safe, whatever storms may agitate the world; and if our life be hid with Christ in God, we shall have a sure refuge against the rage of Satan, and the fear of death. While the worldling’s treasure is fading as the tints of evening, our portion will be glorious as the days of heaven; for God will be our everlasting light, and the Lamb our glory. How loosely then should we sit to all things here below. Oh that we could practically learn to cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?

May every heart be impressed with the Apostle’s appeal to the church of Corinth, "Brethren, the time is short. It remains, that both those who have wives, be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they wept not; and those who rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and those who buy, as though they possessed not; and those who use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passes away."

The more we contemplate the holiness of God, and the nature of our redemption by Jesus Christ, the more we must be convinced, that sanctification is the beauty and the health of the soul. The holy Christian is the happy Christian. He may, and must have troubles as he journeys to his heavenly rest; but so long as Jesus is his guide and guardian, darkness may reign without, but all shall be peace and light within.

What lies nearest to our hearts? All men propose some object to themselves, and their utmost energies are directed to attain it. Some pant after honor, some after pleasure, and many after wealth. What are we most anxious to possess? Is it the favor of God? is it an interest in the atonement Jesus? Or, are we only thirsting after earthly things? Blessed indeed are we, if to do the will of God be the great object of our lives; if to walk agreeably to the light of His revealed Word, be our one undeviating aim.

Jesus as our perfect pattern, left us an example that we should follow his steps. The more we drink into his spirit, the more we shall love and obey our heavenly Father, enjoy a foretaste of heavenly bliss, and be prepared for heavenly glory. True happiness would soon revisit our world, were the name of God universally hallowed- were his kingdom set up in every heart– were his will done on earth, as it is in heaven. O when will this happy period arrive. A great blessing is promised, but this blessing must be sought for by fervent believing prayer.

Christ was the glorious promise under the Old Testament Dispensation- the Holy Spirit is the gracious promise under the New. For this gift, Jesus himself, as Mediator, intercedes for his people- "I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth." For this gift he commands us to pray with assurance of success; "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

O! that Christians of every name, may be stirred up to seek the Lord until he comes and rains down righteousness upon us; until the Spirit, being poured out from on high, fills our world with light and love, with peace and purity, with grace and glory.

Divine Truth, like the meridian sun, shines with resplendent luster in the Book of God. The glory of Jehovah is the Alpha and Omega of all its revelations. Is a world created? -it is by the Word of God. Is a world redeemed? -it is through the love of God. Every blessing flows from him– all praise belongs to him. Pride wants its share of merit in the work of redemption, but Truth levels the proud pretension in the dust. With what force does the Apostle repel the self-righteous plea, and refute the skeptical cavil. In all his writings, he maintains one constant truth- "By grace are you saved....not of works, lest any man should boast."

The author of all holiness is Almighty God; for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained, that we should walk in them. The meritorious cause of sanctification is Jesus Christ; who, by his death and obedience, has procured for us the gift of the Holy Spirit, to renew our souls after his image in righteousness and true holiness; and therefore he is made unto us sanctification. The instruments which God employs in the hand of the Spirit, to produce the blessing of holiness, are his Word and ordinances, the ministers of his Gospel, and the various dispensations of his providence.

Gospel sanctification consists in the mortification of our corrupt affections, whereby the power of original sin is weakened; and in the vivification or quickening of our souls to a new and divine life, whereby habitual acts of filial obedience are performed.

The work of sanctification extends to the whole man; body, soul, and spirit. The design of God, in our sanctification is, that the mind be enlightened to know himself as the chief good, and his mercy in Christ as the highest blessing; that we be made acquainted with the corruption of our nature, and the remedy which he has provided; that our will be molded into his will, and our constant aim be the promotion of his glory; that the memory be stored with heavenly truths, and daily replenished from his Holy Word with new subjects for delightful meditation; that the conscience be made tender and alive to the calls of the Spirit, afraid of sin, while delivered from guilty fears through the blood of Jesus; that the affections of love, joy, grief, and fear, be all brought under due regulation, through the indwelling Spirit, and made to run in one uniform channel of evangelical holiness- that those desires of the soul, which are of a more animal nature, be brought into subjection to the Law of Christ; while the body is made subservient to the powers of the renewed mind.

Such ought to be the happy state of every true believer in Jesus; and such, in some measure, is his state, when he walks in love, and in the light of the divine favor.

But, it may be asked– Is his sanctification, while in the body, complete and entire, lacking nothing? Alas! no. Although the above description is true, with respect to what the Holy Spirit produces in the soul, as all his works are like himself, pure and holy; yet, through the remainders of corruption, this blessed work is greatly impeded and retarded in its growth. There still remains much darkness to be dissipated from the mind, much selfishness to be subdued in the will; much forgetfulness of God to be rectified in the memory; much hardness to be softened in the conscience; much irregularity to be removed from the affections; much self-indulgence to be mortified in the animal passions. All this creates that conflict, that up-hill work, that struggling, and wrestling, and fighting, that earnestness in prayer, that cleaving to Jesus, that reliance on his grace, that display of his power, that exercise of his mercy, which are constantly experienced in the eventful life of the true believer.

All these things Paul felt when he said, "I run- I fight- I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; I count not myself to have apprehended. But this one thing I do; I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And what was the mark at which the Apostle aimed? -perfect holiness. And what the prize which he longed to attain? -perfect happiness through Christ Jesus. This is the longing desire and aim of every true believer.

Is this our experience? Can we say with the Apostle– "when I am weak, then am I strong?" Conscious of our spiritual weakness, and in full reliance on the strength of Jesus, do we in faith draw out of his fullness grace for grace? The enemy may alarm, but he cannot destroy the children of God, for whom Christ died. How sweetly consoling are the Savior’s words, "You now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy, no man takes from you."

While running the heavenly race, the believer has many hindrances, and many helps. Does the Devil walk about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour? In this can he rejoice, that, angels are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation. O how numberless are the mercies of Jesus, how multiplied the devices and depths of Satan. The power of this arch-deceiver, though limited and restrained, is yet truly awful. The Scriptures style him, "the god of this world," so extensive is his influence over the hearts of men. They declare that, "he who commits Sin is of the Devil," because he blinds the minds of those who believe not; and, works in the children of disobedience.

Are the children of God out of the reach of this evil one, while journeying to their eternal rest? Ah! no. What says the Scriptures? "Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel and God was displeased with this thing." Jesus said to Peter- "Simon, Simon, behold Satan Math desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." "Some," says Paul, "are already turned aside after Satan." "We would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again, but Satan hindered us." The spotless Jesus himself was tempted by the Devil in the wilderness, whom he drove back by this powerful word, "Get away Satan."

Fear not then, O tempted saint. Jesus, in whom you believe, has vanquished this roaring lion. Are you helpless in yourself? Hear what John says, "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." Are you afraid of falling, one day, by the hard of your spiritual foe? Hear what Paul says, "God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." Then let us not despond. The Spirit of God, who dwells in the hearts of his people, will make us more than conquerors through Christ Jesus. How gracious are the words of Jesus to Peter when Satan desired to sift him- "I have prayed for you,

that your faith fail not." How cheering his love to Paul when buffeted by Satan; "My grace is sufficient for you."

O may we ever lean upon our loving Savior, whose power is infinite. Blessed are those who hear his voice, who follow him in faith and patience, through evil, as well as good report. They and they only are the sheep of his pasture, who thus look unto him and live upon him as the bread of life. Jesus has purchased them with his own blood, he will preserve them by his power, and present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

This Truth, the holy Apostle declared with an inspired distinctness to the church at Rome, "When we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. God commended his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more, then, being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God, by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

Oh! blessed and consolatory conclusion! Can we now for a moment doubt his willingness to save? Did he die for us, and will he not preserve us? Did he pray for us, and will he not hear our prayers? Did he invite us to come, and will he forbid our approach? His compassion is not diminished, because he is now in glory. His love is not abated, because the heavens have received him out of our sight. His tenderness is not less susceptible; now that he is removed from the innocent infirmities of our nature. He still can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He still feels in heaven, for his poor afflicted members upon earth. Though Lord of all, having all power in heaven and in earth, he is not insensible to the needs of his people. He is their friend, who loves at all times; and who, when they are gathered together in his name, is ever in the midst of them. If persecuted for his sake, he graciously identifies himself with them, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute you me?" If relieved, in the name of a disciple, he condescendingly accepts the benefit, as done to himself, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me."

Oh how inconceivably great is such love as this! Well might the grateful Apostle, who was himself a wonderful subject of it, fervently pray, that the Ephesians might know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, and, be filled with all the fullness of God.

Jesus, having loved his own, will love them unto the end, and glorify them with his own glory. His work and ways, like himself, are infinite and everlasting.

The graces of God’s Spirit are not, in the hearts of his children, like morning mists which soon disperse; they resemble the morning light, which shines more and more, unto the perfect day. Their faith, like a well-built tower, whose foundation is laid in a rock, can withstand the assaults of the enemy, and the raging of the storm. What are all enemies and storms, however powerful and violent, where brought into contest with Jehovah Jesus? They are weak as the chaff before the whirl wind; or, as the flax before the devouring fire. In the strength of Christ we must, and shall prevail.

Let us then trust, and not be afraid of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy. Jesus ever reigns! Reposing with steadfast faith on his Divinity, atonement, and intercession, we may smile in the midst of danger, having nothing to fear but sin. How precious are these truths,

whose everlasting lines gladden and support the Church; "As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward those who fear him. As far as the East is from the West, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him."

"My Father knows my feeble frame,

He knows how poor I am

Untold he knows it all;

The least temptation serves to draw

My footsteps from my Fathers law,

And make me slide and fall.

Of this, I give him daily proof,

And yet he does not cast me off,

But owns me still as his;

He spares, he pities, he forgives

The most rebellious child that lives,

So great his patience is.

And shall I then a pretext draw

Again to violate his law?

My soul revolts at this;

I'll love, and wonder, and adore.

And beg that I may sin no more

Against such love as his."

Contemplate, O my soul, with rising admiration, the love of God to sinners. Contemplate the freeness, the fullness, the fitness, the all-sufficiency of Christ's salvation. Contemplate the gracious work of the divine Spirit, in its beginning, progress, and completion; until all your powers are lost in wonder, love, and praise!

How amazing is the kindness and love of God our Savior to dying sinners, who cast themselves upon his mercy, and stay upon his word. He infuses into their souls a principle of spiritual life, which is no less than eternal life begun. He creates a divine light in their minds, which discovers their disease and their remedy. He imparts His strength, by which they persevere, and conquer. He becomes their sun and shield; and gives them grace and glory. He declares them to be his portion, to whom it is his good pleasure to give the kingdom.

The Father has prepared this kingdom for them, from the foundation of the world. Jesus has gone to prepare a place for them in the mansions of glory. The Spirit descends into their hearts to make them a prepared people, and to consecrate them as temples of the living God. The precious blood of Jesus cleanses them from all sin. His glorious righteousness claims their admittance into the celestial city, and procures their acceptance with the Father. His lovely image is drawn in lines of grace upon their souls, by the unerring hand of the Eternal Spirit. His countless promises are their daily food and portion; and like reviving cordials, strengthen them when laboring under trials, and contending with the prince of darkness.

Should not such love, of which these instances are but as a drop compared to the mighty ocean, constrain you, O my soul, to love, with all your powers, this adorable Redeemer?

To live to Christ should indeed be the business of your life; and if your business, God will assuredly make it your blessedness.

01.21. Chapter 21.

Chapter 21.

ON THE SPECIAL GIFTS OF GOD.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMILITY IN CONTEMPLATING

THE PURPOSES OF JEHOVAH.

THE STABILITY OF THE NEW COVENANT.

How precious are the gifts of God; no human mind can estimate their worth; their value exceeds an angel’s computation. With overflowing gratitude let us hourly bless our heavenly Father:

For the Gift of His Son- "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

For the Gift of His Holy Spirit- "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

For the Gift of a New Heart- "A new heart will I give you; and a new spirit will I put within you."

For the Gift of Inward Peace Through the Son of His Love- "My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you."

For the Gift of the Holy Scriptures- "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."

For the Gift of Eternal Life- "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

God, who is infinite in love, does not give and then take away. Of the endlessness of his gifts we have abundant assurances in his Holy Word. Jesus said to his disciples, "If any man loves me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever." God has secured, by promise, the stability of his people- "I will put my fear into their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Peter has affirmed, "The Word of the Lord endures forever, and this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you."

And Jesus to complete the full assurance of hope, has declared, "If any man serves me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be. Father, I will that they whom you have given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." On what an immoveable rock does the believer in Jesus rest all his hopes of heaven. The eternal truth and faithfulness of Jehovah are engaged in covenant, to secure the final happiness of his people.

But, does God never recall any of his gifts? He does indeed frequently reclaim what he has only lent; such as health, riches, friends, and other temporal comforts; and often in righteous judgment, he hides his face from us. But his ’new covenant blessings’, which he gives in, and with, and

through his beloved Son, he gives forever; for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.

Hence, Paul could say to the Corinthians, "You come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall confirm you unto the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." To the Philippians he gave the same blessed assurance, "Being confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ, even as it is fit for me to think this of you all, inasmuch as you are partakers of my grace."

Happy, thrice happy is the man, who, like Mary, has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from him. These truths may be called the children's bread. They are the never-failing support and cordial of holy souls, who know by sweet experience the sanctifying grace of the Spirit, the blessedness of being rooted and grounded in love, and the consolation arising from a firm hold of the promises made to them in Christ Jesus.

Those who know not the Truth, through the teaching of the Spirit, may abuse these privileges of the true believer, by sporting themselves with their own deceivings, and throwing the rein upon the neck of their lusts. But, must we on that account withhold the heavenly manna! Must the children perish for lack of bread, because some vitiated hearts may destroy its wholesome quality? Shall fragrant flowers no longer scatter their perfume, because a few of them may be converted to pernicious purposes? Would we desire the Almighty to withhold his providential blessings, because they are often perverted and abused? As it was in the days of the Apostle, even so it is now; the carnal mind turns food into poison, and blessings into curses.

O that we may have grace to draw out of the precious truths of God, all the benefit and blessedness, which they are designed to convey.

The character and state of redeemed sinners are most admirably delineated in the Seventeenth Article of the Church of England. Their election in Christ being declared, their spiritual state is thus described– "They are called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working in due, season; they, through grace, obey the calling; they are justified freely; they are made the sons of God by adoption; they are made like the image of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ; they walk religiously in good works; and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity." This is a beautiful epitome of the Christian's walk to glory, which the Apostle has so fully revealed in his various Epistles, by the unerring pen of inspiration.

Whatever poisonous consequences may be drawn by the corrupt heart, from the sweetest truths of God's Word, of this we are certain, that all is good which comes from God, and all is done right, which is done from a principle of faith in Christ, and in obedience to his will. While we cultivate this holy frame, our duties will be pleasant, our delights will be pure, and our hopes will be sanctified.

Let us then think often on the nature, the extent, and the influence of the love of Christ– what designs it formed- with what energy it acted- with what perseverance it pursued its object- what obstacles it surmounted- and what sweetness it imparted under the severest trials. And then, let us remember, the present and eternal portion of every believer in Jesus is still the same Almighty, efficacious love– free, sovereign, and everlasting. It is your portion, even yours, O sinner, if you have laid hold on Jesus; if you have fled to him as your only refuge from the storm; if you have received him into your heart by faith.

There is nothing more clearly revealed, or more frequently insisted upon in the Holy Scriptures, than a holy walk and conversation, as the fruit and evidence of a justifying faith. Without this blessed work of the Spirit, religion is but a lifeless form, unacceptable to God, and unprofitable to man.

When the sinner changes his state before God, through faith in the atonement of Christ, he changes also his character before men, through the renewal of the inner man. He becomes a new creature and walks in the newness of life. His views, intentions, and designs are new. His affections are placed upon new objects. His will receives a new bias; and in the language of Paul- "Old things pass away, and all things become new."

The true believer is a decided character. He does not halt between two opinions. His choice is deliberately and firmly made. The Divine Spirit has convinced him of his danger, and taught him where to find pardon, peace, and joy. He wholly relies on the power and grace of Jesus, receives strength equal to his day, and though encompassed with infirmities, and groaning under the burden of the flesh, he runs the race which is set before him, and, through grace, obtains the prize.

How different from all this is the formal professor of Christianity. His heart is cold and comfortless, while that of the true believer is lively and joyful. The one, has the Spirit of a slave; the other, that of a child. The one, serves God through fear; the other, from a principle of love.

Though we see as through a glass darkly, yet quite enough is revealed to us in the Bible, to condemn us if we miss the road to heaven. What we need is, a humble mind to receive the great truths of the Gospel as practical truths, which were revealed, not for the purpose of making us disputants, but disciples of Jesus Christ; not, that we may indulge our speculative opinions, but that we may be made wise unto salvation.

However extensive may be our knowledge, or however animated our feelings, it will avail us nothing, while we remain destitute of those scriptural marks which designate the children of God, and which can alone prove us to be among the chosen in Christ Jesus. This truth shines as with a sun-beam in the page of Revelation, that the people of God are a holy people, each possessing that inward purity which manifests itself by outward acts of piety.

It is painful to think with what unhallowed freedom some people speak and write about the Divine Decrees. They assert their opinions with an authority most bold and daring; and are ready to anathemize all whose views do not accord with their own. This state of mind is the offspring of pride.

The further advanced the real Christian is in the grace of the Gospel, the more he possesses the spirit of a little child. He becomes more humble, more teachable, more submissive, and more dependent upon the light and guidance of the Holy Spirit. He knows his own nothingness, and the Divine Immensity. This bending of the mind and will is the blessed effect of the Spirit’s teaching; for, how is it possible that a finite creature should grasp Infinity; or, that a mind, so contracted as ours, should comprehend the Eternal Jehovah, in all his purposes and decrees? What created being can unfold those mysteries of grace which were treasured up in the Divine Mind, before time began, and which can only be known, as the Spirit has been pleased to reveal them to us by the Prophets and the Apostles.

Being commissioned to preach these wonders of redeeming love, the indefatigable Apostle declared to the Corinthian church the source from where they came, "the wisdom we speak of is the secret wisdom of God, which was hidden in former times, though he made it for our benefit before the world began. But the rulers of this world have not understood it; if they had, they would never have crucified our glorious Lord. That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him." But we know these things because God has revealed them to us by his Spirit, and his Spirit searches out everything and shows us even God’s deep secrets. No one can know what anyone else is really thinking except that person alone, and no one can know God’s thoughts except God’s own Spirit. And God has actually given us his Spirit (not the world’s spirit) so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. When we tell you this, we do not use words of human wisdom. We speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit’s words to explain spiritual truths."

This important declaration of Paul, puts the seal of inspiration upon his communications to the churches, and makes his writings to be the Word of God. It is also a fulfilment of the Savior’s promise to his disciples, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when the Spirit of Truth is come, he will guide you into all truth, he shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." Thus the Gospel dispensation is emphatically the dispensation of the Spirit. May our hearts overflow with gratitude for this revelation of redeeming love. O Spirit of Truth, by whose power the whole body of the church is governed and sanctified, shine into our hearts, and give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Open our understandings to understand the Scriptures, and mold our souls into the holy image of our God and Savior.

Man would be wise above what is written; taking reason for his pilot, he loves to launch into a sea of theory and conjecture. Pride swells his canvass; and while in quest of some discovery, which he fondly hopes shall immortalize his name, his vessel, freighted with vanity, is driven by every wind of doctrine, until at length it sinks amid the rocks of infidelity.

Knowing the danger of such unhallowed speculations, Paul, with apostolic faithfulness, thus warns the Colossians, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." He also cautions Timothy, "Timothy, guard what God has entrusted to you. Avoid godless, foolish discussions with those who oppose you with their so-called knowledge."

Were our minds duly humbled under a conscious feeling of our ignorance, we should seek for wisdom from above, that we may know what is good to be known, and experience the sanctifying influence of the truth upon our hearts. However we may wish it, we cannot reach beyond the limits which Infinite Wisdom has prescribed. Even within that boundary line, there are many things hard to be understood. Humility and obedience will guide us, through the Spirit, into all truth; for, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."

Mutability is inscribed on every earthly thing; but, "the counsel of the Lord stands forever; the thoughts of his heart to all generations." This divine stability and unchangeableness was the rock upon which David built his hopes, "It is my family God has chosen! Yes, he has made an everlasting covenant with me. His agreement is eternal, final, sealed. He will constantly look after

my safety and success." Happy saint–

"Who can sink with such a prop,

Which bears the world and all things up!"

This truth comforted the afflicted Jeremiah; "The Lord has appeared of old unto me, saying; Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you." Isaiah was honored to be the bearer of this divine consolation to the suffering Church, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, says the Lord that has mercy on you."

A time of trial is the time when the promises of God are peculiarly precious. The Lord, whose grace is sufficient for us, has grace in store for suffering seasons. "As your days so shall your strength be." This was experienced at a period of national judgment, when the king of Babylon was commissioned to carry away captive the idolatrous house of Judah. During this season of distress, the prophet Jeremiah was favored with a divine declaration of faithfulness and mercy. It would seem to the eye of sense, that the promise, made to the house of David, was about to be cancelled by the overwhelming desolation. But God will never disappoint the hopes of his saints, who rest upon his Truth. They may partake of the general calamity, but not of its penal character; for while the wicked are made to drink of the cup of divine indignation, the righteous shall be refreshed with abundance of peace. At such a period, the Lord, as he has graciously promised, will be a little sanctuary to his people; a refuge from the storm, when the blast of the terrible ones is a storm against the wall. To these hidden ones, thus says the Lord– "If you can break my covenant with the day and the night so that they do not come on their usual schedule, only then will my covenant with David, my servant, be broken. Only then will he no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne. The same is true for my covenant with the Levitical priests who minister before me. And as the stars cannot be counted and the sand on the seashores cannot be measured, so I will multiply the descendants of David, my servant, and the Levites who minister before me." O! how firm is the promise of Jehovah. He might well say, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore, you sons of Jacob are not consumed."

But as his promise is true to his people, so are his threatenings to his enemies. The rebellious Jews had sent to Egypt for help against the Chaldeans, and no doubt they rejoiced in the success of their worldly policy; for, "When the army of Pharaoh was come forth out of Egypt, and when the Chaldeans that besieged Jerusalem heard tidings of them, they departed from Jerusalem." Inspired with hopes of deliverance, they began to think– 'Now we shall see what will become of Jeremiah's predictions; neither we or our land shall fall a prey to Nebuchadnezzar.' Trusting to an arm of flesh, they despised the Word of the Lord, and indulged the infidel hope, that his threatenings would prove abortive.

The Almighty God, who searches the deep recesses of the heart, sent this message to his unbelieving people. "Thus shall you say to the king of Judah; Behold, Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt, into their own land; and the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight again this city, and take it, and burn it with fire. Thus says the Lord; Deceive not yourselves, saying, the Chaldeans shall depart from us; for they shall not depart."

Now mark the impossibility of defeating the purposes of Him, who can destroy a wicked people by the weakest instrument, "For though you had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet would they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire." O that rebellions sinners would lay this to heart; for neither wisdom nor strength, however matured or combined, can defeat the purposes of Jehovah. The weaker the means which are employed, the more is the power of God manifested thereby. The locusts, the caterpillar, and the palmer-worm can reduce a land of plenty into barrenness, as expeditiously as the devouring sword; sooner than the Word of God shall fail. Jesus has assured us, that the stones would immediately cry out. Human projects are uncertain in their results– not so the Divine counsel, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words," said the Omnipotent Savior, "shall not pass away."

As the judgments of God overtook his enemies, so do his mercies encircle his people. When the famine was desolating the land of Israel, the prophet Elijah was sustained by that Almighty hand, which in all ages protects and feeds the saints- "Hide yourself by the brook Cherith- I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." O afflicted believer, whatever be your straits and trials, God has means to help and deliver you, as he did his suffering servant. When the brook was dried up, then came the word, "Arise, get you to Zarephath, behold, I have commanded a widow woman to sustain you." It was not a king or a noble who was to preserve the life of this holy Prophet. No- it was to be a poor widow, who, with two sticks, was about to bake her last cake for herself and her son that they might eat it, and die! Let these instances of God’s providential care, and miraculous preservations, shame us out of our unbelief and mistrust of his goodness- "for the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruise of oil fail, according to the Word of the Lord, which he spoke by Elijah."

The Bible is full of wonders. This delightful Book would arrest the attention, and attract the admiration of mankind, were it not for its holy character. Its light is too pure- its standard is too exalted- its statements are too humbling, for the pride and wickedness of the natural heart. In the Bible, truth shines with unclouded luster. Wherever it is received in faith and love, there, darkness flies before it. At the glorious Reformation, its Holy Light, concealed in cloistered cells, shot forth filling those nations with unnumbered blessings which embraced its heavenly doctrines. O may we never by our sins provoke our God to withdraw His Truth from us.

Protesting against Papal errors and Infidel blasphemies, let us rally around the Word of God- that standard of Eternal Truth. Clinging to the cross, and confessing Christ, let us ever, with fearless integrity, maintain our Gospel principles, and earnestly contend for that faith, once delivered to the saints, which is founded upon the bible- the whole bible- and nothing but the bible.

Whatever infidelity may assert, this truth is written as with a sun-beam on the page of Scripture, and in the Book of Providence– that all the purposes of Jehovah, whether of mercy or of judgment, shall have their full accomplishment. The puny arm of man can neither turn aside the burning wrath, nor suspend the shower of blessing.

We naturally expect great effects to arise from what we conceive to be powerful causes. So did Naaman, when he esteemed the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel. "But, my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. My strength is made perfect in weakness. Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be

accounted of?

This truth, so humiliating to our vanity, Paul boldly declared to the Corinthians- "Instead, God deliberately chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose those who are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important, so that no one can ever boast in the presence of God."

For this reason he was not ashamed to say- "Dear brothers and sisters, when I first came to you I didn't use lofty words and brilliant ideas to tell you God's message. For I decided to concentrate only on Jesus Christ and his death on the cross. I came to you in weakness—timid and trembling. And my message and my preaching were very plain. I did not use wise and persuasive speeches, but the Holy Spirit was powerful among you. I did this so that you might trust the power of God rather than human wisdom."

Though honored to preach the Gospel of his grace, this humble servant of Christ sought not glory from men. Ever desirous to exalt the Savior, he told the Corinthians, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

Humility is inseparable from the Christian character. Pride was not made for man; yet man is a proud sinner- a fugitive from God. His darkened understanding, his perverted will, his corrupt affections, his polluted memory, his seared conscience, his defiled imagination, all prove him to be a creature fallen from original righteousness, obedient to some other power, and pursuing an end, the very opposite to that for which he was created. Satan being entrenched in his self-love, obtains an easy conquest over him. The artful foe whispers to his heart the flattering tale, and he receives it with complacency. Listening to this hellish fiend, he boldly eats of the forbidden fruit, and braves the vengeance of Omnipotence.

Truth is too bright for his diseased intellect- too stern and faithful for his fastidious ear. He slights the monitory warnings of his truest friend, and fondly cleaves to Satan and his lies. O what a blessing is a humble mind, a teachable Spirit, a dependent frame of heart. This happy state of soul contains within itself the abundance of peace. Jesus dwells in such a lowly bosom, and beautifies the meek with his salvation. Happy shall we be, if our wills are made conformable to the Will of God. Then however dark may be his dispensations towards us, at evening-time it shall be light. Then, when heart and flesh shall fail, Jesus will be the strength of our heart and our portion forever.

"Would that my heart were fully bent

To serve you, Lord, in faith and love;

That my desires were all intent

On heavenly joys, and things above.

Vouchsafe with energy divine

To visit me and make me thine.

Oh Savior, with your presence cheer

This heart, and chase the gloom away

Rise, Sun of Righteousness, and here

Light up an everlasting day.

Your grace dispels the shades of night;

Wherever you dwell, there is light.

I seek you in affliction’s hour,

When every earthly comfort fails;

I seek you when the tempter’s power,

Against my feeble heart prevails;

My burdened bosom breathes its sigh

To You, and knows that you are nigh.

Dear Lord, I shall not ask in vain,

For you have taught me how to pray;

Here I will wait till I obtain

Your grace to take my sins away

My helpless soul with pity see,

And let it now be filled with thee."

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Chapter 22.

ON THE ETERNAL LOVE OF GOD, THE SOURCE

OF THE BELIEVER’S HAPPINESS.

THE FINAL GLORIFICATION OF THE SAINTS.

The unchangeable nature of the promises of God in Christ, which are yes, and amen, to the glory of his grace, gladdened the afflicted Apostle under all his troubles. By the inspiration of the Spirit, he was enabled to lead his Christian converts to the one only source of all their holiness and happiness– the eternal purpose and love of God in Jesus Christ, through whom their souls were redeemed and sanctified.

The sweet Psalmist of Israel struck his harp to this inspiring theme- "Salvation belongs unto the Lord; your blessing is upon your people." O may we catch the sacred fire, and feel our every power glowing with holy love. None but ransomed sinners can fully estimate the blessings of redemption.

Salvation springs altogether from the grace and sovereign will of God, who has mercy on whom he will have mercy. It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy; who dispenses his blessings, whether temporal or spiritual, as seems good in his sight.

All blessings of time and eternity must be traced to this infinite love of God the Father, in, and through, his beloved and co-equal Son. The heart of Paul glowed with holy fervor whenever he dwelt upon this theme of mercy. Angels delight to look into this mystery of love. Devils tremble at the amazing sight of man’s redemption. None but unhumbled sinners turn from it with disgust!

When writing to the churches, the divinely-inspired Apostle kept back nothing that was profitable; neither did he shun to declare the whole counsel of God. Ministers who are swayed by self-interested motives, easily forsake the path of rectitude. Instead of preaching those truths which would be profitable to others, they preach such doctrines as are profitable to themselves. Paul was a man of another spirit. He had tasted that the Lord is gracious; to him Christ was precious; and his heart’s desire and prayer to God was, that His way might be known upon earth, and His saving health among all nations. "To the suggestions of worldly prudence, he paid no attention; his counselor was conscience; and the source of his actions was the love of Christ. Hence he sought the salvation of others, with an ardor little inferior to that, with which he labored, through grace, to secure his own. Contenting himself with the consciousness of upright intention, and the approbation of his Master in heaven, he did not hesitate to bring forward, in the proper season, whatever would contribute to the instruction and establishment of those, to whom he ministered, even though, in some instances, it should awaken their temporary displeasure."

This holy man, well knew, that as a faithful minister of Christ, he must rise superior to every consideration, but that of his duty. Actuated by this principle, he sought not glory from men, being willing to be esteemed as the off-scouring of all things for Jesus' sake. He, who could say, "Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel," would never shrink from a faithful exhibition of Gospel Truth. To the Galatian church he feared not to say, "Obviously, I'm not trying to be a people pleaser! No, I am trying to please God. If I were still trying to please people, I would not be Christ's servant."

Tracing his own conversion to the sovereign and eternal love of God, who was pleased to separate him from his mother's womb, and to call him by his grace, he delighted to dwell on the exhaustless theme of mercy. Being guided by the Spirit into all Truth, how sweetly did he comfort the Roman Christians, by the comfort with which he himself was comforted of God, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." Here we have presented to our view the golden chain of grace and mercy, reaching from everlasting to everlasting, which draws up into glory all who are called according to his purpose.

To the Ephesian church, Paul unfolded the hidden wisdom of redeeming love, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace." Here again grace reigns, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.

To the Thessalonians, the Apostle imparted the same glorious revelation, "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you unto salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth; whereunto he called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." In this comprehensive and most consolatory passage, we behold the source, the means, and the end of that salvation which will fill heaven with unceasing praise.

Peter, in unison with his brother Apostle, being taught by the same spirit of Truth and Love, styles believers– "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Leighton has made the following beautiful remarks on these words of Peter, "This foreknowledge is his eternal and unchangeable love. 'Has not the potter power over the same lump, to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?' This, if it be harsh, yet is apostolic doctrine. This deep, we must admire, and always in considering, close with this, O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God."

"Effectual calling is inseparably tied to this eternal election on the one side, and salvation on the other. These two links of the chain are up in heaven, in God's own hand; but this middle one is let down to earth, into the hearts of his children; and they, laying hold on it, have sure hold on the other two, for no power can sever them; if therefore they can read the characters of God's image

in their own souls, those are the counter-part of the golden characters of his love, in which their names are written in the book of life.

"Their believing, writes their names under the promises of the revealed book of life, the Scriptures; and so ascertains them, that the same names are in the secret book of life, that God has by himself from eternity. So finding the stream of grace in their hearts, though they see not the fountain where it flows, nor the ocean into which it returns, yet they know that it has its source, and shall return to that ocean which arises from eternal election, and shall empty itself into that eternity of happiness and salvation.

"If election, effectual calling, and salvation, be inseparably linked together; then, by any one of them, a man may lay hold upon all the rest, and may know that his hold is sure; and this is that way, wherein we may attain and ought to seek that comfortable assurance of the love of God. Therefore, make your calling sure, and by that, your election; for that being done, this follows of itself. We are not to pry immediately into the decree, but to read it in its outworking .

"Though the mariner sees not the pole-star, yet the needle of the compass that points to it, tells him which way he sails. Thus, the heart that is touched with the loadstone of divine love, trembling with godly fear, and yet still looking towards God by fixed believing, points at the love of election, and tells the soul that its course is heavenward, towards the haven of eternal rest.

"He that loves may be sure he was loved first; and he that chooses God for his delight and portion, may conclude confidently, that God has chosen him to be one of those that shall enjoy him and be happy in him forever; for our love and electing of God, is but the return and the repercussion of the beams of his love shining upon us."

The writer of these pages has no wish to uphold any human system of theology. He desires simply to declare, in the words of the inspired Apostle, the whole counsel of God, and to keep back nothing which he deemed profitable to the Church of Christ. Angry controversies and contentions wound the mind, embitter the spirit, and destroy the peace and unity of the Church.

To every prayerful student of the Bible, it must be most apparent, that all the doctrines of the Gospel, when received in the simplicity of faith, must, from their nature, have a practical influence on the heart and life. For they are revealed for this very purpose, to make us humble, and holy, and happy. How forcibly does Paul impress this truth upon his beloved Timothy; "The foundation of God stands sure, having this seal; The Lord knows those who are his. And, let every one that names the name of Christ, depart from iniquity."

The first seal is secret to us– "The Lord knows those who are his." The second seal is visible to all– "Let every one that names the name of Christ, depart from iniquity." If we bear the second seal, we may be scripturally assured that the first is impressed upon us. All who bear the broad seal of sanctification, have also the private seal of adoption; for if we love God, it is because he has first loved us.

Let us then seek for those precious fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, which are the indubitable marks of the children of God.

True Christians may differ from each other in language, national customs, and other external circumstances. Yet, they all resemble each other in their likeness to God. Their views and feelings,

their conflicts and supports, are substantially the same. Being born from above, and taught by the same Spirit, they each bear the stamp of their divine origin, though separated by oceans and trackless deserts. Writing to the Ephesians, the holy Apostle mentions this blessed operation of grace; "And now you also have heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God’s guarantee that he will give us everything he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. This is just one more reason for us to praise our glorious God."

Also to the Corinthians, "It is God who gives us, along with you, the ability to stand firm for Christ. He has commissioned us, and he has identified us as his own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the first installment of everything he will give us."

All who truly believe in Jesus, have the witness in themselves; for the indwelling of the Spirit, that precious fruit of the atonement, is known by the change which is produced in the soul. The believer, by this holy transformation of character, evidences his "election of God," and his interest in the merits and intercession of the Redeemer.

All who possess the Spirit of Christ, have the mind of Christ, and follow the example of Christ. The Holy Spirit guides the believer into all truth, both in doctrine and practice. His genuine work is, the production of light in the mind, and of love in the heart. Thus, all who are actually pardoned through the blood of Christ, are graciously sealed by the Spirit of Christ to the day of redemption.

The Church of England, in her Homily on Whit Sunday, is in perfect accordance with this truth of Scripture, "It is the Holy Spirit, and no other thing, that quickens the minds of men, stirring up good and godly motions in their hearts, which are agreeable to the will and commandment of God, such as otherwise, of their own crooked and perverse nature, they could never have. That which is born of the Spirit, is spirit. As who should say, man of his own nature is fleshly and carnal, corrupt and nothing, sinful and disobedient to God, without any spark of goodness in him, without any virtuous or godly motions, only given to evil thoughts and wicked deeds. As for the works of the Spirit, the fruits of faith, charitable and godly motions, if he has any at all in himself, they proceed only of the Holy Spirit, who is the only worker of our sanctification, and makes us new men in Christ."

How blessed is that man in whom the Spirit of God condescends to dwell. He has new joys, new concerns, new hopes, new desires. He prays by the Spirit, and for the Spirit. Receiving the spirit of adoption, he approaches the throne of grace with confidence- views God as his Father- possesses the temper and prospects of God’s child, and delights in everything which promotes the glory of his divine Redeemer.

"Surely, may such n one say, the Lord has loved me with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness has he drawn me, even when I was far from him; and now having brought me near, through the blood of the everlasting Covenant, he will preserve me to the end, as much by his unvarying truth, as he led me at first by his spontaneous mercy. What shall I render then unto the Lord for all the benefits which he has bestowed upon me! I can only render to him by receiving from him. The more I know of his goodness, and taste of his bounty, the more I am indebted to his grace. He himself must, and, I doubt not, will enable me to receive the cup of salvation, and to call upon his holy name, as my Lord and my God! And when the heavens are rolled together as a

scroll, and the elements melt with fervent heat; when the earth, with all the inhabitants of it, is dissolved; then may I and each of my brethren, say; 'I have lost nothing; still I can rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation."

It was to such holy characters as these, that Paul addresses this affectionate exhortation- "Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful."

Thus we see how true faith purifies the heart, works by love, overcomes the world, and triumphs over death and hell. True faith is inseparable from holiness, for the same Divine Power which enables the sinner to put on Christ as his righteousness, transforms him into a holy temple for Christ to dwell in, as his purifier. This is the glory and blessedness of the Gospel. It brings the sinner into union with his Savior; and raises him from earth to heaven.

The influences of faith are extended through the whole soul, and its life is spread by a vigorous circulation. Wherever faith is set up in the mind, as a convincing light to discover the sweetness and excellency of Christ, it will discover itself in the will, by an eager appetite to feed on his pleasant fruits; and in the affections, by that heavenly flame which is ever ascending towards him as the chief good.

This was exactly the effect produced in the soul of the great Apostle, when divine light broke in upon his mind. He saw the glory of Jesus; his will was captivated, and his affections were wholly fixed upon him. No sufferings could deter him from his service, no enemy could drive him from his post of honor. As he gloried in the cross of Christ, so ho gloried in tribulations also, when endured for his sake. Ardently desiring the salvation of sinners, he labored with unceasing perseverance to make them acquainted with their only Savior; and, perhaps, no man was ever so blessed in his labors of love.

O! what a glorious day will that be, when this holy man of God shall appear before the throne of Jesus, clothed with immortality, and wearing the crown of righteousness. Then will his joy indeed be full. Surrounded by his spiritual children, whom he will know as the fruit of his labors, he shall realize those sweet anticipations of bliss expressed to the Thessalonian believers; "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming; for you are our glory and joy."

As eternal life is the gift of Christ, so, like the good shepherd, he guides his flock in safety to the fold above. If we would we reach that heavenly world, we must be ever looking unto Jesus, the author and Finisher of our faith. We must rely upon him for a joyful admission into the realms of peace. He alone can strengthen us for the trials of the way- he alone can support us under the last conflict with sin and death. If we believe in Jesus with all our heart, the stream, through which we shall have to pass, may be tempestuous, but its waves shall not be allowed to overwhelm us. Jesus will carry us in his bosom, and, through his faithfulness and love, will safely land us on the

heavenly shore.

And oh! what bliss will await us there! No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no heart has conceived, the glory which shall be revealed in us, as the ransomed of the Lord. We shall be heirs of God! We shall posses him as our portion, who is the possessor of heaven and earth. We shall be joint heirs with Christ, who is the Head over all things to the Church. Though now compassed about with infirmities, we shall then be like the sun in his strength; though now allied to the dust, we shall then be made kings and priests unto God. We shall sit with Christ upon his throne, and forever drink the living waters of purity and joy.

Our toils will there be exchanged for rest. In that region of unsullied happiness, Satan cannot reach us; wicked men cannot harm us; grief cannot distress us; sin cannot defile us. The day will forever shed its brightness over us, for the Lamb will be our everlasting light, and our God our glory. We shall then be made like unto Jesus, and shall follow him, as the trophies of his victory, wherever he goes.

O! transporting thought, to be made like unto Jesus! This will form the most blessed ingredient in the happiness of heaven. The glorious image of Christ will never be defaced, but the beautiful lines of the new creature will forever shine in the perfection of beauty, to the praise of redeeming love. Here on earth, we are struggling with imperfection, infirmity, and sin; but there, the happy spirit, disengaged from every weight, will ascend, with lightsome wing, to the bosom of its God and Savior.

When we come into that happy world above, to be clothed in the white attire of innocence, it will be impossible for one evil thought to slide into our minds. In that region of perfection there will be perfect light in our understandings; perfect rectitude in our wills; perfect purity in our affections. Our spiritualized bodies will then no longer clog the soul, but rather assist in quickening the movements of the willing spirit. In heaven, we shall enjoy an eternal communion with God. In this world of clouds and shadows, he is often a God who hides himself; but there, he will reveal Himself to the Church triumphant, in all the splendor of his glory, in all the fullness of his love. There, we shall have sweet fellowship with angels, and with the spirits of just men made perfect; and above all, with Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant. And there, with fullness of grace in our hearts, with diadems of glory on our heads, and with the high praises of God upon our tongues, we shall surround his throne, and shall reign with him forever and ever. Thus our bliss will be perpetual; it will be an Eternal Joy.

With what gratitude, if believers in Jesus, should we now begin the song of praise to the Father of mercies, who, from the beginning has chosen us unto salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth; to the Son who has redeemed us unto God by his blood; and to the Spirit who sanctifies us, and all the elect people of God. Happy, thrice happy shall we be, if we have the witness in ourselves, that we are the children of God, and can justly conclude that we have saving faith, from the truth of our sanctification.

If we are holy, we are believers; but without holiness there can be no settled principle of faith. It is sin which darkens our evidences, and destroys our comfort. A constitutional morbid feeling may prevent our enjoying the blessedness of communion with God, by the dread which it creates in the mind; but, if we are happily preserved from this mental depression, and are delivered from the

reigning power of sin, as ransomed sinners we ought to rejoice at all times, and in everything to give thanks. This is our privilege and felicity, as it is the earnest and foretaste of our eternal bliss.

It is the will of God, that his people should be happy; the fault is theirs, if they are not so. His law is good, as well as just and holy; its language is, "Do yourself no harm." His Gospel is love, and breathes good-will towards men; speaking peace through Jesus Christ, and inviting sinners to be reconciled to God. If sinners perish, the cause is from themselves; if they are saved, it is through the unmerited grace of God. Hell will be filled with self-reproach. Heaven will resound with never-ending praise.

O! that every self-deceiver may be roused to a sense of his danger, before it be too late. The loss of worldly property may be retrieved; but our wasted moments can never be recalled. How invaluable on the bed of death are moments to an awakened sinner; and yet how little do we estimate their worth, in the day of health and plenty. The insensibility of the human heart to eternal things is most appalling. A reflecting mind will scarcely think it possible for a man to be so far lost to sober reason, as to fancy himself safe while lying on the brink of a crumbling precipice, or standing on the mast of a heaving ship; yet, thus rash is the man, who, trusting in his own righteousness, and following the sinful desires of his heart, fancies himself secure, and his salvation certain, though he is treasuring up to himself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

Perhaps some may think, that in the Christian world, few are so entirely lost to every feeling of self-preservation, and the solemnities of a future judgment, as to act such a madman’s part. Happy indeed, were this the case- yes, happy, if men were influenced by a salutary fear to flee from the wrath to come; if they would be persuaded by the terrors of the Lord, to seek him before the door of mercy is closed. But alas! even under the fair garb of Christianity, nothing is more common than such a worldly, carnal mind. Actions speak more forcibly than words. They are the test of character. Like fruit upon the tree, they show the nature of the man, while motives, like the sap, are hidden from our view.

The delusions of Satan are very powerful. It is high time to awake out of sleep. No moment should be lost in deciding the important question, Am I Christ’s, or am I not? Is Jesus the one object of my love, of my desire, of my delight? Do I esteem him the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely? O that the Eternal Spirit of all grace, may display his saving power, in convincing the sinner of his guilt; in revealing to him the mighty Savior; in leading him to Gethsemane, that there, he may behold the agony and bloody sweat of his Redeemer; in conducting him to the hill of Calvary, that there, he may see the bleeding Lamb of God, dying for his sins. O that the blessed Spirit may melt his heart to penitence and love, renew his soul, bring him into the Gospel-fold, and make him a monument of mercy, a sinner saved by grace.

The door of mercy is still open; the God of grace is waiting to be gracious; Jesus is pointing to his hands, his feet, his side; inviting us to fly from wrath and misery, to endless bliss and glory. The voice of Mercy is now heard– Come, for all things are ready. Come, for yet there is room. Come, to the feast prepared by Sovereign Love. Come, and freely partake of Gospel blessings.

O! that Jesus may draw every heart to himself by the silken cords of love, until the glorious period shall arrive, when all his elect shall be gathered around his throne, redeemed out of all nations,

and kindreds, and people, and tongues, crying with a loud voice, and saying, "Salvation to our God, which sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

"Oh! how the thought that I shall know

The man that suffered here below,

To manifest his favor

To me, and those whom most I love,

Or here, or with himself above,

Do my delighted passions move

At that sweet word- forever!

Forever to behold him shine,

Forevermore to call him mine,

And see him still before me;

Forever on his face to gaze,

And meet his full assembled rays,

While all the Father he displays,

To all the saints in glory.

Not all things else are half so dear,

As his delightful presence here,

What must it be in heaven?

'Tis heaven on earth to hear him say

As now I journey day by day,

Poor sinner, cast your fears away,

Your sins are all forgiven.

But how must his celestial voice

Make my enraptured heart rejoice,

When I, in glory, hear him;

While I, before the heavenly gate,

For everlasting entrance wait,

And Jesus on his throne of state

Invites me to come near him.

Come in, O blessed, sit by me,

With my own life I ransomed thee,

Come taste my perfect favor;

Come in, O happy spirit, come;

You now shall dwell with me at home,

O blessed mansions, make him room,

For he must stay forever.

When Jesus thus invites me in,

How will the heavenly host begin

To own their new relation?

Come in! come in!- the blissful sound

From every tongue will echo round,

Until all the crystal walls resound

With joy of my salvation!"

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Chapter 23.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS ON PAUL'S CHARACTER.

The character and experience of Paul, though imperfectly delineated in the foregoing pages, show the nature and blessedness of Christianity. Its heavenly doctrines, its consoling promises, its holy precepts, were so many sources of light, joy, and purity, which, through the transforming power of the Spirit, made the once persecuting Saul of Tarsus, a new creature in Christ Jesus. It is interesting to trace the origin, and pursue the course, of those principles which made him such a burning and shining light. Perhaps no mere man was ever made so great a blessing to mankind, or underwent such trials for the sake of the Gospel.

From the short review which we have taken of the life of this holy man, it will be evident, that he was no impostor. His sacrifice of reputation, wealth, and power; his willingness to suffer contempt, poverty, and persecution, abundantly clear his character from this imputation. As far as respects earthly things, he had nothing to gain, but every thing to lose, by declaring himself to be a servant and an Apostle of Jesus Christ. It is also evident, that he was no visionary enthusiast. His spirit was free from the violent impulses of fanatical delusion; and his zeal, though fervent, was never tinctured with melancholy or vanity. He did not court persecution or popularity to obtain a name; neither did he, like the votaries of Pagan and Papal superstition, inflict upon himself useless and absurd penances, with a view of propitiating the Almighty, or purchasing heaven. But, if to love Jesus with all the heart- if to devote all the powers of the mind and body to his service- if to count all things but loss to win Christ, and be found in Him, be enthusiasm; then we do not hesitate to say, that Paul was indeed of all enthusiasts, the Chief.

It must also be apparent from what we have seen, that the Apostle did not embrace Christianity through the weakness of his mental powers; neither was he duped by the artifice of others. Being brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, a noted doctor of the law, his mind was well stored with the learning of those times. His Epistles afforded ample proof both of the strength and cultivation of his intellectual faculties; while his commanding eloquence extorted from King Agrippa that striking confession- "You almost persuade me to be a Christian."

On his way to Damascus, he heard the voice, he saw the glory, he felt the power of Jesus. Being taught by immediate revelation from above, he embraced the Truth in all its greatness, and immediately preached Christ, in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. Can we review so marvelous an event, and not exclaim, "This has God wrought! The finger of God is here!"

Since Paul, as appears from the clearest evidence, neither sought to deceive others, nor was himself deceived; every candid mind must be led to these conclusions- that his faith in Jesus was the result of an overwhelming conviction of the truth of Christianity, which all his Jewish prejudices could not withstand- that his conversion to the faith which once he destroyed, was the work of God- that the Christian religion is a Divine Revelation- and that to reject or neglect the Gospel, is

dishonoring to God, and destructive to ourselves.

Blessed is he, who with a thankful heart believes the heavenly Record- "That God has given to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son." As there can be no happiness without holiness, so there can be no holiness without an union by faith to Jesus. Are we abiding in Him- deriving strength from Him- and depending solely upon his great atonement? He died for sinners- we are sinners. He has said, "Him that comes unto me, I will in no wise cast out." If then, as poor sinners, we come unto Him, we shall assuredly be saved. This is the simple truth of the Gospel. Happy are they, who, like Paul, are enabled to embrace it with child-like simplicity; for to all such, there shall be a performance of those things, which were told them of the Lord.

In the sufferings of Paul, we have seen exemplified that marked hostility which was manifested by the king of Syria, when he commanded his captains to fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel. The enmity of the Jews and Gentiles was not directed against Saul of Tarsus until he became a Christian, and labored most zealously in the cause of the despised Nazarene. It was Christ dwelling in his heart by faith, Christ proclaimed by him, as the King of Israel, who was the real object of their attack.

The world hated Christ, and would not have him to reign over them. They also hated his faithful servants, and sought to destroy them. The enmity of the natural heart still remains the same. Let a worldly man, however elevated his station, become an humble follower of the crucified Jesus, and condemn the world by his holy life, and soon his once attached friends will manifest their displeasure, either by leaving him with disgust, or by visiting him with scorn and insult.

This spirit of opposition began its deadly ravages in the family of Adam, and is still in active operation. For, "As he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him who was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." The prayer of David conveys the same truth, and speaks the language of the despised children of God, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us, for we have endured much contempt. We have endured much ridicule from the proud, much contempt from the arrogant."

Should it be asked- Are not the followers of Christ in danger of deserting him through fear of suffering? The conduct of Paul will afford a sufficient reply. If left to themselves, they would indeed fall away; therefore they dare not say we will not; but through the grace of Christ supporting them, they are enabled boldly to say- "We are ready not to be bound only, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus."

The exhortation of Peter is truly animating. Having fallen through self-confidence, but being again restored through grace, he knew how to strengthen his brethren, "But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."

Jesus himself has put the seal of blessedness upon his persecuted saints, "God blesses you who are hated and excluded and mocked and cursed because you are identified with me, the Son of Man. When that happens, rejoice! Yes, leap for joy! For a great reward awaits you in heaven."

How bitter is the enmity of wretched fallen man against the God who made him, who redeemed him, and who waits to be gracious to him. The zealous Paul once felt this enmity in his state of blindness, and when converted, deplored it deeply at the foot of the cross. May we not enquire; What is the state of our hearts? Can we suffer shame and reproach for Jesus' sake; or, do we turn aside through fear, when a cross is appointed for us to bear?

What words can be more awakening, than those which Jesus spoke to his disciples- "If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give it up for me, you will find it." Ah! who can bear this touchstone of sincerity? Who can endure the bitter pang of separation from the dearest objects of their earthly affection? Yet it must be so. With undivided hearts, and disengaged affections, we must follow our all-gracious Savior, though we incur the frowns of relatives, and the loss of friends. We must be ready to suffer for his sake, if we would enjoy Him as our portion. To gain all, we must be willing to lose all; for Christ has said- "He that finds his life shall lose it; and he that loses his life for my sake shall find it."

Do we feel our hearts growing cold? Oh! let us look unto Jesus, until they are filled with holy love. He left the bosom of the Father. He took upon him our nature. He entered into our world of woe. He carried our sorrows. He bore our sins in his own body on the tree. He endured the cross, despising the shame; and then, as the Lord of glory, he burst the bands of death, ascended into heaven, and sits at the right-hand of the throne of God, where he ever lives to make intercession for us. Can we be insensible to such grace as this? O that the love of God were shed abroad in every heart, then would earth resemble heaven, and the Church of Christ form one holy, happy, and united family.

It cannot be too deeply impressed on the consciences of men, that love to Jesus is the spring of holy obedience. It is the Divine Chemistry which turns all into gold. A cup of cold water given from this principle shall not lose its reward, while the most costly sacrifice is worthless, if it does not spring from love.

The sacred fire of love can only be kindled by Him whose name and nature is love; and when once kindled, it can only he kept burning on the altar of our hearts, by the constant supply of his grace. The prayer of faith obtains the holy oil with which our vessels must be filled, and our lamps trimmed, while waiting in joyful expectation for the coming of the Bridegroom. Increasing with the increase of faith in the atonement of Christ, this heavenly flame will burn brighter and more fervently, the nearer it approaches the source from where it came.

"Yes! love indeed is light from heaven;

A spark of that immortal fire

With angels shared, by Jesus given,

To lift from earth our low desire.

Devotion wafts the mind above;

But heaven itself descends in love;

A feeling from the Godhead caught

To wean from self, each sordid thought;

A ray of Him who formed the whole.

A glory circling round the soul."

"Love is from God; and every one that loves, is born of God, and knows God." "God is love; and he who dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him." Happy then is the heart in which the spirit of love dwells and reigns. Such a heart is the abode of the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy, and who delights in the lowly, loving disciple of the crucified and glorified Jesus– his coequal, co-eternal Son.

Oh! that we may daily live under the sweet constraining influence of the loving-kindness of our God. Without it, all is dark and cheerless; with it, joy and peace, like lovely flowers, spring up around our path. What are all the vanities of this world, but painted bubbles, when compared with this eternal treasure? Love, joy, peace, survive the tomb; and form that unending wreath which shall forever adorn and gladden the soul of the glorified believer.

Like his Divine Master, Paul had no certain dwelling-place. He was truly a pilgrim and a stranger upon earth. Wherever he went, bonds and imprisonments awaited him. We, on the contrary, in these days of the Church’s prosperity, can dwell at ease, none making us afraid. The law does not unsheath the sword of persecution, nor kindle the martyr’s fire. Is there not then cause for anxious apprehension, lest, while we profess much love for Christ, our hearts should cleave unto the dust? Are we not in danger of making a home of this world, and of setting up our rest here, as if this wilderness were the promised Canaan, rather than the road through which we have to pass to it?

As professing Christians, living in the midst of Gospel light and Gospel privileges, we can readily exclaim against the idolatries of the Heathen, while we forget, that whatever draws away the heart from God, is an idol in his sight. Our domestic ease, our family comforts, too often become our household gods, at whose shrine we sacrifice the claims of Christian charity, and the spiritual interests of perishing millions. "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s." There is in every man a powerful principle, which God has wisely implanted for the purposes of self-preservation. The second great commandment in the Law appeals to this principle– "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus refers to it– "All things whatever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

But there is a sinful love of self- a spirit of selfishness which is utterly at variance with the law of love. Nothing can extirpate this evil principle but love to Christ. As believers in Jesus, we must daily live in the exalted spirit of his new commandment; "Love one another, as I have loved you." The love of Christ to us is the Gospel pattern of our love to others. With enlarged heart, the Apostle enforced this disinterested duty on the Philippian Christians- "Don’t think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing. Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had."

With thankfulness to Almighty God we must acknowledge, that of late years much has been done in our favored island to advance the cause of Christ throughout the earth, as well as to widen the circle of general beneficence; yet much still remains to be done. This is but the seed-time of the

world. Let us then, in the spirit of faith and prayer, cast our bread upon the waters, for we shall find it after many days.

If we truly love the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall, and must, rejoice in everything which advances the interests of his kingdom. A heart warmed with the love of God, cannot rest, satisfied with mere verbal expressions of gratitude, for the blessings of redemption. Love is an active principle. Its language is, What can I do, however feebly, to promote the great and good work of evangelizing the world? If contributing of my substance will aid the noble cause, I will gladly cast into the treasury that which God has given me. If active exertion be required, I am willing to spend and be spent in advancing my Savior's kingdom. If advocating the cause of Christ be needed, I will endeavor to speak, though with a faltering tongue. Such is the language of love. To all this, the servant of Christ will join his fervent prayers, and rejoice, with all his Christian brethren, at the enlargement and prosperity of Zion.

"He who sows sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; and he who sows bountifully, shall reap also bountifully," -is the Apostle's appeal to our Christian liberality. Do we act agreeably to this practical knowledge? Do the rich professors of Christianity never first consult their family luxuries, their equipage and decorations, before they dare to answer the Savior's call; "Sell all that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come, and follow me." Our loving Savior, though he does not require his followers to enter upon a state of voluntary poverty, or to deny themselves the innocent enjoyment of his providential bounties; yet, he does demand their chief affection, and a willingness to impart cheerfully of their substance for his sake.

"Jesus went over to the collection box in the Temple and sat and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. Then a poor widow came and dropped in two pennies." Many are willing to make an offering out of their surplus, but few, to make a sacrifice of their comforts. Liberality must be estimated, not by quantity, but proportion. A splendid gift from a wealthy person forms only an offering, when no inconvenience is felt by the rich donation. A small sum given by a poor man is a real sacrifice, when some privation is experienced by this act of generosity. On this account it was, that, looking at the largeness of her heart, and the smallness of her means, our Lord declared- "I assure you, this poor widow has given more than all the others have given. For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has."

As the love of the world is the sin which easily besets us, when sheltering itself under the creditable appellation of prudence, economy, and planning, our Savior has given us a double caution against its pernicious influence. "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation." The Gospel indeed does not condemn a prudent management of our concerns- it rather enjoins it for, "a good man will guide his affairs with discretion.'' But, it does condemn that anxious, murmuring, fretful spirit, which disfigures the conduct of many professors.

How cheering are the words of Paul, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Christian Reader, behold your privilege- "Do not be anxious about anything." When any trial comes upon you which would fill you with anxiety, (for who can escape from trouble in this fallen world) do not grapple with it in your own strength, nor lean to your own understanding. Trust in the Lord with all your heart;

betake yourself by earnest prayer to the Father of mercies; implore Him to direct and overrule for good, "the cloud you so much dread," and then, calmly leave at his feet the burden of your fears. Do this with thankfulness, that you have such a God who cares for you, and on whom you may boldly cast all your concerns. While you thus acknowledge Him in all your ways, God will direct your paths, and either support you under, or deliver you out of, all your troubles.

How sweet is the voice of mercy speaking peace to the troubled heart- "But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they go right on producing delicious fruit." He, on the contrary, who, when trouble overtakes him, will first measure it with his reason, and manage it with his own counsel, and take the care upon himself, rather than cast his burden upon the Lord by faith and prayer, shall involve himself in many miseries, lose his joy and peace in God, sink deeper in the miry clay, and in the end obtain nothing but vexation of spirit. This is what the Lord says: "Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans and turn their hearts away from the Lord. They are like stunted shrubs in the desert, with no hope for the future. They will live in the barren wilderness, on the salty flats where no one lives."

O how quieting to the afflicted believer are the words of Jesus- "Take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." "Let not your heart be troubled." "Neither be you of doubtful mind." Happy is that soul whose hopes are firmly anchored on the promises of Christ! We live alas! far, far too much below our privileges. Had we more faith, and spiritual-mindedness, we would have more strength and joy in every tribulation; our moderation would be known unto all men; our conversation would be without covetousness; we would be content with such things as we have on our journey heavenward; and our minds being fully stayed upon Him who has said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you," would be kept in perfect peace. Such was the happy spirit in which the primitive Christians lived and died. They learned in whatever state they were, therewith to be content; and took joyfully the confiscation of their goods, knowing in themselves, that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

Do we act as stewards of the manifold gifts of God avoiding miserly anxieties, and wasteful expenditures? Knowing that we are not our own, being bought with a price, even the precious blood of the Son of God, do we seek for grace to live to our Redeemer’s glory? The world would no longer sway our affections, did we daily reflect how quickly it is passing away; and how soon we shall be called to give an account of our stewardship, either for the one, or for the ten, talents which may have been entrusted to our care.

Though all do not become martyrs, yet all must possess the martyr’s spirit; and though all are not called upon to forsake their houses and friends, as the noble-minded Paul did, yet all must be in readiness to do so, when the cause and glory of Christ demand the sacrifice. It was "to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints," that he gave the exhortation, "Do not be conformed to this world." The very admonition implies the danger of worldly conformity, and the proneness of the heart to earthly things. Who can say that he is always raised above the undue influence of terrestrial objects- that he is daily passing, as it were, upon tiptoe, across this world of vanity. Alas! alas! we too often sink into the mire of earthly-mindedness, and have our thoughts absorbed amid

the trifles of a day! But what can the world profit us? It can neither secure us against temporal evils, nor save us from eternal misery. It cannot, for a single moment, prolong our existence here, or make that existence peaceful and happy. It is often a clog, but never a help in moments of spiritual distress. And yet, we love the world, though, by its deceitful smile, it robs us of our peace, entangles us in its snares, and would, if left under its power, eventually destroy our souls.

The heavenly-mindedness and contempt of the world which shone so brightly in the lives of the first Christians may well cause us to blush. These devoted followers of a crucified Redeemer did not study those arts of splendor which have overspread the Christian world. When the honor of their Divine Master required the sacrifice, they could trample under foot, those profits and pleasures which ensnare and enslave mankind. They looked upon the delights and advantages of this life, as things not worthy to arrest their affections in their journey homeward. Their spirits breathed in too pure an air, to be caught with the delusive charms of this lower world. It was their continual regard to keep company with dying thoughts, and to dwell within the prospect of eternity.

Hence, Justin Martyr in his Epistle says, "that Christians, even in their native country, live as pilgrims and strangers. They are in the flesh, but do not live after the flesh; they dwell upon the earth, but their conversation is in heaven. As the soul lives in the body, but is not of the body, so Christians dwell in the world, but are not of the world; for, while sojourning in corruptible tabernacles of clay, their immortal spirits are daily longing for, and expecting an incorruptible state of glory in heaven."

The simplicity of these early believers in Jesus, kept them from aspiring after worldly honors and distinctions; and, if at any time advanced to them, their greatest care was, to keep themselves unspotted from the world. When Cyprian was elected Bishop of Carthage, his modesty and humility made him fly from the first approaches of the news. Thinking himself unfit for so weighty and honorable an employment, he desired that a more worthy person, and some of his seniors in the faith might possess the place. So far from accepting his refusal, the people were more urgent in their entreaties; his doors were immediately crowded, and passages of escape blocked up. He would indeed have fled out at the window, but finding it in vain, he unwillingly yielded, the people in the meanwhile impatiently waiting, divided between hope and fear, until seeing him come forth, they received him with universal joy and satisfaction.

Can we wonder that such a feeling should be expressed towards this excellent man, when it is recorded of him, that upon his becoming Christian, he sold his estate, to relieve the necessities of his poor brethren, from which he could not be restrained, either by the persuasions of others, or from the considerations of the poverty to which he himself might be reduced. After his entrance upon the ministry, his doors were open to all who came, from which no widow ever returned empty. To any who were blind, he became a guide to direct them; to them who were lame, he lent his assistance and support. None were oppressed, but he was ready to defend them. He was the father, the friend, and the shepherd of his flock. With Job, he could truly say- "All who heard of me praised me. All who saw me spoke well of me. For I helped the poor in their need and the orphans who had no one to help them. I helped those who had lost hope, and they blessed me. And I caused the widows' hearts to sing for joy. All I did was just and honest. Righteousness covered me like a robe, and I wore justice like a turban. I served as eyes for the blind and feet for the lame. I was a father to the poor and made sure that even strangers received a fair trial." Thus Cyprian like

the blessed Paul, lived for one only object– the glory of Christ and the salvation of men.

Contentment, moderation, and thankfulness peculiarly distinguished the primitive Christians. This lovely feature in their character is strikingly portrayed by Gregory, bishop of Nyssa- "The transitory condition of man's life," says he, "calls for daily reparation of the decays of nature. He, therefore, that looks no farther than to minister to the desires of nature, and troubles not himself with vain anxious thoughts for more than is necessary, lives little less than the life of angels; while, by a mind content with little, he imitates their need of nothing. For this cause, we are commanded to seek only what is enough to keep the body in its due state and temper, and thus to address our prayers to God; 'Give us this day our daily bread.' Give us bread, not delicacies or riches, not splendid and purple clothing, not pearls and jewels, large fields and great possessions, not numerous flocks and herds of cattle, or a multitude of servants, not any of those things by which the soul is diverted, and drawn from more noble and divine thoughts and cares, but only our daily bread."

Thus practically did the primitive Christians follow the command of our Savior; "So I tell you, don't worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food, drink, and clothes. Doesn't life consist of more than food and clothing?" Having food and clothing they learned to be content. Thus, unhesitatingly, could they declare their renunciation of all things for his sake, "Lo, we have left everything, and have followed you." Thus deeply did they drink into the spirit of their beloved Lord, who said, "My food and drink is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to finish his work."

O how seldom, in these modern times, do we find that full display of the mind of Christ, which was exhibited amid the storms of persecution in the early ages of Christianity. May the Divine Spirit revive our languid graces. May we daily look unto Him, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes, became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. The tendency of the Gospel is to expand the heart, to widen the stream of liberality, to diffuse happiness through the earth. When its power is felt, its fruits immediately appear. Love oils the wheels of action, while faith propels the ardent spirit in its career of universal benevolence.

But, if few be found willing to sacrifice their superfluities for the Gospel's sake, how much fewer are found ready to leave the bosom of an affectionate family, to brave the dangers of the ocean, to endure the sicknesses of foreign climates, and all those other trials which await the man, who in the spirit of the self-denying Apostle, delights to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and would rather die than forsake his God and Savior.

Few, like Caleb, follow the Lord fully. Yet nothing is more abhorrent to our all-gracious Redeemer, than a divided heart and a lukewarm spirit. As all our happiness in time and in eternity is the fruit of his love to us; so all our holiness is the fruit of his Spirit, drawing our hearts, and fixing them wholly upon Himself. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to take of the things of Christ, and to show them unto us; to convince us of the emptiness of every earthly good; and the folly of seeking our happiness in a world which lies in wickedness. Sin blinds the understanding, and sears the conscience; but, when the heart is filled with the love and Spirit of Jesus, how weak are the temptations of Satan- how powerless are the allurements of the world- how comparatively smooth the paths of sorrow. May we be graciously delivered from a worldly spirit, which can assume a thousand forms to allure and to deceive. To be in the world, and yet not of the world- to use it for our temporal necessities, and yet not to abuse it for carnal purposes, is a high Christian attainment, which Paul possessed in

an eminent degree.

From the book of Nature we may derive much useful knowledge. Solomon sends the sluggard to the ant. Isaiah, the inconsiderate, to the ox and the donkey. Jeremiah, the forgetful, to the stork and the swallow. Animals and birds teach us many important lessons- Thus, when the squirrel is disturbed, it skips from bough to bough, continuing always near the earth; while the lark, when alarmed in her nest, flies upwards with rapid wing, singing as she soars. Just so the worldling, when beset with grief, goes from one terrestrial object to another; while the Christian, leaving all his earthly cares behind him, rises on the wings of faith and prayer, to seek, with tuneful heart, his rest in God.

Do we thus seek for consolation from our God and Savior, and find it in the hour of trial? Jacob wrestled and prevailed. May we be Israels with God, and never cease to pray, until he gives that realizing faith, which lessens the weight of earthly sorrow; that hope and fear which bear the soul with steady flight to heavenly glory!

Jesus, dwelling in the heart by faith, invigorates the feeblest saint, and dispels the deepest gloom. The believer, resting in the full assurance of hope upon the unchanging promises of his Savior, triumphs over every enemy, and reaches in safety his eternal rest. Such was the blessedness which cheered and strengthened the heart of Paul, and such is the blessedness which animates all the children of God.

In the days of his unregeneracy, we have seen how the Apostle prided himself in being a descendant of Abraham; or, as he styled himself, "a Hebrew of the Hebrews." Like the rest of the Pharisees, he esteemed himself to be righteous, and despised others, especially the Gentiles, who were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise. But, when it pleased God to reveal to him that Savior, by whom the middle wall of partition was broken down, he could give the right-hand of fellowship to all, whether Jews or Gentiles, who loved the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

This is the true Christian spirit, which unites the whole body of the Church, by that charity which is the bond of perfectness. For this uniting spirit, our divine Redeemer supplicated his Holy Father, previous to his crucifixion, "Sanctify them through your Truth; your Word is truth; that they all may be one; as you Father are in me, and I in you, that they also maybe one in us; that the world may believe that you have sent me." If union be the strength and beauty of the Church of Christ, how great must be the guilt of those who tarnish and weaken it by contentions and divisions.

Through the blindness of our minds, we are too ready to value ourselves upon our external privileges, as if belonging to a pure Church must of necessity make us pure. It is one thing to make a profession of religion, and another to possess its spirit, and to feel its power.

From Scripture and experience we learn that the heart of man, while alienated from the life of God, is the same in all ages and countries. Outward circumstances indeed make some difference, but the radical evils of the heart remain the same. In Christian lands, unconverted people are no better than heathens, except as they are brought under the predominating influence of Christianity, which restrains their vices; while, in those nations, where sensuality forms a part of the prevailing superstition, they are more openly licentious.

How little reason have we then to plume ourselves upon our outward advantages, or to exalt ourselves above others; when the difference arises, not from any superior natural goodness of our own, but from circumstances over which, as far as we are concerned, our wisdom and foresight had no control. Wicked men are greatly indebted to Christianity, and to the restraining grace of God, for numberless outward comforts which they enjoy, though they either know it not, or are unwilling to acknowledge it. But oh! what an unspeakable mercy is converting grace, which brings unnumbered blessings in its train; for godliness has the promise not only of the life that now is, but also of that which is to come.

This blessedness, Paul experienced in all its richness, and proclaimed it to a dying world, in all its fullness. He knew, that the grace of God makes all the difference between one man and another; collectively, between nations, where Christianity is established, and where it is not- individually, between those who are Christians indeed, and those who are Christians only in name. Being well acquainted with the workings of spiritual pride, he put these humbling questions to each Corinthian convert, "Who makes you to differ from another? And what do you have, that you did not receive? Now, if you did receive it, why do you glory, as if you had not received it?"

Are we the subjects of this distinguishing grace? With what ardor then should we follow the footsteps of the Apostle, and engage with all our hearts in the service of our Redeemer. Has the Spirit drawn us to Christ with the cords of love? How zealously then should we labor for the conversion of mankind. Though despised by the world, we shall be precious in the sight of God. Though, by nature, devoid of spiritual light and power, we shall become, through the Spirit, "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world." Thus was Abraham blessed of God, and made a blessing to all around him; and so are all who walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which obtained for him that exalted title– "the Friend of God."

May the universal Church of Christ, by whatever names its several parts may be distinguished among men, be stirred up to active zeal and self-denial, to increased liberality and fervent prayer. Then will our Zion become a praise in the earth, and all the ends of the world shall see the salvation of our God. When we survey those regions of the earth, where the light of Truth has not yet penetrated, inhabited by millions of immortal beings who are successively passing into eternity, what daily cause have we to bless God, that our lot has been cast in a land of Bibles and Sabbaths; a land, where his ministers are appointed to proclaim the Gospel of peace; where we are governed by equal laws; and where we enjoy the blessing of civil and religious liberty.

O! that we may not, by our willful and continued ingratitude, provoke our God to withdraw these blessings from us. As a nation, we have long enjoyed his peculiar favor; and as a nation, we are unmindful of his benefits. By his present dispensations towards us, he calls to us, in mercy, to consider our ways. But, if his call of mercy be disregarded, he will speak with a voice of judgment, which shall cause the stoutest hearts to tremble.

The Almighty has put a singular honor upon his Church, not only by imparting to it his blessing, and causing it to reflect his glory, but by rendering it the medium, whereby his perfections are more fully known to the angelic host. In heaven, they behold one unbroken stream of love; in hell, one unmixed torrent of wrath. But, in this our world, the seemingly opposing attributes of justice and mercy, are displayed in all their glory at the Cross of Christ.

This wonderful truth is mentioned by Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians, "Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Can we be indifferent to this mystery of grace? Can we treat with lightness these wonders of redemption, which occupy the highest thoughts, and call forth the loudest praise, of principalities and powers in heavenly places? Could angels weep, surely, tears would be shed in heaven over the insensibility of man.

To display this redeeming grace to a dying world, was at once the labor and delight of Paul. The Godhead of Christ, his atonement, resurrection, and glorification, constituted the grand subjects of his preaching. He was truly a scribe well-instructed in the mysteries of the kingdom.

This wise master-builder did not exalt Christ on the ruins of the Moral Law, nor raise human works to an equality with the righteousness of Christ. He did not magnify the sovereignty of God to the disparagement of his holiness, nor lower the claims of justice to enhance the charms of mercy. In the beautiful harmony of truth, he so revealed the divine perfections, that with David we are led to exclaim, "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Having receive the Gospel by the revelation of Jesus Christ, he saw and proclaimed the glory of the cross, whereby God can be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly; faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

"If we desire that our faith may be kept from faltering, we ought to be always upon our guard against every opinion, the drift of which is to lower the Author and Finisher of it; because everything that tends to lessen our Redeemer's glory, and to detract from what he has done for us, weakens our faith, unhinges our hope, and destroys our confidence. Therefore, as we should avoid those as the spreaders of the most dangerous plague, who would reduce our Savior to the lots rank of a creature; so we shall be afraid of partaking of the infectious leaven of such as would bring us off from looking for our salvation from Christ alone, and would persuade us to expect that from our faith, repentance, sincerity, and obedience; which was procured for us by his agonies, toils, and death. And, at the same time that we are exalting Christ to the utmost, we should avoid the extreme of those, who, under pretense of magnifying our Savior's infinite merit, pretend to a liberty to act as they will; because whatever swelling words we may speak, we do not sincerely trust in the infinite merit of the sacrifice of our Lord offered up as our Priest, unless we manifest the sincerity of our faith, by submitting to him as a King.

"It shows that people have no desire to be saved by Christ, when they take pains to degrade him. None can better judge of his worth, than those, who having washed their robes in his blood, and by his aid, passed through great tribulation, are brought to behold his face in righteousness. They suffer no diminishing thoughts concerning him to find the least harbor in their spotless breasts; but, in the company of angels and archangels, with the highest strains of rapture, praise and adore him.

"As long then, as Christians are traveling through the dark and gloomy valley of life, they should not be backward to ascribe the highest honors to him who was slain, and has redeemed them to God by his blood; which they will do without ceasing and weariness, when, passing out of time into eternity, they shall come to be forever with the Lord in the peaceful realms of light and immortality, where faith will be turned into sight, and hope will be swallowed up in enjoyment."

Blessed Jesus, O Light of the world, and the Glory of your Church, cause the bright beams of your Truth to shine into my heart. Open my understanding that I may understand the Scriptures. Reveal Yourself as my Savior, as the Lord my Righteousness, as my Great Atonement and Example. Wash me from all my sins through your precious blood. Fill me with faith and love, meekness and humility. Wean my affections from the world, and enable me to receive the truths of the Gospel in simplicity, to walk in the way of your precepts with sincerity, and to feed upon your promises with gratitude. Prepare me by Your Holy Spirit for the mansions of glory; and place me near your throne as a monument of mercy, there to praise You with saints and angels forever and ever.

02.00. CHRISTIAN MEDITATIONS

CHRISTIAN MEDITATIONS or

THE BELIEVER'S COMPANION IN SOLITUDE

by Thomas Reade 1841

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02.000. Preface

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"My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord." Psa 104:34

"But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father secretly. Then your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you." Mat 6:6

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." Mark 1:35

PREFACE

This Volume is designed to be "THE BELIEVERS COMPANION IN SOLITUDE". The Meditations, interspersed with Hymns, chiefly original, are intended to promote serious reflections, silent aspirations to God, and self-examination; and thus, through the divine blessing, to lead the heart to God in Christ, as the only Foundation for a sinner's hope; and the only Fountain of a sinner's happiness. Should this important end, in any humble measure be attained, the glory will be His from whom all good proceeds.

Frequent retirement, and reading the Scriptures with meditation and prayer, are essential, through the power of the Spirit, to our growth in grace. The more we meditate on the things of God, as revealed in his holy word, the more will our minds be brought under their sanctifying influence. The religion of Christ, is the religion of the heart. It not only enlightens the understanding, but it purifies the affections. The world will lose its fascinating power, and formality its deadening effect upon us, when once we come to a saving knowledge of Christ Crucified! We shall then use the world as not abusing it, and engage in outward forms of religion, as needful for order, but not as substitutes for personal piety. We shall then live in the spirit of the vows and promises which were made in our names at our baptism, and thus evidence our new birth, by walking before God in newness of life.

In a spirit of Christian love, the author of these Meditations has dwelt on the evil of self-deception; on our proneness to confound the sacramental sign with the thing signified; on the danger of our professing to know God, while in works we deny him; and, of resting in the form of godliness, while we deny the power thereof. Surely these subjects cannot be too frequently, nor too earnestly, enforced. If we diligently study our Bible, that only rule of faith and practice, we shall be preserved from those abounding errors which darken and pervert the truth. "The entrance of your words gives light; it gives understanding unto the simple."

May the Savior, who is love, impart his blessing to these Meditations on his Grace and Power, that he who writes, and they who read, may finally rejoice together in his kingdom of glory.

02.01. Communion with God

1. COMMUNION WITH GOD

"When I awake, I am still with you." Psa 139:18

Communion with God is the privilege of every true believer. He alone can approach the mercy-seat in the spirit of adoption, and enjoy a foretaste of heaven while journeying towards it. John felt all this happiness when he wrote: "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." Union to God, and communion with him through the Son of his love, is the source of every spiritual blessing. This exalted privilege can only be enjoyed by the holy followers of Jesus; for the Apostle adds, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin." Yes, from all our sins, "though they be as scarlet," "though they be red like crimson," crying aloud for vengeance on our souls. But, "if we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth;" for, "He that says he abides in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."

How inseparably connected, in the word of God, is the privilege and the character of the true believer. Let none, then, dare to claim the privilege who are destitute of holiness so emphatically denominated light. "God is light," "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning." All his people are "the children of light and the children of the day." They have "no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." Oh! that the words of Christ may be living words in the hearts of all his people: "I am the Light of the world; he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes on me should not abide in darkness." "While you have light, believe in the light, that you may be the children of light."

All the people of God are "light in the Lord;" -but while in the body, they are renewed only in part, for thus writes John; "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Sin does not reign, though it rebels in the hearts of the redeemed; for "Whoever is born of God does not commit sin; for his seed remains in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil." But, "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins;" for "the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world," "that we might live through him."

All, who are united to Christ by faith- all, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them- all, who rely simply and without reserve on the blood and righteousness of the Redeemer, through the Spirit, have fellowship with the Father and the Son. To them, God is a God that hears prayer; he grants the requests of their lips. As they pour out their hearts before him, so he pours his blessings into their souls. He fills them with light, he strengthens them with might, by his Spirit in the inner man- he speaks peace through the blood of Jesus- and accepts them, clothed in his righteousness; the divine image is formed in their souls, and they are made fit for the kingdom of glory.

Such is the character and experience of all who are privileged to hold communion with the Father of spirits. What honor can exceed that of being admitted into the presence-chamber of the King of kings– of holding converse with Him, whom angels worship, and before whom devils tremble! Is this the exalted privilege of the sons of men? Oh! my soul, bless, forever bless that precious Savior, who procured all this, by his blood, for you.

Oh! my adorable Jesus! enable me to make a full surrender of myself to you. Did you leave the bosom of your Father, to bleed and die for me, and shall I refuse to leave this vain empty world at your sweet call? Alas! I should refuse and spurn you too, did not your love constrain me to obedience. Oh! blessed Redeemer, I would now hold holy Communion with you. Oh! make me sincere. Give me a saving knowledge of myself. Show me my true character. Allow me not to build on a false hope, lest I cherish a false peace. Send your Holy Spirit into my heart, to enlighten my understanding, and mold my will to yours; that my affections may ever soar towards You.

Your word of truth declares, that, "without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." Let me not deceive myself, Oh Savior of sinners, in a matter of such infinite importance as the salvation of my soul. Let me not fancy myself to be something, when I am nothing; or to suppose, that, because I am among the outwardly called, I shall therefore be found among the chosen; for you have yourself declared, "that many are called but few chosen." Oh! give me the searching light of your Spirit, that I may drag from its concealment, every lurking sin, and crucify every rebel lust!

Oh! my heavenly Father, wash me in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness; make me your child by adoption and grace; enable me to cast away the filthy rags of my own righteousness, and to put on, by faith, the righteousness of your dear Son. Clothe me with humility. Keep me in a meek and lowly frame. Give me a patient and contented spirit- contented with such outward blessings as you are pleased to bestow- and patient under such afflictions as you know to be needful for me. Make me thankful for all your mercies. Let my heart overflow with unceasing praises for the unspeakable gift of the Lord Jesus. Here I am, Oh my God, in your presence. Look upon me in Christ for his sake, and through the merit of his blood, pardon all my offences. Seal me with your Spirit, and make me a partaker of your love. Deliver me daily more and more from the power of indwelling sin; from the fiery assaults of Satan; from the love and friendship of the world; yes, from everything that can alienate my heart from you, or unfit me for your heavenly kingdom.

Give me, blessed Lord, an increasing relish for spiritual exercises; for religious retirement; for the precious privilege of Communion with You. May the gospel of your grace be as a well of salvation to my soul, from where I may daily draw the water of life. May the Savior be continually more precious in my sight, and more endeared to my heart. Transform me anew into his holy image, and seal me yours, forever yours, a sinner saved by grace.

Without Christ, I can do nothing. All my fresh springs are in him. Great blessings are promised to faith, but faith is his gift. I cannot believe through any natural effort of my own. I may hear sermons, partake of the Lord’s Supper, read my Bible, and pray much, but no means, however excellent, can of themselves work faith in my heart. You alone, Almighty Savior, are the author and finisher of faith. Your blessing must descend from on high; your Holy Spirit must be imparted before those means can be rendered effectual, which your wisdom has ordained for the conversion of sinners, and the sanctification of your people. Save me from resting in forms and ceremonies, which, without your grace, are but as "clouds without water."

Oh! heavenly Father, whose love and grace are infinite, give me this precious faith, that I may hourly look to Christ as my great Atonement; flee to him as to a City of refuge; receive him as my Prophet, Priest, and King; rely upon him for the forgiveness of my sins, for righteousness to justify me in your sight, for strength to enable me to perform duty, to follow after holiness, to encounter spiritual enemies, and to come off more than conqueror, until faith is lost in vision, and the cross be exchanged for the crown.

If David could say, under the comparatively dark dispensation under which he lived: "O God, you are my God; early will I seek you, my soul thirsts for you," O! that, enjoying the bright beams of gospel day, I may feel, blessed Jesus, earnest desires after your presence, ardent longings after communion with you. There is no happiness separate from you. With you is life. Unite me to yourself. I have daily to mourn over a cold heart. When I would do good, evil is present with me. Every day affords fresh proof that I am a fallen creature. The leprosy lies deep within; my whole nature is corrupt. Nothing but grace can rescue me from perdition. I need the three-fold blessings of redemption: pardon, peace, and purity. How cheering is the assurance of your Apostle, that we have redemption through your blood, even the forgiveness of sins. To this fountain I would continually resort, that through faith, I may wash and be clean. Then shall I enjoy your presence here, and dwell with you in glory everlasting.

There is a simplicity in the gospel method of salvation which none can rightly discover but those who are taught of God. "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The nominal professor of Christianity cannot enter into the rich, yet simple revelations of redeeming grace. The humble soul, emptied of self, and filled with the light of truth, can alone apprehend and feel the exquisitely delightful manifestations of that love which it free, full, sovereign, and eternal.

Man is always desirous to help save himself; to work out a righteousness of his own, that he may have something whereof to boast. But the gospel declares his total inability for this work, and points him, as a helpless, lost, guilty sinner, to the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world; saying in accents of mercy- "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." "Only believe" was the word of our Savior to the weeping father in the gospel. He was enabled to believe, and received an immediate blessing, in the restoration of his child. Lord, I believe; help my unbelief. Turn away my eyes from all creature dependencies, from all self-confidence. Be all my hope and all my plea before the mercy-seat.

While thousands around me are rejecting your authority, neglecting your salvation, or darkening your counsel by words without knowledge, may I have grace, blessed Jesus, to wash in no other fountain but your precious blood; to walk by no other light, than the truth of your holy word; to journey heavenward in no other way, than by faith in you; to feed my soul on nothing but yourself, the living bread from heaven; to desire no other joy, than that which springs from union to You and communion with You. Then shall I partake of the cup of salvation, and praise you with the countless host of the redeemed in your kingdom of glory.

Come, O my soul, retire a while,

Withdraw your thoughts from things below;

Beneath the Savior’s blissful smile,

A heaven on earth, you then shall know.

Communion with your God, how sweet!

To feel his presence- how divine!

Oh! make me for this blessing meet;

My Savior, make me ever thine.

While thousands seek their joy on earth,

Where thorns, in rich profusion, grow;

I long for joys of heavenly birth,

Which Jesus only can bestow.

Amid the tangled cares of life,

Amid the sorrows which abound,

Amid the errors, sins, and strife,

Which thickly cover nature’s ground;

I would withdraw to silent shades,

And seek retirement with my God,

Where earth, with all its folly, fades,

Where I can leave affliction’s load.

How precious this Communion, Lord;

With You is light, and peace, and joy;

I trust the promise of your word,

Which earth and hell can ne’er destroy.

02.02. THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS

2. THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS

"Who else among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is glorious in holiness like you—so awesome in splendor, performing such wonders?" Exo 15:11

"Worship the Lord in all his holy splendor. Let all the earth tremble before him." Psa 96:9

If the external evidences of Christianity prove the truth of its being a divine revelation, how much more do the internal evidences attest its divine origin. From the period of the Fall to the Prophet Malachi, promises and prophecies were proclaimed, types and ordinances were instituted, to foretell and prefigure the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, the Lamb of God, who, in the fullness of time, should take away the sin of the world. Holiness is the grand characteristic of the gospel of Christ- and all who are interested in its blessings are a holy people; for the announcement to Joseph by the angel was, "You shall call his name JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins." "Be holy, for I am holy," is the command of God. "Be holy in all manner of conversation," is the apostolic injunction. Believers are described by Peter, as, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that they should show forth the praises of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light."

There is a beauty in holiness which as far surpasses the rude features of the world’s morality, as the dazzling brightness of the sun outshines the glowworm’s light. The morality of the world consists in outward decency, and in rectitude of conduct towards our neighbor, while the heart is wholly estranged from God. Holiness has a special regard to God, and consists in purity of heart, and in a conformity to the divine image. This is what God demands. To this, a promise is annexed: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." This is what God works in believers by his Spirit; and without this, no man shall see the Lord. All religion is vain, if inward purity be lacking. No outward morality- no speculative knowledge of divine Truth- no formal observance of religious duties- can ever be accepted as a substitute for holiness by Him who has said: "My son, give me your heart."

Oh! my, soul, have you been born again? Has this divine change passed upon you? Are you renewed in righteousness and true holiness? Can you rejoice at the remembrance of God’s holiness? Are you laboring daily, through the Spirit, for greater purity of heart, more heavenly-mindedness, chasteness of affection, and rectitude of intention? Is love to God, your principle of action? Is his glory, your end and aim?

Oh! blessed Jesus, I have no strength in myself to do these things. Put forth your saving, sanctifying power. Breathe, oh vivifying Spirit, breathe on the dry bones, and they shall live. Shine, oh Sun of Righteousness on my barren soul, that heavenly graces may blossom and bear fruit to your praise. Angels will then rejoice over another sinner that repents; and another jewel will be added to your crown.

Give me grace to hate even the garment spotted by the flesh, to loathe sin, as I should a garment in which is the plague of leprosy. Preserve me from the lustings of carnal nature, from inordinate desires, irregular propensities, and sinful thoughts, those seeds in the soul, from where spring so many poisonous weeds. Purify every imagination of the thoughts of my heart; give me, holy Savior, the victory over myself, that every thought may be brought into captivity to a willing obedience to you. Oh! may I daily worship You in the beauty of holiness, in spirit and in truth, that "with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, I may laud and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you, and saying- Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Glory be to you, O Lord most High."

I am now living in an enemy's country. My heart, like a besieged city, has to contend with foes without, and traitors within. Watchfulness and prayer are the sentinels which guard the holy principle within; while circumspection watches the motions of the enemy without. If I sleep at my post, or relax in my vigilance, my soul would soon be overpowered by indwelling corruptions, and be vanquished by the powers of darkness. How earnest is the exhortation of Peter: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking those whom he may devour: resist him steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." How encouraging is his prayer, "But the God of all grace, who has called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen."

Self-examination, and prayer for divine illumination, are powerful auxiliaries in the Christian warfare. The Christian soldier must pray with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, that he may be endued with strength in the inner man. He must search into his heart, and learn to know himself, that he may not be surprised by the secret machinations of indwelling sin. Oh! how arduous is the life of the believer. The 'mere formalist' knows nothing of his conflicts or his comforts. "See, then," says Paul, "that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore, do not be unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."

Enable me, O Lord, to examine myself, whether I be in the faith; to prove my own self. Many deceive themselves by not scrutinizing their principles of action. Preserve me, your unworthy servant, from this fatal neglect; lest, judging from external performances, and disregarding the motives from where they proceed, I should be found, at last, to be only as reprobate silver in your sight.

Am I in the faith? True saving faith is a living, loving principle in the heart. As life manifests itself by action, so does a living faith- it works by love, it purifies the heart, it overcomes the world, it unites the soul to Christ, it apprehends his merits, and puts on his righteousness, it lives upon the promises, it realizes celestial glories, it raises the believer above the cares of life, the sorrows of the world, and all the gloomy horrors of the grave; it resists sin, it applies the death of Christ as a powerful corrosive to eat out the gangrene of corrupted nature, it raises the dead soul, by virtue of the Savior's resurrection, from the grave of spiritual death to newness of life, it enables the believer to walk with God, to worship him in the beauty of holiness, in the spirit of adoption, until he attain to the temple above, where his services and praises shall be perfected and eternal.

Have I this precious faith, this faith of God's elect, which is according to godliness? It is the gift of God; it is of the operation of the Spirit; Jesus is the author and finisher of it. Oh! blessed Trinity in unity, three persons in one Divine Essence, undivided, immutable, self-existent, and eternal; grant unto me this invaluable, indispensable blessing. Without it, I cannot please you. Without it, I cannot approach unto you with acceptance. If in Christ, I shall be precious in your sight, for his dear sake who lived and died for me. If out of Christ, I shall be viewed as a vessel of wrath, as fuel for the everlasting burning! Delay not, then, blessed Lord, delay not, to impart this precious gift of grace- a justifying faith working by love. Speak the word only, and the blessing will descend. Work in me all the good pleasure of your goodness, and the work of faith with power, that, going on from strength to strength, from conquering to conquer, I may rise superior to all my foes, glorify you here in the beauty of holiness, and shine forever as the sun in the kingdom of my Father.

02.03. ASPIRATIONS AFTER HOLINESS

3. ASPIRATIONS AFTER HOLINESS

"With my whole heart have I sought you: O let me not wander from your commandments." Psa 119:10

Blessed Savior! Oh lover of my soul, give me grace to love you. Never, oh, never let me forget what you have done for an unworthy sinner! Let me never forget your bloody sweat, your cross and passion, your known and unknown agonies, when you made your soul an offering for sin. Oh! that I had a heart to love you with a supreme affection. Come, blessed Spirit, shed abroad in my heart a Savior's love, and that will kindle mine. Sit as a refiner's fire, as a purifier of silver, until the dross of sin is consumed, and your holy image be reflected on my soul; yes, until I be made fit for the inheritance of the saints in light. Give me a hatred of sin; preserve me from the wiles of Satan; deliver me from the workings of pride; save me from a worldly spirit, from a carnal mind, from sensualized affections.

Oh! fountain of all spiritual life, quicken my dead soul to act with energy in the cause of truth; give me a thirsting after holiness; strengthen my faith in the Redeemer's righteousness; my reliance on his power; my confidence in his grace; my hope in his promises; my assurance in his love. Fill me with holy joy, tranquility, and peace. Take what you will of earth away, only give me your Blessed Self, and then, through grace, I shall sing in the darkest seasons; triumph in death; and shout hallelujah in glory.

Manifest yourself, Almighty Jesus, in these days of rebuke and blasphemy, when infidelity, popery, and anarchy are combining to overthrow your church, that church, which you have purchased with your blood, that "congregation of faithful men," however differing in name, whom you have chosen out of the world. Make bare your arm as in the days of old. Stir up your people to arm themselves for the combat, with the armor of your providing for attack and defense- with the belt of truth; the breastplate of righteousness; the shield of faith; the helmet of salvation; the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; and with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, that they may be able to withstand in the evil day, and be faithful even unto death.

Preserve me, gracious Savior, from false philosophy; from that wisdom which is from beneath- the poison of the old serpent. Alas! how is your glorious plan of redemption perverted by men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth. Preserve me from that spurious charity and mistaken toleration, which would embrace in its arms every error, every false doctrine, every heresy; and from that infidel liberality, that boasted freedom of sentiment, which delights to darken the clearest truths, and would root out of the world, if it were possible, the saving knowledge of your Divinity, your Atonement, and Intercession.

Oh, Son of God, one with the Father, God over all, blessed for evermore, give me grace to build all my hopes for heaven on You, and You alone; to plead nothing before the Throne of offended Justice but your blood and righteousness; to acknowledge my sinfulness with deep contrition; to

loathe myself in your sight and my own; and to praise you by a life of loving obedience, for all that you have done and suffered for me, the chief of sinners. Give me grace to know my weakness, my worthlessness, my wretchedness, my danger. Impart unto me your Holy Spirit, that I may apprehend your saving merits; that I may taste that you are gracious; and be filled with all joy and peace in believing.

O, my soul! spread your needs before the Lord, who is ever more ready to hear than you are to pray. Lord hear my prayer, give hear to the voice of my supplication. I want to feel a greater delight in God. I want to look up to God, as my covenant God in Christ. I want a greater freedom of access to Him through the Son of his love. I want a more vigorous faith; a more spiritual understanding; a greater ardency of affection. My mind is dark; my spiritual feelings are benumbed; I seem to myself cold and lifeless! Lord quicken me according to your word. I see many around me who live only to You. Many hearts are burning with love to Christ, and zeal for the salvation of perishing millions. I behold glorious Societies flourishing in our land. Like so many trees of life, they spread their fruitful boughs over the earth, while their leaves are for the healing of the nations. O, how awful! -to be dark, in the midst of light- cold in the midst of holy fire- dead in the midst of life! Lord grant this blessing, grant that the fire of love may ever be burning on the altar of my heart, and never go out. Oh! what a precious gift is a new heart. This is the new covenant gift; "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." What a gracious command, "My son, give me your heart."

Blessed Lord, through your abounding grace in Christ Jesus, grant this request of my lips. I want a penitent heart- a heart deeply humbled on account of sin. Only the sight of a crucified Jesus can melt my frozen heart, and cause the tear of penitence to flow, as water from the smitten rock. I want a believing heart, a heart filled with lively faith, and clear views of the power and grace of Christ; a faith, which can draw the healing virtue from the great Physician. Oh! the blessed power of faith, which can make the Savior’s merits mine, and place my sins on him! What joy, what peace, what sweet assurance does this economy of grace impart to the believing soul! I want a loving heart. God is love, and every one who loves is born of God, and knows God.

"Happy the heart where graces reign,

And love inspires the breast."

Oh! that my heart were the abode of holy love; the Spirit thus witnessing with my spirit, that I am a child of God. How I long to feel the purifying influence of this heavenly grace, which assimilates the believer to the saints in glory. I want an obedient heart, the heart of a child, whereby, with filial confidence, I can cry- Abba, Father! As love is the spring of all holy obedience, so obedience is the truest test of love. All profession is vain without obedience to the will of God. The Redeemer’s character was marked by obedience to his Father’s will. His active obedience, and passive sufferings, proved his entire submission as man to the will of God; while, by his obedience unto death, he wrought out a righteousness to justify my guilty soul and to save me from eternal death. O, miracle of grace! the wonder of angels! and the everlasting song of the redeemed.

I want a thankful heart, a heart to praise my God with unceasing praise. A thankful heart is a tuneful heart. Its melody is sweet in the ear of Eternal Love. It is a good thing to be thankful. The joy of the Lord is our strength. Humility will help forward the work of praise, while love will strike the chords of celestial harmony. This I indeed want- one of the richest gifts of grace, a penitent,

believing, loving, obedient, thankful heart. For this will I never cease to pray, knowing that this is the will of God and my sanctification.

Without the blessings flowing from the covenant of grace, through the precious blood of Christ, the greatest monarch, though surrounded by grandeur, is poor; and possessing these blessings, his poorest subject, though encompassed with misery, is truly rich. This truth our blessed Lord has taught us in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The blessings of the New Covenant are beyond all earthly price. Nothing could purchase them but the blood of Christ; none can bestow them but the Friend of sinners, through the indwelling of his Holy Spirit. Lord look upon me in Christ, as a member of his mystical body, then will my soul be filled with your goodness.

In myself, I am nothing but sin and misery. In Christ, I have holiness and happiness, yes, and abound in all things– wisdom for my ignorance, righteousness for my guilt, sanctification for my pollution, redemption for my thraldom. Oh! delay not, blessed Savior, to shower down upon me, the abundance of your grace. Your work is salvation; let mine be praise. You know my heart, which, though hard and deceitful by nature, can be transformed by grace. Make me holy as you are holy. If I am not be a partaker of the divine nature, in all your communicable perfections of love and mercy, faithfulness and truth, righteousness and holiness, I can never enjoy your beatific presence in the realms of light. There, all is holiness, and there, all is happiness. Sin which blighted the earthly, cannot blight the heavenly paradise. There, the tree of life forever bears its celestial fruit; no cherubim, with his flaming sword, guards it from unhallowed hands; for all the ransomed throng, having entered through the gates into the city, the New Jerusalem, have right to the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God, and may eat, and live forever. Oh! that my portion may be YOURSELF, for whom have I in heaven but you, and there is none upon earth I desire in comparison of you.

Spirit of Holiness! descend and dwell,

Within a heart which pants after thee;

Of living water, You the sacred Well,

Spring up, and rise into eternity.

O! shed abroad your love within my heart,

Fill all my soul with every pure desire!

Yourself, dear Lord, in showers of grace impart,

And kindle in me the celestial fire.

Reveal the Savior to my longing soul;

His grace and beauty may I hourly see;

The force of pride and unbelief control,

And clothe me with his own humility.

Be every day devoted to your fear;

Be every moment sacred to your will;

Your voice of mercy, hourly let me hear;

And all your righteous purposes fulfill.

Then, when I draw towards earth’s remotest bound,

A weary pilgrim on life’s dreary road,

Oh! may my soul with Christ my Lord be found,

And spring with triumph to his blessed abode.

02.04. MEDITATION AND PRAYER FOR THE SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

4. MEDITATION AND PRAYER FOR THE SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

"I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways." Psa 119:15

"Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your law." Psa 119:18

While passing through this benighted world, how happy is the man who can say with David: "Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." While surrounded with errors of every kind, how privileged are we, of this highly favored land, who possess the pure unadulterated Scriptures of truth. Oh! that the word of Christ may dwell in us richly in all wisdom. Then we shall know how to choose the good, and refuse the evil. We are too apt to draw our opinions from the writings of men, rather than from the word of God; and to range ourselves under certain theological leaders, rather than follow the mind and commands of Christ. Thus parties are formed in the Church; and charity expires on the field of battle. If I would I reach the Fountain of Truth, I must pass by all uninspired men, however venerated for antiquity; however renowned for wisdom and piety. I must pass by Milner, Scott, and Simeon; Owen, Watts, and Doddridge; Hooker, Hopkins, and Reynolds; Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer; Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin; Tertullian, Chrysostom, and Basil; Clement, Polycarp, and Ignatius; yes the whole army of saints and martyrs, until I come to the Light of the World, the adorable Jesus, whose word is THE TRUTH; and to his inspired Apostles, who were guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth, and whose writings alone contain the mind and will of God under the gospel dispensation.

Here I arrive at the source of truth. Here I find the true Rule of Faith. Here all is luminous, purifying, and consoling. Here I come to the Promiser of light and guidance. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." Here I am told the happy result of searching the Scriptures. "And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul’s message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to check up on Paul and Silas, to see if they were really teaching the truth. As a result, many Jews believed, as did some of the prominent Greek women and many men." They did not receive the declarations even of Paul and Silas with a blind submission, but searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things which they spoke, were so; that is, in accordance with the predictions of the Prophets. This search was not displeasing to God, for faith is his gift, and many of them believed.

The beloved Apostle has commanded us to guard against being entrapped by error: "Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world." Our blessed Lord has given us the same caution with respect to their character: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."

How are we to try the spirits? Isaiah tells us: "To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this rule, it is because there is no light in them." How are we to form our judgment of character? Our Lord has taught us: "You shall know them by their fruits." "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit; therefore, by their fruits you shall know them."

The judicious Hooker has forcibly expressed his opinion on the subject of 'Tradition.' "When the question is, whether we are now to seek for any revealed law of God anywhere than only in the sacred Scripture; whether we do now stand bound in the sight of God, to yield to traditions urged by the Church of Rome the same obedience and reverence we do to his written law, honoring equally and adoring both as divine? Our answer is, No! Those who so earnestly plead for the authority of Tradition, as if nothing were more safely conveyed than that which spreads itself by report, and descends by relation of former generations unto the ages that succeed, are not all of them (surely it would be a miracle if they should be) so simple as thus to persuade themselves; howsoever, if the simple were so persuaded, they could not be content perhaps very well to enjoy the benefit as they account it, of that common error. What hazard the truth is in when it passes through the hands of Tradition; how maimed and deformed it becomes. Let those who are indeed of this mind, consider but only that little of things divine which the heathens have in such a way received. How miserable had the state of the Church of God been long before this, if, lacking the sacred Scripture, we had no record of his laws; but only the memory of man receiving the same by report and relation from his predecessors."

Oh! how delightful it is to open the Book of God, with the full assurance that there all is TRUTH; pure, unadulterated Truth! What, then, must we think of that Church, which would debar her members of this inestimable gift of God? Time was, when the Holy Bible, like a prisoner, was fastened by a chain in our Parochial Churches; but now it is furnished with wings, and flies from east to west, from north to south, proclaiming the gospel of the grace of God.

This blessing may be withdrawn if we slight or abuse it. Dark clouds are gathering around us. Oh! that we may be found faithful; that we may have a humble, teachable spirit; a prayerful frame of mind, to receive the revelations of God's will with an earnest desire, through the Spirit, to live under its influence. Then will Christ be formed in us the hope of glory, then we shall be prepared to dwell with him in glory everlasting.

When I read the blessed Scriptures of truth, what amazing love and mercy do I find contained in one single promise! How inconceivably great, then, is the whole treasure which lies concealed in this sacred volume. Like the rich ore in the mountain, the most precious lies the deepest, but when found it well repays the laborer's toil. When I read the writings of pious men, whether ancient or modern, I must always peruse them with caution, and bring them to the test of Scripture.

Tradition is useful for establishing a fact; but must not be exalted into the tribunal of Scripture; for Christ himself has declared, "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day." Those who read the Scriptures with little attention, receive little comfort from them. But the Christian, who not only reads, but marks, learns, and inwardly digests them; who peruses them with prayer for God's Spirit to understand them, and then meditates upon them day and night, finds them a well of salvation; they become his delight and his counselor, and by them he is made wise unto salvation through

faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Lord! open my understanding that I may understand the Scriptures; that I may know you, the only true God, as therein revealed; and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent, as my Sacrifice, my Righteousness, my Example; to know whom is life eternal. Teach me to know myself, the vileness of my nature, the depravity of my heart, the sinfulness of my life, that I may fly out of myself to Jesus, for pardon, peace, and holiness.

Teach me to know, by blessed experience, the work of the divine Spirit, that being convinced of sin; all pride and self-love may die in me; and being led to the cross of my Redeemer, love and gratitude may fill my soul, and invigorate my endeavors to please you.

Teach me to know the vanity and emptiness of the world; its insufficiency to gratify the desires, or satisfy the longings of the new-born soul; yes, its utter inability to make its most devoted votaries happy.

Teach me to number my days, to estimate their shortness and uncertainty, that I may not procrastinate in the great work of salvation. When I think of a dream or a flower, I am reminded of the fleeting life of man. Your word is full of warnings, cautions, and admonitions, to awaken my solicitude about eternal things.

Teach me to value the bliss of heaven above all earthly joys- to dread the torments of hell above all earthly sorrow. Alas! how often do the pleasures of sense blunt our sensibilities to those things which are above; while the troubles of time obliterate from our minds the misery which awaits the impenitent and unbelieving.

Teach me, O blessed Savior, cheerfully to refuse the pleasures of sin, which end in everlasting torment; and cheerfully to endure those trials, for your sake and the gospel’s, which terminate in endless glory.

Oh! my soul, remember where you are, in a world of sinners, yourself a sinner. Time is flying with rapid wing. Eternity, with all its solemn realities will soon open before you. Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation; tomorrow, the door of mercy may be closed; tomorrow, your state may be everlastingly fixed. Tomorrow? Oh! my soul, boast not yourself of tomorrow, for you cannot tell what a day may bring forth. While you are forming schemes of happiness for many years, the word may have passed the lip of the Eternal: "You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you."

Call together your scattered powers, which have too long wandered amid the vanities of time. Let all your faculties be brought to ponder well the solemn truths of God. Meditate on everlasting things. Soon must your old companion, this mortal body, be consigned to the tomb, there to moulder into dust, until the all-awakening trumpet of the archangel shall rouse it from its earthly bed, to stand, re-united to yourself, before the judgment-seat of Christ. But, you, my soul, can never die. When the hour of dissolution comes, you only change your habitation, remaining ever a conscious, thinking being. Your powers, when freed from the burden of the flesh, will be more expanded, and more fitted for the extremes of bliss or pain. O then how important is the enquiry– on what state shall I then enter? in what habitation am I then to dwell?

Unfold the sacred volume, the Scriptures of the God of truth, and there you read, that the righteous shall go into life eternal, but the wicked into everlasting fire. Who then are the righteous, and who are the wicked? This, you learn also from these sacred oracles. All, who live in open, willful sin, despising, rejecting, or neglecting the gospel of Jesus Christ; all, who will not have Christ to reign over them; all, who love the world more than God; all, who hate holiness, and die in this impenitent, unbelieving state, are denominated wicked, and shall have their portion in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.

All, who come, as lost sinners to Jesus Christ, weary of the service, and heavy laden with the guilt of sin; all, who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness; all, who are seeking with earnest solicitude, for the pardon of sin, for peace with God, for purity of heart, through the blood and Spirit of Christ; all, who through the power of the Holy Spirit, resist the devil, crucify the flesh, renounce the world, live by faith in the Son of God, esteem him precious and altogether lovely, labor to win souls to Christ, by prayer, by influence, and by example; are called righteous in the sacred Scriptures, and shall go into life eternal.

Now, oh! my soul, behold the truth spread before you. The countless millions which populate the earth are divided into only two classes by Him who searches the heart; the righteous and the wicked, saints and sinners, the sheep and the goats. Two states are prepared for them in the world to come: heaven and hell. No middle class is specified in the word of God; no middle state, no imaginary purgatory is revealed. Here on earth, the wheat and the tares grow together; here, pain and pleasure, sin and holiness, are strangely intermixed; but there, in the eternal world, it will be forever- unmixed bliss, or unmixed woe; unmixed evil, or unmixed holiness; joys unspeakable, or anguish beyond conception. To which of these classes do I belong? If I determine this, I shall know my future state.

Oh! eternal Spirit of Truth, enable me to examine myself as in your sight; yes, in mercy search me and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.

Have I true faith in Christ?

Simon Magus believed; but he was in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity, though by baptism a professing member of the visible Church. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. The Spirit of Christ dwells in him, to renew his soul in righteousness, to fill him with all goodness, and to prepare him, by a life of holiness on earth, for a life of happiness in heaven.

Have I put off the old man, with the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him who created him? Is sin, in all its forms, odious in my eyes and hateful to my heart? With relentless hand, have I torn the entwining mischief from my bosom, and cherished with delight the blessed motions of the Spirit? "Those who are Christ’s, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." His servants are dead unto sin and alive unto righteousness. They serve God in all holy obedience, delighting to do his will.

Have I mortified the members of my body, and crucified all inordinate inclinations and desires? Do I never serve sin and the lust thereof? Can I freely part with it though it cost me much– the love of former friends, the esteem of the world, and the prospect of earthly gain? Do I esteem all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord?

The true believer can say- The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world by the Cross of Christ. His heart is in heaven. He abides in Christ, and Christ in him. Have I renounced the world and all its sinful pleasures, its carnal company, its vain amusements? Are my friends, the friends of Jesus? Is Jesus the Hope, the Joy, the Treasure of my soul? Is my acceptance with the Father founded wholly on the righteousness of the Son? Disclaiming all merit in myself, have I received the gospel as a message of grace, a revelation of love to perishing sinners? Do I receive Christ into my heart by faith in all his saving offices of Prophet, Priest, and King? Do I dwell in Him, and He in me!

Am I clothed with humility?

The redeemed of the Lord are humble; they look at the rock from where they were hewn, and beholding their honored station, as living stones in the spiritual temple, they exclaim, Lord! why me? When I find, on strict examination, that many former sins are subdued, and many once neglected graces attained, can I say from the heart, by the grace of God I am what I am; in the Lord alone have I righteousness and strength? Feeling the influence of holy love, am I pressing forwards in the path of holiness? Under the constraining love of Christ, am I running the race set before me, hastening with unwearied step towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus?

Do I bring forth the fruits of faith?

True faith is known, like a good tree, by its fruits. Do I cherish benevolent thoughts towards my fellow creatures, as well as fellow Christians? Is the conversion of sinners to Christ, the ardent desire of my soul? While preserved from the allurements of the world, can I pity and pray for those who are drawn away by them, as well as pardon those who speak reproachfully of me, because I dare not run with them to the same excess of riot; because I dare not be found in companies and places where God is not; where his Spirit does not preside, where his fear is not found?

What is my conduct with respect to relative duties?

To be really holy, I must be relatively holy; holy in all manner of conversation. In every situation of life– as a child, a husband, a father, a master, a subject, have I searched the word of God to know the duties required of me in these particular relations? Have I diligently and frequently examined myself by that holy standard, in order to obtain a more perfect knowledge of myself, both as respects my attainments and deficiencies? Do I daily implore forgiveness for all my short-comings, and seek for grace to amend what is wrong? Does my heart overflow with gratitude to the Giver of all good, if, in any humble measure, I have been enabled to grow in grace and in the knowledge of my God and Savior Jesus Christ? Can I take encouragement from the experience of divine mercy, to pray with greater boldness for more faith, more hope, more love; knowing, that to him who has, shall more be given, and he shall have more abundantly?

Am I content to be nothing, that Christ may be all in all? Are my thoughts continually running after God as my only resting place in this ever-agitated world? Have I, in all sincerity, given my heart to God, and made a full surrender of myself to him? Have I submitted myself, through grace, to the righteousness of God, and received salvation as the gift of sovereign love, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus?

Oh! eternal God, who knows the hearts of all the children of men; you know that I desire to love you. In mercy fulfill the desires of my heart, desires of your own creating, for if I love you, it is because you have first loved me. Pardon what is amiss; restore what is defective; sanctify me wholly in body, soul, and spirit; and when the summons is given to call me hence, receive me to yourself, as an everlasting trophy of redeeming love!

02.05. THE PROMISES OF GOD

5. THE PROMISES OF GOD

"All the promises of God in him are yes, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God." 2Co 1:20

When I read the Scriptures, almost every page presents to my heart most precious promises, adapted to console and strengthen the mind under every trouble. But an important question arises: To whom do these promises belong? Has every one, who calls himself a Christian, a right to the comfort of them? Have I a right to appropriate them to myself? Lord enable me to deal faithfully with my own soul, lest I be deceived in one of the greatest of all concerns- for what can be compared with Eternal Salvation?

The Scriptures expressly declare, that all the promises of God, ALL, none excepted, in Christ are yes, and in him Amen. As in Jesus are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, so, in him, all the promises of God meet and unite as their proper center. To have a legitimate interest in these promises, I must have a saving interest in the merits of Christ. But here another question naturally arises, a question of vast importance to the peace and comfort of my soul. How can I tell, whether I have a saving interest in the merits of my Redeemer, and so have a scriptural right to the enjoyment of the privileges and promises of the Gospel?

The Bible gives me clear information on this point also. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." "If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him." From hence I learn, that if I am without the Spirit of Christ, I am in a state of condemnation, and consequently can have no claim to the consolatory promises of the Gospel. As many, and no more, as are led by the Spirit of God to the foot of the Cross, are the sons of God. And those only who have the Spirit of Christ, and therefore are in Christ, are heirs of glory.

But, if any man is in Christ, he is a New Creature; born from above; renewed in the spirit of his mind; made a temple of the Holy Spirit. This is the character of the redeemed as portrayed in the word of God; they are washed from their sins in the blood of Christ; justified by his righteousness, sanctified by his Spirit; a mansion of glory is prepared for them; they are the loved by the Father, and to them belong all the promises of grace and mercy clustering on the Tree of Life.

Now, Oh! my soul, as in the presence of the Judge of the living and dead, before whose tribunal you must shortly appear, bring all your inmost thoughts to the touchstone of his word. See how far your inward state approaches towards this exalted standard; whether you bear the infallible marks which designate his chosen people. Alas! how many deceive themselves by false marks, and by an unscriptural standard, calling evil, good; and good, evil; putting darkness, for light; and light, for darkness. Lord make me sincere and faithful to you. The heart, I well know, by painful experience, is deceitful above all things. Pride, that old leaven of my fallen nature, is ever ready to interrupt these searchings of heart, by whispering, "all is well;" and making a merit of those actions, which, if brought to the test of truth, would overwhelm me with confusion.

Blessed Savior! I desire to be yours; to follow you with a single eye, and in simplicity of spirit; to be delivered from the bondage of corruption, from the power of sin, from unholy imaginations. Cause me to abound in every grace, that you may be glorified; that I may be fitted to hold sweet converse with you in solitude, apart from the noise and follies of the world. In the days of your flesh, you set your disciples a bright example of holding communion with your Father. In your word I read how you went into a solitary place, and there prayed; how you withdrew into the wilderness, and prayed; how you continued all night in prayer, separate from your disciples, on the lonely mountain. May I love retirement with You; then I shall be able to say, I am not alone, for you are with me. O manifest yourself to me at such seasons as you do not unto the world. Enable me to pluck the grapes of Eshcol, the sweet fruits of the promised land, the precious pledges of those richer fruits which grow in the paradise above. May I feel your love, though I cannot find words to express its sweetness; yes, may I feel it flowing into my soul in daily increasing streams, until all sin is borne away, by the force of this resistless torrent.

How glorious are your promises, they are yes and Amen; they are like yourself, immutable. When the enemy comes in like a flood, and suggests that I am not the Lord’s; oh! in mercy lift up a standard against him. Let your Spirit bring to my troubled mind some peace-restoring promise, to confirm my faith, to confound my foes, to strengthen my heart by his heavenly consolations. In sorrow, in sickness, and in death may I trust in your faithfulness, repose on your promises, and triumph through your grace. Under every trial, like David, may I encourage myself in the Lord my God, and like him, be enabled to say- "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." Thus, upheld by your powerful arm, I shall pass over Jordan in peace; reach that happy shore, where angels will welcome my entrance into bliss; and where I shall enjoy the blessed fulfillment of your promise: "Where I am, there shall also my servant be."

The promises of God have a transforming efficacy through the power of the Holy Spirit; for "unto us," writes Peter, "are given exceeding great and precious promises, that by them we should be partakers of the divine nature." How wonderful! worms of the earth, sinful dust and ashes, to be made partakers of the divine nature! Well may angels desire to look into these things. Man, fallen man, who lost the image of God, can now, through the Gospel of Christ, through the promises of his grace, be restored to the divine likeness. The Apostle might well call them exceeding great and precious promises; precious, beyond all price; exceeding great, beyond all calculation.

Like Peter, his "beloved brother Paul," extolled the promises of God, not only as yes and Amen in Christ Jesus, but as purifying the hearts of believers through faith. "And what union can there be between God’s temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: "I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore, come out from them and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord. Don’t touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete purity because we fear God."

The promises of God, when rightly embraced, never fail to quicken the speed of believers in their heavenly course. They then can run with patience the race that is set before them, looking into Jesus, while animated by the promises of his love. They are no longer slothful, but followers of

those who through faith and patience inherit the promises; treading in the footsteps of the flock, until they reach the heavenly fold. Oh! who can grasp this one thought- "inherit the promises;" yes, all the promises of life and salvation, of grace and glory, which are made to man, from Adam in Paradise, to the closing of the canon of Scripture by John? Every thing that is sublime, glorious, blissful, and holy is contained in the promises of God in Christ. To inherit the promises, is to inherit all things; all that Christ has promised out of his fullness; and all that his people are capable of enjoying, when perfected in glory. Why, then, do we grovel like worms of the earth, when we should be mounting with wings as eagles- yes, soaring, as on seraph's wings, towards the realms of light?

"My soul cleaves unto the dust, quicken me, O Lord, according to your word." Put your fear into my heart that I may not depart from you. Your ancient people, through unbelief, died in the wilderness; therefore, writes Paul to the Hebrew Christians, "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left to us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." May this warning of your Apostle awaken my solicitude, and lead me to You for faith, to persevere under every discouragement; for hope, to animate my soul amid every conflict; for love, to urge me forwards with unceasing energy, through every opposition from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Blessed Jesus! yourself the promised gift, and the Promiser of eternal blessings, give me Yourself, and then, with you, I shall inherit all things.

Sweet is the promise of your grace,

So freely made to me;

When shall I end my earthly course,

And dwell, dear Lord, with thee?

Firm as a rock your promise stands;

Your Truth and Love endure;

Oh! may I love your bless'd commands,

And make my calling sure.

The precept and the promise, Lord,

You have so fitly joined,

That in the volume of your grace,

They ever are combined.

Without the promise- all is dark;

Without the precept, vain!

Your wisdom, by their union, gives

Your people's richest gain.

O! may I love your precepts more,

Your promise more enjoy,

’Til I shall reach the world of bliss,

Secure from sin’s alloy.

There will the riches of your grace,

Be like a boundless sea;

The Promise, and the Promiser,

My Portion ever be.

02.06. THE FALL OF MAN, AND HIS RECOVERY BY GRACE

6. THE FALL OF MAN, AND HIS RECOVERY BY GRACE

"O Israel, you have destroyed yourself; but in me is your help." Hos 13:9

God is the Almighty Sovereign of the universe! He made all things by the word of his power; and for his pleasure they are, and were created. Contemplating the Sovereignty of Jehovah, Solomon declared, "Whatever God does, it shall be forever; nothing can be added to it, nor any thing taken from it; and God does it, that man should fear before him." Nebuchadnezzar, when humbled under the mighty hand of God, confessed: "His dominion is an everlasting dominion." "All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he does according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what do you? Let all the earth, then, keep silence before Him. Let all the world stand in awe of Him who has said: My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

Those angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, God has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day, without one single ray of hope, or promise of forgiveness. Who dare deny their righteous condemnation- their just punishment, torments without mitigation, and anguish without end? Their expulsion from heaven was not an act of arbitrary power. They sinned- therefore God spared them not, but cast them down to hell- into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Man, created in the image of God, fell from his state of holiness and happiness, through the deceitful wiles of the old serpent, Satan, the adversary of God and man. By the righteous judgment of Jehovah he was doomed to die. "Dust you are, and unto dust shall you return." None of the children of Adam have been exempted from this sentence, for "Death passed upon all men, for all have sinned;" none, but Enoch and Elijah, who were translated, that they should not see death, as types of the ascending Savior. The Lord of life and glory, bowed his head, and died. His precious body was laid in the tomb, but death could not hold him; He saw no corruption; He burst the barrier of the grave, and rose triumphant, the Victor of death and hell. He is the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in him, though he dies, yet shall he live; and whoever believes in him shall never die. Oh! glorious revelation of grace and mercy!

The moment our unhappy parents ate of the forbidden fruit, thus rebelling against the Sovereignty of Jehovah who had a right to command, while it was their duty and happiness to obey, they became spiritually dead. The Spirit of God forsook them; the image of God departed from them. Thus forsaken by God, Satan made them his prey, and filled them with all unrighteousness. They were lost to every holy disposition, to all heavenly joy. They became the willing slaves of every sinful affection, of every hateful and hurtful lust. Such is man by nature. Such is the effect of the fall.

Grace alone can counteract the evil, and produce a new creation. Do we find mankind, at this moment, different from the awful picture drawn by the pencil of Truth: "God saw that the

wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," "evil from childhood." Is not the world still filled with Cains, and Nimrods, yes, with giants in iniquity? Ah! then let not pride deny the solemn truth, that we are shaped in iniquity, and conceived in sin; that we drink in iniquity like water, and have turned every one to his own way. O my soul, with deepest self-abasement acknowledge the justice of that sentence: "You shall surely die."

The moment Adam sinned, he not only became a dying creature, "dying, you shall die;" he not only lost the image of his Creator, but he was every moment liable to eternal death. Nothing but the breath he drew, formed the barrier- slender indeed! between time and eternity, between earth and hell!

Angels sinned and fell to rise no more. Man sinned and fell, but oh! to grace how great a debtor, daily, I am constrained to be! The hand of mercy was stretched out, the voice of mercy was heard in sweetest accents- "the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head." From that moment a door of hope was opened; a ray of consolation beamed on the souls of our fallen parents. "The seed of the woman" was the Gospel sound- the glad tidings of great joy- the source of hope and peace. "When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons; and because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." Thus writes the great Apostle to the Gentiles, when expatiating on the love and faithfulness of God. Be deeply humbled, O my soul, while contemplating the Sovereignty of God. Let every unhallowed feeling be subdued, while looking into the deep profound.

In strictest justice, the Almighty might have left the whole human race to perish. He was therefore under no obligation to save any. The prohibition in Paradise was clear, the sentence definite- "You shall not eat of it, lest you die." Our first parents did eat and died. Adam, being the federal head of the human race, all his posterity fell in him. "In Adam all die," all, to the end of time. Thus, in strict justice, God is bound to save none; for all have sinned, and come short of his glory. But God is pleased to save some, therefore their salvation must be all of grace. None can claim this mercy as a right; all may petition for it as a free gift, through Jesus Christ.

The offer of salvation is as extensive as the human race. The seed of the woman, the adorable Jesus, when he had wrought out a full redemption for us, commanded his Apostles just before his ascension into heaven, to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature; assuring all the fallen sons and daughters of Adam, that whoever believes, and is baptized, shall be saved; but that whoever believes not, shall be damned. Thus mercy and judgment, life and death, heaven and hell, were to be set forth by a preached Gospel, to animate the hopes, and awaken the fears of the sons of men.

All men have not faith, therefore all men will not be saved; they reject the counsel of God against themselves; they refuse his offers of mercy; they will not accept Christ as their Savior; they will not submit to him as their king: therefore, if they perish, they perish justly, and in the day of judgment they shall stand before the Lord of glory, speechless and self-condemned. Are any saved? it is through the grace of God- through the love of a dying Savior, through the operation of the Holy Spirit producing faith in their hearts to lay hold of, and delight in, the ever precious Jesus.

Have you received this gift of grace, a saving faith in the adorable Redeemer? Then, cease not, O my soul, to extol the Giver of such sovereign mercy. Why should the Sovereign of the universe condescend to visit you? Why should he pour this oil of grace, this unction from the Holy One, on you? Why convert you into a vessel of mercy fitted for the Master's use, while thousands around you are vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction, through their own willful transgression? Why is this? Amazement seizes on my mind! Love and praise should fill my heart! O why is this? Because he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. I must resolve all into the sovereign will, the electing love, the free grace of the Great Jehovah.

If I choose Him as my portion, it is because he has first chosen me. If I love him, it is because he has first loved me. If my heart is given to him, it is because he loved me and gave himself for me. If I am united to him, it is because he drew me with the bands of a man, with the cords of love, in fulfillment of his own most precious word: "I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself."

Many reject this blessed truth. The pride of man cannot bear this humiliating doctrine, so subversive of human merit. But what are its genuine effects? It humbles the sinner, it exalts the Savior, and promotes holiness. That doctrine must be true, which places Christ on his throne, and the creature in the dust; which opposes the evil of sin, and delights in holiness!

To all who are taught of God Christ is precious. He is their All, in All. They receive him as their Prophet, Priest, and King. They trust in him as their Atonement, Righteousness, and Advocate with the Father. They receive the gift of the Spirit through his intercession, to renew them after the divine image; to give them persevering grace; to make them conquerors over sin and Satan; to bring them in triumph into the realms of glory, and there to place them before the throne of the Eternal, as monuments of redeeming love.

O all-glorious Jehovah! guide me into all truth. Make me to know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. Enable me to perceive and relish the Gospel of your grace. Take away the scales of error and prejudice from the eyes of my understanding. Remove pride and the love of sin from my heart. Give me grace deeply to bewail the corruption of my nature, as well as the transgressions of my life; to acknowledge your justice in the destruction of sinners, as well as your mercy in the glorification of your people. Impress my soul with an abiding sense of the evil of sin; and with an increasing conviction of the beauty of holiness. Cause me to abound yet more and more in faith, and love, and every grace, until rising, as on seraph's wings, my liberated soul shall mount aloft to your abode.

When I consider how soon the mind is disturbed by earthly cares, and delighted with worldly comforts; how soon the imagination is filled with scenes of promised pleasure; and how easily the affections are borne away on those painted bubbles which burst and vanish into air– I might be amazed that cares, and comforts, and pleasures of so superior a nature as those which the Gospel reveals, should make such little impression, yes, be even forgotten gotten by myriads of professing Christians, did not the Bible unfold the awful truth.

The care of the soul, which is the one thing needful; a solicitude to obtain the favor of God through the atoning blood and all-prevailing intercession of the Lord Jesus; a thirsting for the consolations of the Spirit, which flow from communion with God through Christ, and which are the foretastes of

those pleasures which are at his right hand forevermore, would be the daily desire of our hearts, if sin had not so entirely blinded the judgment, debased the affections, perverted the will, and turned the whole soul out of the way of holiness into the broad road of destruction.

This is the case, not with a part, but with the whole human race without exception. All flesh has corrupted its way before God; there is none righteous, no, not one. My heart bears its own sad testimony to this scriptural truth. Everything within me bespeaks my condemnation. There is not one spark of goodness in me. As a shipwrecked mariner, I must sink beneath the waves, if help is not provided. But oh! how wonderful is the love of God against whom I have sinned. He stretches out his arm of mercy to save me from perishing. He speaks with melting kindness: "You have destroyed yourself, but in me is your help." Placed on the Rock of Ages, on Jesus, the sure Foundation, my soul is penetrated with gratitude while I listen to the gracious voice of my Redeemer– "I, even I, am the Lord, and besides me there is no Savior." "I, even I, am he that blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember your sins." "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Such are the expressions of Infinite Love to encourage, and comfort, every lost sinner who is enabled by grace to lay hold upon Christ crucified as his hope of glory. Exclaim, O my soul, with the enraptured Prophet: "Where is another God like you, who pardons the sins of the survivors among his people? You cannot stay angry with your people forever, because you delight in showing mercy. Once again you will have compassion on us. You will trample our sins under your feet and throw them into the depths of the ocean!" Strike your harp with David- "You Lord are good and ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy unto all those who call upon you." "I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; and I will glorify your name for evermore. For great is your mercy towards me, and you have delivered my soul from the lowest hell." Join in the chorus of the saints around the throne: "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever!"

02.07. THOUGHTS ON THE MYSTERY OF REDEMPTION

7. THOUGHTS ON THE MYSTERY OF REDEMPTION

"Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness." 1Ti 3:16

"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." Deu 29:29

Almighty and everlasting Jehovah! clouds and darkness are round about you. Many deep and unfathomable mysteries are contained in your sacred word, yet on this my soul relies– that You O Lord are good; and that there is no unrighteousness in you. In the day of judgment, you will manifest your Justice and Truth, and silence the accusations of your enemies forever. Let me not, O Lord, indulge a sinful curiosity in prying into those things which you have wisely concealed, but keep my soul as a weaned child. Make me wise unto salvation through faith in your dear Son. Impart unto me, your unworthy servant, the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of you, that the word of Christ may dwell in me richly in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, producing in me the peaceable fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God.

In your word I read, that man is born in sin, and therefore deserving of eternal death. In your word I read, that Jesus died, and through the merit of his precious blood has obtained eternal redemption for us. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with loving-kindness and tender mercies."

If it be asked- Will all the fallen race of Adam enter into the Ark which mercy has provided? Alas! no. As it was in the days of Noah, so it is now– the thoughtless, giddy, unbelieving world is as much occupied as the Antediluvians were, though warned by that preacher of righteousness, in eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, smiling at the superstitious fears of the faithful, and feeling no concern about the threatened judgment. But those who love the world shall perish with the world.

"As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." "The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." How, then, comes it to pass that any are lost? Because they themselves choose the path of destruction, and will what is wrong, and persist in it; for sin consists in willing wrong, and the wages of sin is death. Men will not come to Christ, that they might have life; they will not have him to reign over them, therefore thus says the Lord, "I will ’destine’ you to the sword. All of you will bow before the executioner, for when I called, you did not answer. When I spoke, you did not listen. You deliberately sinned—before my very eyes—and chose to do what you know I despise."

But does not the Spirit of God graciously strive with sinners? Yes! he does strive with them, though they resist his heavenly motions, grieve him by their ingratitude, and finally quench the holy fire.

This is evident from– "My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for he is mortal," corrupted and depraved. And with whom did he strive? With those who perished in the waters. "In your love, you were patient with them for many years. You sent your Spirit, who, through the prophets, warned them about their sins. But still they wouldn't listen! So once again you allowed the pagan inhabitants of the land to conquer them. But in your great mercy, you did not destroy them completely or abandon them forever. What a gracious and merciful God you are! Also from– "They rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them." "You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? But your ancestors did, and so do you!"

Founded on the truth, Paul thus warns the Christian converts to whom he wrote "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption." "Quench not the Spirit." How pathetically does the God of all grace expostulate with his fallen creatures– "Why will you die, O house of Israel?" "Oh! that you had hearkened to my commandments; then your peace would be as a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea." "Oh! that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me and keep all my commandments, always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever." "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets, and stone those who are sent unto you, how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not."

Impressed with a deep sense of the blessedness of obedience, how solemnly, yet affectionately, does David charge his son Solomon: "And you Solomon my son, know the God of your father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands all the imagination of the thoughts: if you seek him, he will be found of you; but if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever." Thus, all who perish, perish through willful disobedience to the divine command. The sinner will be condemned, because he willfully rejected the offers of mercy, so lovingly made to him, through Christ in the Gospel; because he stifled the convictions of the Spirit; because his will was uniformly opposed to the will of God.

"This," said our Lord to Nicodemus, "is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that does evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." Paul declares: "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." "To be carnally-minded is death."

How, then, comes it to pass that any are saved? Because God is love. "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments and do them." "You has he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." "By grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Thus the Holy Spirit overcomes the natural enmity of the will, and influences the sinner, by enlightening his understanding, to choose the way of life, opened to him through the Atonement of Christ, as revealed in the Gospel.

But, does the Spirit of God never 'force' the will of the sinner to accept of salvation? No, never. The sinner is not dragged against his will to the foot of the Cross, but he is drawn there through the sweet constraining power of love. "It is in the nature of the will, to will freely whatever it wills; for the

will cannot be compelled." Compulsion and willingness are directly opposed to each other. God, therefore, in the conversion of sinners, acts upon them, by his grace, not as machines, but as rational creatures. If man chooses death, it is owing to his moral depravity, and the fault is entirely his own, because he wills it, as a free agent. "I have loved strangers, and after them I will go." But if he chooses life, it is through the enlightening and awakening influences of the Spirit of God, who works in him to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Yet, be it ever remembered, the choice is his own. It is the voluntary act of the renewed will- "When you said, Seek my face; my heart said unto you, Your face, Lord, will I seek." So, when Saul was converted, he cried out– "Lord, what will you have me to do?" He was now made willing in the day of God's power to perform a cheerful and willing obedience.

If the view now taken of man's condition here, be scripturally correct, we must come to this conclusion: that man is a free agent, a responsible being, justly chargeable with the guilt of willfully refusing the offers of divine mercy through Christ; and yet, that it is wholly of grace, if he becomes willing to accept of these offers and is finally saved.

Fallen man, if left to himself, would never love God; he would never come to God; his rebellious will would forever oppose his approach to God. On this account it was, that the Redeemer said: "You will not come to me that you might have life," and, "No man can come unto me unless the Father who has sent me draws him." "Him that comes unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

Now, O my soul! praise the Lord, who has showed you in his word these precious truths. Use the means which he has appointed for obtaining the blessings of salvation. Go to your God through Jesus Christ. Beg earnestly the pardon of your sins through his atoning blood. Implore the Spirit's aid to illuminate your mind, to rectify your will, to purify your affections, to take away the serpent's enmity, the serpent's poison from your heart, to guide you into all truth, to give you an unshaken faith in the Savior, a delight in holiness, a cleaving unto God while life and being last.

But, O my soul, never dare to fathom with your scanty line, the deep things of God. While standing on the brink of the vast profound, unite with Paul in his self-abasing exclamation: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out." And with David, "Your judgments are a great deep." "Your way is in the sea, and your path in the great waters, and your footsteps are not known."

Act upon this great truth– that the mysteries of redemption are revealed to us as objects of faith, not as subjects for doubtful disputation. They are made known to us for our salvation, not for the indulgence of unhallowed speculation. Vain man would be wise, but "the world by wisdom knew not God." "All your children shall be taught of God and great shall be the peace of your children," is the sweet promise made to the Church in every age. Eve wished to be wiser than infinite wisdom ordained, and her knowledge was dearly bought. Eden, with all its holiness and happiness, its peace and joy, was lost; a thorny wilderness, with cares and sorrows, disease and death, became her portion. Learn, then, O my soul! to bow with child-like submission before the Great Eternal. Though clouds and darkness veil his vast designs; Judgment and Justice form the basis of his throne–

"Not angels that stand round the Lord

Can search his secret will,

Yet they perform his heavenly word,

And sing his praises still!"

Go, and do you likewise, relying on Him who has said, "My grace is sufficient for you."

02.08. SALVATION BY GRACE

8. SALVATION BY GRACE

"By grace are you saved. " Eph 2:13

Awful would have been the condition of fallen man, had he been left to work out his deliverance by the Covenant of works. The command- 'Do this, and live,' as well as the threatening- 'Transgress and die,' would have fast barred the door of hope against him. If his conformity to the divine law had been the only way of escape, despair would have made him its prey, and his doleful cry would have been: Farewell glory and happiness; farewell heaven forever!

But, blessed be God, adored be his grace– he has not left us in this hopeless, helpless, and undone condition. By his Gospel he has revealed Himself to us as a just God and a Savior; just, and yet the justifier of all who believe in Jesus. A way of escape is now opened to us through the Cross of Christ. A city of refuge is prepared to receive every trembling sinner who is pursued by the avenger of blood. Lord! I feel more and more that I am a sinner; yes, the chief of sinners. Every day brings fresh proof of my corruption, and lays me in the dust before you. My just deserving is everlasting burning; nothing less than this do I deserve; nothing more than this can I ever merit. Lord, my name is sinner; my nature is depravity; my heart is sin itself. What, then, can I hope for, when I thus contemplate myself, but repulsion from your presence, when I appear before You seated on your throne of Justice, surrounded by ten thousand tines ten thousand pure and happy spirits. These angelic beings will acknowledge the justice of that sentence which frowns me into hell. Oh! my God, and is this indeed my dreadful state by nature? Alas! it is.

But on this darkened cloud, whose bosom is filled with elements of destruction, shines the rainbow of mercy. In the midst of the earthquake, the whirlwind, and the fire, I hear a still small voice, speaking accents of grace, and, bidding me not to fear, only to believe. Oh! my soul, can this be true? Does mercy rejoice against judgment. Can God be gracious to the vilest of the vile, and yet remain unsullied in his holiness, uninjured in his justice? Can he receive sinners, and yet manifest his hatred against sin? Well may angels desire to look into these things.

Admire, O my soul, with never-ceasing delight, the glories of sovereign grace, the riches of redeeming love, the transcendent mercy of Almighty God! A Savior is provided for you, suited to your every need. In Him, you have Wisdom, for your ignorance; Strength, for your weakness; Pardon, for your sin; Righteousness, for your guilt; Holiness, for your pollution; Redemption, for your bondage; Light, for your darkness; Life in God, for your death in sin; Hope of glory, for your dread of hell. All this, and much, much more is Jesus to you, if you can believe in Him!

What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits- how shall I show forth all his praise? O my soul, give God the Father, the glory of your whole salvation, who thus freely devised this amazing plan of saving rebels from the wrath to come. Give God the Son, the glory of your whole salvation, who so willingly submitted to meet in your nature, the wrath of incensed Justice, who so patiently sustained for you its accumulated vengeance, who so graciously turned it away, though it burned

against you to the lowest hell. Give God the Holy Spirit, the glory of your whole salvation, who with such wonderful forbearance has, for years, been striving with you to draw your fugitive affections from forbidden objects, and place them on the precious Jesus; by whose almighty power, you have in some degree been brought to cleave unto, to love, rely upon, and trust in the ever-adored Savior as your only sacrifice for sin, your only justifying righteousness, your only Hope of glory. Oh! blessed Trinity in Unity, accept the praises of a poor unworthy sinner! Inflame my love, that I may praise you better both in lip, and heart, and life, until I am translated to that world of joy where praise will be unceasing and eternal.

Come, O Spirit of all grace and truth, come into my heart and take up your abode there. Oh! come and dwell in me, unworthy as I am of such a Guest. Make me willing, I humbly beseech you, to welcome your approach, to receive you with joy and gladness. Come into my heart, O Pledge of eternal blessings. Fill me with light and love. Cause the fruits of righteousness to abound in me, as a living branch in the true Vine. Come, and manifest yourself to my soul, You, who are the Seal of everlasting salvation. Let me bear the impress of your holy nature. Be the inward Witness, testifying to my conscience that I am a child of God, enabling me to cry, Abba, Father.

From first to last salvation is all of grace, whether I consider the love of the Father in devising, the love of the Son in executing, or the love of the Spirit in applying, its blessings to my heart. How wonderful is the work of the Holy Spirit on the soul. His operations are remarkably declared by our Lord when about to leave his disciples. To them, he would be a COMFORTER; to the world, a CONVINCER of sin. Meditate, O my soul, on these two characters of the divine Spirit, and adore that grace which so wonderfully seeks out the lost sinners of mankind.

Before the promised Comforter could be given, it was expedient that Christ should go away, that he should be offered up as a sacrifice for sin, that he should triumph over the powers of darkness; that he should ascend to the Father. This blessed purchase of his blood is now poured out on the sons of men, and works in mercy upon his Church and on the world.

To the world he is the CONVINCER OF SIN. "When he comes," said Jesus, "he will reprove the world of sin," "because they believe not on me." All other sins are included in the sin of unbelief. It is the root from where spring all those poisonous branches which have shed their hateful influence through every age. The fruit of this tree is death. All the miseries which have deluged the earth, sprang from unbelief. Eve disbelieved the word of her Creator, and fell. All her children have trodden in her steps, and with her, have fallen into depths of woe. How pathetic is the cry of David "Out of the depths have I cried unto you, O Lord." The Bible is full of the vials of wrath, poured out upon an apostate world, because of unbelief. The history of nations, is but the history of human crimes, and of human miseries, because of unbelief. All the sorrows of time, all the agonies of eternity, may be traced to the sin of unbelief. Great, then, is the work of the Spirit, to convince the world of sin, because, said the Savior, they believe not on me.

When I look around me and contemplate the great mass of mankind, unbelief appears like a mighty ocean overspreading the human race. Pagans, Mohammedans, Jews, are all alike wrapped in the darkness of unbelief! That portion of the world, nominally Christian, is also covered with this blinding evil. Thousands, who have been baptized in the name of Christ, remain destitute of the Spirit of Christ. Baptized infidels, baptized profligates, scandalize the Christian name, and form a stumbling-block to Jews and Gentiles. Thousands who profess that they know God, in

works deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work, reprobate.

The world is their idol; at its shrine they devote themselves. Present pleasures, present honors, present profits, are the things they covet, the things for which they toil, the things for which they expend their time, their talents, their all. The future is hidden behind the thick mists of unbelief. They neither see, nor long for, the pleasures which are at God's right hand; for the honor which comes from God only; for the riches of his grace and glory. Oh! how great, how merciful is the work of the Spirit, when by his power, he enlightens the mind, touches the conscience, awakens the fears, and melts the heart of the worldling, convincing him of sin, of the deadly sin of UNBELIEF, in rejecting, despising, or neglecting, the Savior of the World.

When unbelief is removed from the heart, the next operation of the Spirit is to reveal to the sinner, (now enlightened to perceive his danger) where HELP is to be found. He displays to him, in all its glory, that Righteousness which Christ wrought out for him by his obedience unto death, and arrayed in which, as in a garment of salvation, he can stand before the throne of Justice, accepted in the beloved. He then makes known to him for his encouragement and joy of faith, the triumphs of the Savior, his victory over death and hell, and how the prince of this world is judged and overcome.

Such are the manifestations of the Spirit as promised by our Lord to the world: "And when he comes, he will convince the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. The world's sin is unbelief in me. Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more. Judgment will come because the prince of this world has already been judged." Oh adorable Redeemer, pity a world sunk in unbelief and sin. Stretch forth your almighty arm. Rescue the perishing millions of mankind from sinking into the fiery abyss of hell. Manifest yourself as in the days of old, when thousands on the day of Pentecost were cut to the heart, crying out, Men and brethren, what shall we do? who, gladly receiving the word preached by your Apostle, confessing their sins, and professing their faith in you, were baptized in your name, and added to your Church.

Now, let me meditate on those operations of the Spirit promised to the true disciples of Jesus. To them, the Holy Spirit is a COMFORTER. Delightful visitant! None but those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, who have found rest in believing, whose souls repose on the bosom of their beloved Savior, can comprehend the felicity contained in this endearing name- the Comforter. Oh that my heart may daily enjoy the consoling influences of this celestial Guest, in fulfillment of that promise- "He dwells with you, and shall be in you."

He is also the Spirit of TRUTH. "When he is come, he will guide you into all truth." The Spirit guides us into the truth of all the promises, and of all the prophecies, which, centering in Christ, receive their full accomplishment in Him, for Christ is Himself the Truth, and to know Him, is to know the truth. What a blessing, in the midst of abounding errors, to have such an unerring Guide.

The Spirit is the GLORIFIER OF JESUS. "He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." The Spirit glorifies Christ, when he reveals him to us in all the glory of his nature, as God manifest in the flesh; in the glory of his character, as our Mediator, Advocate, and Friend; in the glory of his offices, as our Prophet, Priest, and King; in the glory of his work, as our Redeemer and Savior of the world. Oh that I may have grace to glorify him by receiving him

into my heart by faith; by casting the burden of my sins upon him; by delighting to hold communion with him; by living wholly to him, who lived and died for me. Thrice happy they, who from the inward working of the Spirit, can say with Paul: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."

How free was the Savior's grace to the woman of Samaria: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, Give me to drink; you would have asked of him, and he would have given you living water."

"Jesus, the gift divine I know,

The gift divine I ask of thee;

That living water now bestow–

Your Spirit and yourself, on me;

Oh, Lord, of life the fountain art

Now let me find you in my heart.

Oh, let me drink, and thirst no more,

For drops of finite happiness;

Spring up, O Well, in heavenly power,

In streams of pure, perennial peace;

In joy, that none can take away,

In life, which shall forever stay.

Father! on me the grace bestow,

Unblameable before your sight,

Where all the streams of mercy flow,

Mercy, your own supreme delight;

To me, for Jesus' sake, impart,

And plant your nature in my heart."

02.09. THE SUFFICIENCY OF DIVINE GRACE

9. THE SUFFICIENCY OF DIVINE GRACE

"My grace is sufficient for you." 2Co 12:9

Self-knowledge is an invaluable attainment. Without it, we resemble a vessel, driven during the midnight darkness, amid rocks and quicksands, and which is every moment in danger of being dashed to pieces. Temptations and dangers surround us on every side. The stormy gusts of passion hurry us here and there; no wonder, then, while destitute of chart and compass, if we finally sink beneath the yawning waves.

Few men know themselves. This science can only be taught in the school of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the divine Teacher. He alone can make us savingly acquainted with ourselves. Unbelief and pride, the love of the world and carnal inclinations, blind the mind and corrupt the heart. Many, who esteem themselves to be wise are total fools in God’s estimation. Many, who call themselves righteous, are an abomination in his sight; for God sees not as man sees; man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.

The teaching of the Holy Spirit is enlightening, convincing, purifying, and consoling. The first operation of the Spirit is light. When darkness was upon the face of the deep, God said, "Let there be light, and there was light." In the new creation, light springs up at the command of God. "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This light, darting into the conscience, produces conviction of sin, by discovering, in all its hideousness, the monster that dwells within. "Vice is a monster of such frightful appearance, that to be hated, needs but to be seen."

Sin becomes truly odious when viewed by the light of the Eternal Spirit. Its nature and effects are then known, and felt, and deplored. This sight of ourselves is truly humbling. Self-abhorrence is the fruit of deep conviction. Nothing can lay the sinner in the dust of humiliation but the searching light of the Spirit. This candle of the Lord, shining into the inward parts, into the chambers of imagery, discovers the secret abominations which are practiced there. Oh what hidden evils are made manifest by the light- evils of every name, the progeny of hell. Self-love sickens at the view. Pride shrinks before the appalling spectacle.

This loathing of sin, this prostration of soul at the foot of the Cross, is accompanied, through the power of the Spirit, with a longing after inward purity. The soul, thus enlightened, convinced, and humbled, pants after that holiness which forms so essential a part of the new creation. Everything which brings the soul into a nearer conformity to the divine image is delighted in. Holy thoughts, affections, and desires are now the natural and spontaneous workings of the new-born soul. Once it was winter, cold, barren, and gloomy. Now it is the season of warmth, fruitfulness, and cheerfulness. "For the winter is past, and the rain is over and gone. The flowers are springing up, and the time of singing birds has come, even the cooing of turtledoves. The fig trees are budding,

and the grapevines are in blossom. How delicious they smell!"

Joy and peace, like the beauteous flowers of Eden, spring up and adorn the garden of the Lord. Praise and thanksgiving with the voice of melody form a concert in which angels join. Filled with gratitude for such divine consolations, the believer thus pours out his heart: "Awake, O north wind, and come O south wind, blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruit." Jesus the beloved one, answers to this call in accents of love: "I have come into my garden, my sister, my spouse. I have gathered my myrrh and my spices." Oh! how delightful is this communion between Christ and his Church. Well may the believer say: "My beloved is mine, and I am his." "My beloved is the chief among ten thousand." "He is altogether lovely."

Though reconciled to God, through Jesus Christ, yet, like the Israelites of old, the believer must buckle on his armor, and prepare for the conflict, knowing that there still remains very much land to be possessed.

"Man’s is laborious happiness at best,

His joys are those of conquest, not of rest."

The enemy within, will unite with the enemies without, in contending with him every inch of the way to Zion. Every day he will find that there are fightings within, and fears without, to discourage his heart, to retard his steps, to make his soul weary because of the difficulty of the way. But, as the soldier is not sent on a warfare at his own charge, so neither is the Christian warrior. Provision is made for him by the captain of his salvation, equal to his need:

"Jesus gives us in his word,

Food and medicine, shield and sword."

Oh my soul, you can never sufficiently praise the Lord your God for all his rich promises of protection and care. Many times you are cast down and sad when the enemy oppresses you; many times you tremble, as if the power of the Prince of darkness would finally overcome you. But do not be dismayed. What do you read in the word of Truth, for your support and consolation? "As your days, so shall your strength be." Do you ask, who spoke these life-inspiring words? It was not the announcement of some mighty monarch, with his fleets and armies. It was not the proclamation of some great archangel whose powers surpass all human thought. Oh delightful truth! they are the words of Him who cannot he; whose power is infinite; the Eternal Jehovah, the everlasting God, speaking through his servant Moses.

Jesus, who is God over all, blessed for evermore, is the Fountain of grace and mercy. He alone can give to his people the assurance of hope, because none but He is infinite in power, and infinite in grace. Hear his own declaration, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." "My grace is sufficient for you." Rejoice, O my soul, rejoice in this, that as none but Christ, who is God manifest in the flesh, could make this promise, so, He in faithfulness will assuredly fulfill it. Blessed promise indeed! how suitable to the needs and weaknesses, the fears and failings, of his people. Away, then, unbelieving fears, since Jesus has said- "My grace is sufficient for you."

What have I now to do, but to go to the strong for strength, to go in the full assurance of faith and hope. But alas! my faith is weak, and too often wavering, when the wind of temptation blows upon it. Let me, then, without delay, plead this precious promise, founded on the truth, and sealed with the blood of Christ. With this promissory note in my hand, ever payable on demand, when presented by faith and prayer in the name of Jesus, I need not despond. I shall receive in return what will supply my every need out of the fullness which is in Christ Jesus. Out of his fullness, I shall receive, and grace for grace.

Am I tempted by small temptations? There is grace sufficient. Am I assaulted by the hottest batteries of hell? There is grace sufficient. Am I brought down into the valley of poverty? There is grace sufficient. Am I raised to the dangerous heights of earthly grandeur? There is grace sufficient. Am I treated as the offscouring of all things for Jesus' sake? There is grace sufficient. Am I brought down to the chambers of death, racked with pain, and worn out by disease? Still there is grace sufficient. My needs are many, but my supplies are infinite. Though millions of weak, tempted, persecuted, dying believers, have been invigorated in every age by this living water, yet its streams are undiminished; it still remains as it ever was- Grace Sufficient! Sufficient to relieve the needy, to strengthen the weak, to pardon the guilty, to sanctify the unholy, to support the disconsolate, to comfort and save all, however vile and worthless; who sincerely, fervently, and perseveringly seek for it, through faith in Christ.

Oh for a stronger faith. Lord give me faith, and increase it. Let the dew of your grace be ever falling on my soul, that I may blossom as the rose, that I may bear fruit to your glory. Endue me with power to withstand the temptations that surround me. Enable me to fight the good fight of faith, to lay hold on eternal life. Give me persevering grace through Jesus, my only hope and stay. His grace is sufficient for me, by whose power I am rescued from the jaws of Satan, by whose blood I am cleansed from sin, by whose righteousness I am delivered from the curse of the law, and made an heir of glory. For his sake, O heavenly Father! strengthen me with strength in my soul, that I may be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus my Lord, until all my sins are subdued, Satan vanquished, and death swallowed up in victory. Then, in the glorious day of Christ's appearing, ten thousand times ten thousand voices will shout the triumphant hallelujah, praising, adoring, and blessing Him whose all-sufficient grace brought them to the realms of glory.

I will trust your promise, Lord,

Rest in your unchanging word,

Which so kindly says to me;

"As your days, your strength shall be."

Do I feel with guilt oppressed,

Rankling in my wounded breast?

Jesus sweetly calls to me;

As your days, your strength shall be.

I have borne your sins alone,

For your guilt I did atone,

Only now, believe in me,

As your days, your strength shall be.

Ask of me the Spirit’s power,

In the sad, and evil hour;

Then, my goodness you shall see,

As your days, your strength shall be.

If overwhelmed with earthly care,

Banish unbelieving fear;

All my grace shall shelter thee,

As your days, your strength shall be.

When the hour of death shall come,

Hasten to your heavenly home,

Trusting on my word to thee,

As your days, your strength shall be.

Lord, I bless you for this grace,

As I run the heavenly race;

For this promise, rich and free,

"As your days, your strength shall be.

02.10. THE DYING LOVE OF CHRIST

10. THE DYING LOVE OF CHRIST

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep." John 10:11

The parable of the good Shepherd is beautiful and affecting. The Jews could fully enter into the character of a shepherd. They were well acquainted with the cares and hazards of a pastoral life, in a country where beasts of prey so often invaded the fold. This imagery was familiar to them from the Psalms of David and the writings of the Prophets. "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name." What a lovely picture of a shepherd and his flock, applied with such exquisite feeling by David to himself.

"Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you that lead Joseph like a flock; you that dwell between the cherubim, shine forth." Such was the prayer of the Psalmist to the God of Israel, that he would graciously vouchsafe to his people a shepherd's care. "Thus says the Lord God, Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep." "I will feed them in a good pasture." "I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek that which was lost." What can be more gracious than this manifestation of the divine solicitude for his chosen people.

Jesus styles himself the good Shepherd, thus bearing the very character in which the God of Israel was revealed to his Church. Christ is Jehovah our Shepherd; the good Shepherd, who gives his life for the sheep. His work of love is sweetly described by himself. "I have come to seek and to save that which was lost." "I know my sheep and am known by them." "My sheep recognize my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. So no one can take them from me. The Father and I are one."

That heart must be harder than adamant, which can hear unmoved these gracious words from the lips of eternal love. Oh! that my heart may be melted and subdued by these expressions of infinite mercy. "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." Blessed indeed are those who form a part of this redeemed flock, purchased by the blood of the good Shepherd.

The majesty and humiliation of Christ, his Godhead and Manhood, will form a subject for admiring contemplation, a theme for adoring praise, throughout the ages of eternity. How am I lost in wonder, when I begin to meditate on the grace of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty might be made rich. When I consider the dignity of his nature, one with the Father, by whom all things were made, and by whom all things held together; in whom I live, and move, and have my being- when I contemplate his transcendent greatness, his infinite perfections, his immensity, his eternity- when I reflect upon his unspeakable felicity, the overflowings of his love to myriads of angelic spirits who

surround his throne, happy in his presence, and delighting to perform his will- when I thus contemplate the ever-glorious Jesus, how am I lost in wonder and amazement, when, bending down to earth, I behold him an infant of days, lying in a manger, working as a carpenter, not having a place wherein to lay his head, mocked, scourged, spit upon, and at last, with every aggravation that malice could invent, nailed to a cross, and pierced with a spear!

Great indeed is the mystery of godliness. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us;" that Word which was with God, and was God. How can we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? In the fullness of time Christ came, emptying himself of all but love, that, as the good Shepherd, he might give his life for the sheep. He came to magnify the law, by bearing the curse for us, by shedding his blood for us. He came to make it honorable, by fulfilling all its requirements in our nature, and by his sinless obedience, even unto death, to work out a righteousness for us. He came to reconcile us unto God, to save us from going down to hell, to purify our corrupted nature, and to make us partakers of his everlasting glory.

Oh my soul, never cease to love and praise this all-gracious Redeemer, whose love is unspeakable, whose riches of grace are unsearchable, whose purchased blessings are eternal. View him in his glory with profoundest adoration. View him in his abasement with deepest humiliation. Behold, by faith, the Lamb of God, that Lamb of God’s providing, extended on the Tree, his body covered with bloody gore, his ears assailed with the scoffs of his executioners, his soul pierced with the sword of justice, which then awaked against the shepherd, against the man that is Jehovah’s fellow. Behold this sacred victim bleeding on the altar, as a sacrifice for your sins, in dreadful conflict with the powers of darkness, groaning under the tremendous load of human guilt, which would have overwhelmed all except a God Incarnate.

Behold him in this most pitiable condition, at this mysterious hour, forsaken by his heavenly Father: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" O doleful cry! O mysterious exclamation! Sin, what have you done, you murderer of the Prince of life! For whom did Jesus bleed and die? for sinners, rebellious, ungrateful sinners; for me, the chief of sinners! Oh! my soul, melt into contrition at the foot of the Cross; behold what terrible effects your vile apostasy has produced; and never cease to love this gracious Savior, who, in boundless mercy and compassion, divested himself of his celestial glory, which he had with the Father before the world was, that he might take upon him the form of a servant, and being made in the likeness of man, might humble himself and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross!

O blessed Jesus, increase my faith, inflame my love, animate my hope, and stimulate my obedience, until my frail endeavors here below are perfected in heaven. Then shall I sing your praise in purer strains; then shall I proclaim your dying love with all the ransomed throng, who, on their golden harps, forever strike the chord, "Worthy is the Lamb."

You men of the world, grasping after sordid gain; you votaries of pleasure, dancing on the borders of destruction; you aspiring souls, whose eyes are fixed upon the pinnacles of power; you self-righteous professors, who make your works the sole foundation of your trust- look at the suffering Jesus! You hear of his dying love, but you regard it not. Ah! for a moment listen to these moving words, prophetically issuing from the lips of the pale, tortured, agonized Redeemer, who, beholding your cold, your cruel indifference to his sorrows endured for your sakes, thus addresses you: "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see if there is any suffering like

mine, which the Lord brought on me in the day of his fierce anger."

O my soul, pray earnestly for those thoughtless, senseless beings, that the Lord the Spirit may smite every rocky heart, and cause the waters of godly sorrow to gush out in plenteous streams- yourself, the hardest rock of all!

Though Isaiah complained: "Lord, who has believed our report." Though Paul reiterated the complaint; still bright days are in reserve for the church of God. The prophecies glow with descriptions of glory. Language fails to depict the fullness of the blessings of the Gospel of Christ. How rich, how varied, are the promises made to Christ, for in him, they are all yes and amen, to the glory of God. As the stars in the firmament, they shine throughout the pages of Holy Writ. Faith, standing like Moses on the top of Pisgah, views the length and breadth of Immanuel's Land.

While mourning over the world's dreary map, as presented to your view, cast your eyes, O my soul, over the predicted realm of the glorified Messiah! "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." "They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, says the Lord." "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." "I shall give you the heathen for your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession." "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before you." "In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endures. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end." "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen says the Lord of Hosts." "Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in: and so all Israel shall be saved." "I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying; Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigns." "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ."

Truly, when this period arrives, it will be as life from the dead. The word is spoken, and cannot be reversed; for Jesus, who is the Truth, has declared, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." To his ancient Church, the Almighty declared: "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." And what is his counsel? what is his pleasure? That the dying, risen, glorified Redeemer shall see his seed, shall prolong his days, shall see of the travail of his soul, shall be satisfied, shall justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities, shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul unto death, was numbered with the transgressors, bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

The Man of Sin, with his anti-Christian power; the false Prophet, with his licentious code; the votaries of gods innumerable, with rites so bloody and obscene, shall fall before the Cross, shall vanish as the mist before the sun. The cry will then be heard– Babylon has fallen! has fallen, to rise no more. The Gentiles shall then cast their idols to the moles and to the bats. The proud crescent of Mahomet shall then wane and disappear from beneath these heavens. The Jews shall then embrace the crucified Messiah, as their long-expected king. Then truth and righteousness will prevail. "On that day even the harness bells of the horses will be inscribed with these words: Set apart as Holy to the Lord. And the cooking pots in the Temple of the Lord will be as sacred as the

basins used beside the altar. In fact, every cooking pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be set apart as holy to the Lord Almighty. All who come to worship will be free to use any of these pots to boil their sacrifices. And on that day there will no longer be traders in the Temple of the Lord Almighty."

Then will all who worship God, worship him in spirit and in truth. Jesus will reign, the universal King, for "the King of the whole earth shall he be called." Lord, hasten your kingdom; take unto you your great power, until every heart shall crown you Lord of all.

Soon must I quit this transitory scene;

Soon will the sweetest bonds of love dissolve!

To cease from man, from earth my heart to wean,

Before death o’ertake me, be my firm resolve.

Great God! how just are your divine decrees;

How just the doom for man’s rebellious sin;

The curse is uttered- and cold death shall seize

The race of Adam, until the world he win.

But You have said- Your right hand shall unbar

Sepulchral caverns through your Spirit’s power;

Lord, we confide, amid this doleful war,

On You, whose grace shall bring Redemption’s hour.

O blessed Hope! triumphant Faith divine!

’Tis Jesus calls us to partake his joy;

Christian advance- the Victory now is thine,

The conquering Savior shall your foe destroy.

He lives on high- we soon shall see his face,

Securely stationed on the heavenly plain;

Where, clad with beams of his reflected grace,

Our souls, with Jesus, shall forever reign.

02.11. THE WILLINGNESS OF CHRIST TO RECEIVE SINNERS

11. THE WILLINGNESS OF CHRIST TO RECEIVE SINNERS

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." John 6:37

Jesus is the great Teacher of heavenly wisdom, and simple-hearted believers are his disciples. Renouncing their own wisdom, they sit, like Mary, at his feet, to hear the words of eternal life. Like her they have chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from them. Blessed Savior, impress my heart with this great truth, "One thing is needful." May the salvation of my soul be the great object of my desire. Make me a simple-hearted believer. Let me not distract myself with things which are too high for me, but make me desirous for the sincere milk of the word, that I may grow thereby.

Your word declares, that "all have sinned." O, give me grace with unfeigned contrition to acknowledge myself a sinner, deserving of everlasting banishment from your presence. Your word declares, that there is no other name given among men, whereby they can be saved, but yours alone. May this precious name be ever my plea before the throne of Justice; my strong tower and castle of defense against the accusations of Satan, and the just demands of your most righteous Law. You have yourself declared- "Without me, you can do nothing." Do not allow me to rely a single moment upon my own strength, which is perfect weakness, but to lean wholly on your almighty arm, which can alone uphold me amid the dangers of the way, and conduct me in safety to the heavenly city.

Your word, with a solemn distinctness speaks to my heart; "If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Heavenly Father! impart unto me the Spirit of your dear Son, that I may be born again of the Spirit; have your Spirit dwelling in me, as the Spirit of adoption; and be made the temple of the Holy Spirit. Then will your work of grace appear, by the transformation of my soul into your image; by my separation from a world that lies in wickedness; by my being turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

Preserve me from all inward impurity, and outward impiety. O, what a world of wickedness may be in my heart, while no glaring irregularity is visible in the life. Lord make me sincere. Let my love be without hypocrisy; that so the internal purity of my heart may be evidenced by the external piety of my daily walk. Thus shall I be continually growing in faith, and love, and every grace, until grace is ripened into glory.

O my soul, pour out your grateful praises to the God of your salvation for this assurance of your acceptance. "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." Blessed Jesus! I come unto you, drawn by the cords of redeeming love. I feel a void, an aching void within, which nothing but You Yourself can fill. To you do I now come for pardon and peace; for a new nature, spiritual affections, heavenly desires. You have commanded me to come, and oh! how sweet, how endearing is your call: "Come unto me all you that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Lo, I come!

Through the gracious drawings of your Spirit I approach your bleeding Cross. Accept, blessed Lord, a vile, polluted sinner, whose soul is bowed down with sorrow under the load of sin, whose heart is panting, after you, as the deer pants after the water brook. Lo, I come! and oh blessed assurance, you will never cast me out. You are faithful who has promised; your word is truth, that gracious word on which you have caused me to hope, "whoever comes to me I will never drive away."

I desire, Almighty Savior, a greater conformity to you; to have more of your Spirit; more of the temper and disposition of a new-born soul. When I read of that power of faith, that fervency of love, that assurance of hope, that purity of heart, that gentleness of manners, that simplicity of life, which distinguished many of the primitive Christians from the world around them, I long for a portion of that spirit which dwelt in them, which caused them to adorn the doctrine of God their Savior in all things. Oh that I may be a follower of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Your arm is not shortened; the fountain of your love is not dried up. Like yourself, it is eternal- ever flowing, ever overflowing to bless a ruined world! Your mercy is from everlasting to everlasting, upon those who fear you. Your grace is, in every age, sufficient for every coming sinner. Sufficient to convert the soul; sufficient to carry on the work of evangelical obedience; sufficient to complete and crown the whole with heavenly glory. Oh with what joy will the top-stone be raised, with shoutings, "Grace, grace unto it."

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."

God is the Lord by whom we escape death. Conversion is his work. Of myself I can do nothing -nothing that is pleasing in his sight, or profitable to my own soul. But, this moral inability forms no excuse for sin. My inability to glorify God arises from the corruption of my fallen nature; from the darkness of my understanding, the perverseness of my will, the depraved state of my affections; and therefore is justly deserving of eternal condemnation. All mankind come into the world in this helpless state. "The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and good works to faith and calling upon God: wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ assisting us, that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will" (Article 10).

How gracious, then, are these words of Christ: "whoever comes to me I will never drive away." As if he had said Come unto me, you trembling sinners, do not be afraid; I will give you all that you need; Come unto me, I will supply all your need out of my fullness; Come unto me, I will bless you with all spiritual blessings; I will strengthen you by my Spirit, I will comfort you with my promises; yes, I will never leave you, until I have done that which I have spoken to you of- for, "where I am, there shall also my servant be."

O, Eternal God, I would praise you for your unspeakable mercy, for your saving power, in applying the precious balm of the Covenant to my wounded conscience; I would bless you for taking of the things of Christ and showing them unto me; for revealing Christ, as my all-sufficient Savior; for drawing me to his Cross; for uniting me to him by faith as a branch in the true Vine; for making me a member of his mystical body; for working in my heart a holy longing after you. Oh! how can I find words to speak all your praise. But alas, in the midst of these mercies, I feel deeply humbled in

your sight. That law in my members which wars against the law of my mind is continually opposing your work of grace. When I would do good, evil is present with me. I am daily taught by painful experience that my heart is deceitful above all things: that I cannot stand a moment except you sustain me; that I cannot take a single step towards heaven, but as you guide me. The whole work of my salvation is all your own; and to You be ascribed the everlasting glory! Under this feeling of impotency, how encouraging are your words, O divine Redeemer, that "whoever comes to me I will never drive away." Make me as willing to be saved, as you are willing to save me.

The enmity of the carnal mind is ever directed against the work of Christ. The moralist, the formalist, the worldling, and the sensualist, are alike opposed to the humbling, purifying doctrines of the Cross. Holiness is offensive to the unrenewed mind. The more spiritual any religious exercise or book is, the more it is disliked. Give some truly scriptural volume to a lover of the world, and how will he receive it? After glancing his eyes over a few of its pages, he will lay it down with a contemptuous smile. He will pity the enthusiast who wrote it, and the enthusiast who admires it. Give him some newly launched novel, some work replete with wit and humor, and he will devour its contents, even though it requires the midnight oil to finish it. Here, all his heart is engaged, all his passions are excited, imagination ads wings to his flight, and, soaring into the realms of fancy, into the fairy land of unreal life, he sinks into his slumbers, regardless whether he awake in time or in eternity!

O how awful is the state of every unconverted soul! "Death is the detector of the heart." When he knocks at the door, when he shakes his dart over the dismayed worldling, what terror seizes upon his mind! Some, indeed, have no worries in their death. Sin has so seared the conscience and hardened the heart. They go as the ox to the slaughter, insensible of the blow which awaits them. But, the moment the stroke is given, the moment eternity is opened before them, O who can tell the horrors of the disembodied spirit, while hurrying down into the dreadful abyss of everlasting woe? O you perishing sinner, before it be too late, while the door of mercy is open, while the voice of love is heard- listen to the Savior’s words- pray for grace to obey his call: "whoever comes to me I will never drive away." "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst, come; and whoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

With joyful steps, approach the Gospel sound,

Jesus the Lord invites you from his throne;

Salvation is proclaimed to all around,

The heavenly Shepherd claims you for his own.

Fear not you trembling souls, whom sins oppress,

The Savior’s grace is boundless, rich, and free,

His affections yearn over all your deep distress,

In tender love he cries- Believe on me.

To seek and save our wretched guilty souls,

Down from the Father’s bosom quick he flew

See, at the Cross, his dying love controls

The powers of hell- and opens heaven for you.

Come, trembling sinner, let not fell despair

Detain your footsteps from the bleeding Cross;

Come as you are- His blood can make you fair,

His endless love repay your every loss.

Filled with the hope of everlasting joy,

A pilgrim journeying to the realms of bliss;

My Savior’s arm shall every foe destroy,

And kindly seal your ransomed soul as His.

02.12. EARNEST DESIRES FOR CHRIST

12. EARNEST DESIRES FOR CHRIST

"My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you." Isa 26:9

Few people are insensible to the happiness of friendship, though few, comparatively, possess a real friend. Worldly friendships are often little better than "confederacies in vice, and leagues in pleasure." Amid refined society, where all the decencies of life are practiced, and the finer sensibilities of the heart encouraged, friendship may assume its native character in an unselfish affection. But still the lovely charm is lacking. Christian friendship alone is the true panacea for human woes. Its kindly influence seems to make an almost Paradise regained. Cemented by the love of Christ, Christians possess the elements of true felicity. They have been described as one soul in two bodies, actuated by the same principle, walking by the same rule, and directed to the same end.

Many requisites are needed to make a Christian friend. Selfishness is the bane of real friendship. It cannot live in such an atmosphere. Like tender plants, it thrives best in its native soil. A heart filled with the love of Christ, a mind clothed with humility, a spirit endued with that charity which seeks not her own, is peculiarly fitted for the growth of Christian friendship. Here it expands its lovely flowers, and bears its precious fruits.

In the midst of this ever-changing, faithless world, there is a Friend that loves at all times, a Brother that is born for adversity. Jesus is his precious name. Love is his endeared character. His faithfulness never fails. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. In the midst of disquietude, he can give rest. In the midst of sorrow, he can give comfort. In the midst of weakness, he can impart strength. In the midst of predicament, he can give counsel. Oh! what a friend is this! Wherever we are, he is a friend at hand to cheer and support. When we read his word, he speaks to us; when we pray, we speak to him. He is near to those who fear him, and he sheds his choicest gifts on those who love him. He dwells in them by his Spirit, and manifests himself to them, as he does not unto the world. Such a friend is Jesus to his redeemed people.

What a lovely instance of holy friendship is presented to us in the family at Bethany. "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus;" and the Savior was equally the object of their warmest love. Earthly friends are indeed blessed, when Jesus is the friend of both; when each, who loves the other, is the object of the Savior’s love. A union such as this brings down a portion of heaven into the soul. A friendship such as this, like a calm and silent stream, meandering through some lonely glen, pursues its course in unobserved, but sweet retirement. The graces of the Spirit thrive like beauteous flowers in this delightful spot, until the happy souls, cemented by the love of Christ, exchange this earthly for a heavenly paradise.

There is no happiness but in Christ. He is the fountain of living water, the source from where our every blessing flows! O! my soul, never look for peace from the creature, nor expect it from yourself. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He has made peace for us through the blood of his Cross.

He alone, by his Spirit can speak peace to the troubled conscience. Through him, we have peace with God; and through him, we enjoy the peace of God which passes all understanding.

Blessed Savior! shed abroad your love in my heart; fill me with joy and peace in believing. Wash my heart from wickedness; allow no vain thoughts to lodge within me. Give me a single eye, a sincere love to you, a supreme regard to all your commandments. Preserve me, O Lord, from every false way, from false views of your Gospel, from false motives in my conduct. Enable me, O sin-bearing Savior, to cast the burden of my sins upon you; to confess them over you, as the appointed sacrifice for the transgressions of your people; and, oh! bear them away into the land of everlasting forgetfulness.

I feel more and more convinced of this important truth, that to be happy, I must be holy. "There is no peace, says my God to the wicked." "The wicked are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." Every page of the Bible proclaims this truth by precept and example. Universal experience attests the truth of this declaration, by the hourly miseries which sin produces. How can peace dwell in the heart, when the curse of God rests upon it? "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, but he blesses the habitation of the just." When the Israelites were at peace with God, he blessed their basket and their store; when they rebelled, his curse consumed all that they had. The world may appear smiling and happy, but its appearances are deceitful. Many an aching heart is hid under a smiling face.

True peace descends from above. It is the celestial fruit of Paradise. The Holy Spirit alone can produce this blessedness in the soul; therefore, none can possess it, but the faithful in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit, in his sanctifying, comforting influences in the hearts of sinners, is the purchase of the Redeemer’s blood. "Except I go away," said Jesus, "the Comforter cannot come." The blessed Savior went to his eternal glory by the way of the Cross; and thus satisfying the claims of Justice, he made a way for the exercise of mercy. Oh how wonderfully does mercy shine forth in this dark world. Like the physical sun, it gives light, warmth, and fruitfulness to the soul. O divine Spirit, dispel the mists of ignorance from my mind; inflame my heart with holy love, and cause the fruits of righteousness to abound in me. Hear my inward breathings after you. Satisfy my longing desires after your presence. Manifest yourself to my waiting soul, that I may be joyful in you. "Remember me, too, Lord, when you show favor to your people; come to me with your salvation. Let me share in the prosperity of your chosen ones. Let me rejoice in the joy of your people; let me praise you with those who are your heritage."

The eye is delighted, while ascending some lofty eminence, with the ever-varying beauties which are spread beneath it. What bounded the range of vision at the foot of the mountain is now lost in the vast expanse. So it is with the Christian traveler, when he leaves this narrow sphere of earth, and soars, by faith, into the world of glory. How wonderful is the power of faith. As the astronomer, by his telescope, discovers new worlds unseen by the natural eye: so the Christian, by faith, beholds a scene of glory which the natural man cannot discern.

The book of God unfolds to his admiring sight these bright displays of glory, when viewed, by faith, through the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit. No wonder that his heart is filled with longing desires after immortality; with a daily thirsting after Christ. The midnight hour, and the early dawn, find him often engaged in this search after Christ. "My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you." Present attainments are forgotten, while his eve is fixed on what

still remains to be possessed. With the Apostle he can say: "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."

I long to be altogether conformed to the will of God; to be transformed into the lovely image of my Redeemer. I feel a constant uneasiness and restlessness of mind. Why should I grovel here below when Jesus calls me to him? Why rest in this valley of tears, when invited to ascend the Mount of God? I desire a greater elevation of soul, a higher standard of excellence. My soul cleaves unto the dust, when it should be soaring into the skies.

Man was originally created with expansive powers; with faculties capable of knowing, and of holding converse with the Deity. He was formed for immortality. Though now fallen, his children still retain some broken fragments of the once noble structure. The heart resembles a triangle which this round globe of earth can never fill; why else that restless discontent, those disappointed expectations so visible among the votaries of the world? They pant after the possession of ideal pleasures, and when possessed their zest is gone. New delights are panted after, which, when obtained, are equally evanescent. The enjoyments of earth, like the Aurora-Borealis, are ephemeral and deceptive.

O deliver me, blessed Jesus, from unbelief and discontent, from pride and selfishness, from fleshly lusts and carnal desires, from covetousness and an earthly mind, from formality and hypocrisy, from sinful compliances and the fear of man. Save me from myself, from the power of Satan, from an evil world.

Oh! impart unto me the unspeakably precious gift of your ever-blessed Spirit, to be the Witness of my adoption, the Seal of my acceptance, the Pledge of future glory. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Hasten your chariot wheels. Come in all your salvation. Come in all the fullness of your grace and power. Oh! delay not, blessed Savior, to make my soul your dwelling-place. I long, I look for you. With you is the fullness of joy, and in your presence are pleasures for evermore. When I awake with your likeness I shall be satisfied with it. When standing before your throne, with robes made white through your cleansing blood, none, yes, none will praise you with a louder song than I.

Jesus, to You my soul aspires,

Dear Object of my best desires;

With you is life, and joy, and peace,

Without you, all is bitterness.

Reveal your glory to my soul,

O speak- and make a sinner whole;

Restore me to your image, Lord,

Renew me through your powerful word.

Come, blessed Savior, to my heart,

Your saving mercies there impart;

Preserve me from impending ill,

And let me ever do your will.

If called to pass through swelling waves,

By furnace fierce, or yawning graves;

If duty’s path lies through this way,

O from it, let me never stray.

Give me a holy courage, Lord,

A firm reliance on your word;

Beneath your banner I will fight,

When clad with your all-conquering might.

Then, when the work of life is done,

The battle fought- the victory won,

Your grace will give the victor’s crown;

But all the glory is your own!

Chapter 40

02.13. THE POWER OF GRACE, AND THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE DIVINE FAVOR

13. THE POWER OF GRACE, AND THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE DIVINE FAVOR

"The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him." Deu 33:12

The promises of protection to the people of God are as numerous as they are consoling. When Abram returned from the slaughter of the kings, and naturally dreaded the fury of their successors, how graciously did the Almighty allay his fears, "The word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram, I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward." When Jacob was oppressed by the covetousness of Laban, the Lord said unto him, "Return unto the land of your fathers, and to your kindred, and I will be with you." When Esau came with four hundred men to meet him, and Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed, the angel of the covenant blessed him, and dispelled his fears. When Joseph was unjustly cast into prison, the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper. Thus, in every age, the beloved of the Lord have dwelt in safety by him.

Moses, when blessing the tribes of Israel, for their comfort recorded the power of Jehovah: "There is no one like the God of Israel. He rides across the heavens to help you, across the skies in majestic splendor. The eternal God is your refuge, and his everlasting arms are under you. He thrusts out the enemy before you; it is he who cries, 'Destroy them!' So Israel will live in safety, prosperous Jacob in security, in a land of grain and wine, while the heavens drop down dew. How blessed you are, O Israel! Who else is like you, a people saved by the Lord? He is your protecting shield and your triumphant sword! Your enemies will bow low before you, and you will trample on their backs!"

In his prayer, Moses also acknowledges the faithfulness of God: "Lord, you have been our dwelling-place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or you had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God."

How sweetly does David sing of the loving-kindness of the Lord. His heart seems too full for words to express his feelings: "I love you, Lord; you are my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the strength of my salvation, and my stronghold. I will call on the Lord, who is worthy of praise, for he saves me from my enemies." "In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret place of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me upon a rock. And now shall my head be lifted up above my enemies round about me, therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises unto the Lord." "He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God; in him will I trust."

Thousands can witness to this truth, that God is the refuge of his people- a present help in trouble. The eleventh chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews is a precious portion. There we have a host of worthies, who, being dead, yet speak to us through the oracles of God. "All these faithful ones died without receiving what God had promised them, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed the promises of God. They agreed that they were no more than foreigners and nomads here on earth. And obviously people who talk like that are looking forward to a country they can call their own. If they had meant the country they came from, they would have found a way to go back. But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a heavenly city for them."

Who can read this beautiful record of patriarchal faith and patience, without the firm conviction, that, under all the varied scenes of life, "the beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him." Oh! what a sweet thing it is to be in the favor of God, to enjoy his peace, through the blood of Emmanuel; to have an assured interest in the righteousness of Christ; to see the way which leads unto Zion, and to walk therein. What can be called happiness if this not? This is, indeed, heaven begun below, and shall terminate in the enjoyment of heaven above.

And is all this bliss, this glory, this grace, freely offered to me, the chief of sinners? Indeed it is. The voice of mercy speaks to me- the invitation is given to me by an ever-loving Savior "Come unto me, and I will give you rest;" "look unto me, and be saved." But how can I come? By his power. How must I come? Just as I am; for, if I tarry until I am better, I shall never come at all. Under a deep sense of my spiritual maladies I must come, as the lame, the blind, the dumb, and the maimed, came to the Great Physician in the days of his flesh. The longer I keep away from Jesus, the more inveterate will my disease become. All human help is vain. Nothing can reach my case, or effect my cure, but the blood of my Emmanuel.

Behold me, then, at your feet, all-gracious Savior; an humble suppliant for pardoning and restoring grace. Pity me, O gentle Redeemer, you who will never break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. Pity me, O sympathizing High Priest, who was in all things tempted like I am, though without sin. Stretch forth your hand. Speak the powerful word, and your servant shall be healed.

Blessed Spirit! give me faith to believe. All things are possible to him who believes. Let me not doubt the Savior's love, and willingness, and power to save, yes, even to the uttermost. Impart this living principle. I cannot believe through any force of reasoning. You, you, alone, can bestow this precious, special gift of faith. Come in your divine energy and make me from this hour, a real believer in Christ, a faithful follower of the Lamb.

Jesus was lifted up upon the Cross, that he might draw all men unto himself. A free pardon is now proclaimed. All who repent and believe the Gospel shall be saved. To apprehend this by faith is the secret of consolation. But some may ask: When can I know that I am among the redeemed? What assurance can I have that my name is written in the book of life? I answer– when you are saved from your sins– when the new name of love is written on your heart.

If a blind man is restored to sight, will he not be conscious of it? "This one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

If a man, groaning under a heavy burden, is delivered from it, will he not be sensible of the change? "Now I will relieve your shoulder of its burden; I will free your hands from their heavy

tasks."

If a person, laboring under a painful disease, is healed of his malady, will he not experience the blessing? "Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague."

If a man is confined in prison, and is again restored to liberty, will he remain in doubt respecting his deliverance? "When Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety that the Lord has sent his angel, and has delivered me out of the hand of Herod."

If reason and experience declare that we must distinguish between light and darkness; between slavery and freedom; between sickness and health; between imprisonment and liberty, why do we not distinguish between sin and holiness, between a state of condemnation and a state of acceptance with God?

If my blind eyes have been opened by divine grace to see my guilty, lost, and ruined condition by nature; if I have been enabled to view Jesus with the eye of faith as my Prophet, Priest, and King, as the Lord my Righteousness, as the Way of access to the Father; if I have beheld him in all these glorious offices and characters which he sustains in the covenant of grace for the redemption of his people, shall I not be conscious of it?

If the load of guilt which oppressed my soul, and filled me with direful apprehensions of the wrath to come, has been removed through faith in the blood of Christ; and if, in consequence of this faith, I enjoy peace with God, and peace in my conscience, shall I not be sensible of this delightful change?

If the power of sin, which, like an acute disease, was hurrying my soul to the second death, and filling me with the poison of corruption, has been destroyed through the mighty power of God; and my soul be renewed in righteousness and true holiness, shall I not experience this blessed effect of the healthful spirit of his grace?

If, when tied and bound by the chain of my sins, and shut up in the prison of unbelief, I not only heard the voice of mercy bidding me come forth into the glorious liberty of the children of God, but have been led by the hand of the Spirit, to Jesus, the friend of sinners; can I remain in doubt, whether I have been delivered or no? Surely not.

Well, then, O my soul, have you experienced and felt these things? Do not be deceived. It is one thing to know these truths from books and human teaching, and another to know and feel them from the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit. What practical effects do I experience from these truths? Do they make me more humble, thankful, and holy? Am I daily praying to Jesus for grace to love him more, and to evidence my love by an uniform obedience to his will? Am I seeking after a more simple dependence on his all-sufficient merits?

If these be the effects produced and witnessed in my soul, by an universal change in my temper, heart, and life, then, I may take the comfort of the promises made in Christ to penitent, believing sinners; then I may enjoy the foretaste of that glory which shall be revealed in all those who believe.

For the comfort of the Church in every age, John shows, that the knowledge of our salvation is attainable, when connected with childlike obedience and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. "By this we know that we know him– if we keep his commandments." "You know that he was manifested to take away our sins." "He that keeps his commandments dwells in him, and he in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit who he has given us." "We have known and believed the love that God has to us. God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him." "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness." "We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."

Had these been the words of an uninspired believer, would they not, by many, have been condemned as enthusiastic and presumptuous? Even in the face of these blessed declarations of John, so descriptive of his own state, and of those to whom he wrote, an inward experience of the love and faithfulness of Christ, combined with a humble assurance of an interest in his atonement, is still treated as the visionary dream of over-heated enthusiasts.

But infidelity and indifference can never remove the rock on which our hopes are fixed. He who enjoys the sunshine of spiritual joy, can never be persuaded that he is wrapped in midnight darkness. One, in the twilight of divine revelation, could say, "I know that my Redeemer lives." Paul, in the blaze of Gospel day, could add- "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." And John, to strengthen his testimony, declared- "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that our joy may be full." What precious words– that our joy may be full.

Can it then be unscriptural or presumptuous to take the comfort of God’s word, if his love is shed abroad in our hearts; if his will is the rule of our conduct; if to please him is our sincere intention and delight? "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." If we feel the godly motions of the Spirit drawing us from evil, and inclining us to good, shall we call it all delusion? Surely this must be a dishonoring of the Spirit, which none can commit, but those who are destitute of his grace.

Blessed Savior, make me wise unto salvation through faith in You. May I ever take your word as my rule and guide. May I ever repose on your faithfulness and care. Then, in the midst of abounding error, and abounding wickedness, I shall hourly experience the blessedness of the promise, "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him."

Jesus, who hung upon the Cross,

And shed his blood for me,

Displays his power in every herb,

In every flower I see.

The flaming orb that lights the day,

The stars which gild the night,

The rolling sea- the rocky shore,

Proclaim the Savior’s might.

The beasts that roam the woods among,

The birds which fill the air;

Each little insect on its wing,

Bespeak the Savior’s care.

But man, of all his works below,

Lies nearest to his heart;

Give me, blessed Savior, in your love,

A never-failing part.

The objects of your love and care,

In safety shall abide

Beneath the shadow of your wing,

And near your sacred side.

No harm shall ever reach their souls;

No power, their hope destroy;

For you did bleed upon the Cross,

To give them endless joy.

O may I now your image bear,

From Satan’s power set free,

Take up the Cross, despise the shame,

Then reign in heaven with Thee.

02.14. THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

14. THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

"Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." Mat 13:46

The language of true believers in Christ, though they be separated by oceans, and are personally unknown to each other, is experimentally the same. The humble follower of Jesus, who loves the Savior amid the heats of Africa, or the frosts of Labrador; who looks to him by faith, surrounded by the worshipers of Buddha, or the devotees of Mahomet, will be actuated by the same Spirit, governed by the same word, have the same inward conflict, and enjoy the same strength and consolation which his brethren in Christ experience, who enjoy the advantages of intellectual light, and who live in a land of Bibles and churches. The delightful accounts which the Missionaries write of these converted Hottentots, Greenlanders, Hindus, and Mohammedans, prove the truth of the Gospel, and display the power and grace of God.

This verifies, also, Paul’s declaration; "Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same Lord we are serving. There are different ways God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work through all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church." The poor converted Negro is not endued with the same intellectual gifts as the learned but pious Professor of Theology; and yet, their spiritual graces are the same. Both are taught by the same Spirit to know themselves as sinners; both are led to Christ as their only Savior; both have grace given to them, to love and serve him; to confess him before men; to fight the good fight of faith, and to lay hold on eternal life.

And, oh! wonderful revelation of the grace of God! their eternal glory and happiness shall be the same. "After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a mighty shout, ’Salvation comes from our God on the throne and from the Lamb!'"

The Church universal is spread over the face of the whole earth. Outward rites may differ, but the inward work is the same. There may be "differences of administration, but the same Lord." Oh! that we saw more of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," was the truly catholic prayer of Paul, whose heart was large enough to embrace all who bore the image of the Redeemer, and who worshiped him in spirit and in truth- while he commanded Timothy to turn away from such as had the form of godliness, but denied the power thereof; and to withdraw himself from men of corrupt minds, who supposed that gain was godliness.

No outward service can be acceptable to God, if destitute of faith and love. The religion of Christ is the religion of the heart. In such a world as this, and composed as we are of body and spirit, Forms

are needful, to impress our minds, to fix our attention, and to enable Christians to unite in worship with each other. But, outward forms, however imposing, are but like a dead carcass, if unaccompanied by a spirit of love. "O, Lord, who have taught us that all our doings without charity are worth nothing, send your Holy Spirit, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whoever lives is counted dead before you. Grant this, for your only Son Jesus Christ's sake. Amen."

There is in all men a natural thirst after happiness. Their tastes may vary, but their pursuit is the same. This search never fails to end in disappointment, because they do not seek for it where alone it can be found. Did we see men seeking for costly pearls among the pebbles of the British shore, we should smile at their folly. To the anxious pursuers after happiness, the Almighty speaks in mercy- "Ho! every one that thirsts, come to the waters, and he that has no money; come, buy and eat; yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." The fruitless effort of these vain pursuers is forcibly described; "Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink—even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine or milk—it's all free! Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength? Why pay for food that does you no good? Listen, and I will tell you where to get food that is good for the soul! Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, for the life of your soul is at stake. I am ready to make an everlasting covenant with you. I will give you all the mercies and unfailing love that I promised to David."

True happiness flows from true wisdom. But where is wisdom to be found? that wisdom which can enrich, ennoble, and bless the soul? "'It is not here,' says the ocean. 'Nor is it here,' says the sea. It cannot be bought for gold or silver. Its value is greater than all the gold of Ophir, greater than precious onyx stone or sapphires. Wisdom is far more valuable than gold and crystal. It cannot be purchased with jewels mounted in fine gold. Coral and valuable rock crystal are worthless in trying to get it. The price of wisdom is far above pearls. Topaz from Ethiopia cannot be exchanged for it. Its value is greater than the purest gold. But do people know where to find wisdom? Where can they find understanding?"

Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, is the true Wisdom. He is "the power of God, and the wisdom of God." He is made unto us- Wisdom. "Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men." "Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things." "Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man who hears me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoever finds me, finds life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord."

To find Christ is to find life. For "this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son, has life; and he that has not the Son of God, has not life." To find Christ is to find the Pearl of great price. The vast universe, with all its treasures, cannot purchase it. The Hierarchy of Heaven, with all their united excellencies, cannot procure it for us. Infinite Justice demands a price beyond the power of heavenly intelligences to pay. Before this treasure can be obtained through the merit of the creature, whether human or angelic, works must be performed more than God has commanded, and be wrought out by a power beyond what he has bestowed. All that is short of this, will avail nothing, for thus said our Lord; "When you shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do." Where is boasting then? It is excluded. Fallen man, if left to

himself, must sink into the depths of misery; and yet, what thousands toil to save themselves on the plank of their own righteousness!

O, you self-righteous professors, you, who seek to be justified by the works of the law; you who labor to obtain a righteousness of your own, and to claim heaven as the purchase of your doings, learn wisdom before it be too late. Your works, which, in your estimation, are like "goodly pearls," are beheld with abhorrence by a Holy God- those actions which you so much admire and value, are in His sight as "filthy rags."

Seek, then, by faith and prayer, through the Spirit of all grace, the Pearl of Great Price; the Lord Jesus Christ. Sell all that you have to obtain this treasure. So did Paul. "I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own goodness or my ability to obey God's law, but I trust Christ to save me. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith." So did the Apostles; "Lo, we have left all, and followed you." And so did the primitive believers, who, for the Gospel's sake, endured a great fight of affliction, and took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

Oh! what a mystery of grace is contained in these precious words- "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. The Pearl of great price is freely given to enrich my soul.

To all who come this Pearl is free,

To Saul, to Magdalene, to me.

Yes! it is freely offered, without money and without price. And does Jesus thus give himself to my poor sinful soul? He does; and declares, by his Apostle, that to as many as receive Him, to them he gives the privilege to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on his name.

O! blessed Jesus– Savior of my soul, enable me now, even now, to make a full surrender of myself to you. Make me faithful, humble, and sincere. Preserve me from vain-glory and from self-dependence. Give me a single eye, and simplicity of heart. Guard me from the crafts of Satan, and the poison of my natural corruption. Alas! I have daily to mourn over the secret workings of spiritual pride. When I would speak a word for you, how soon does vanity spoil all. Oh! show me more of my emptiness and nothingness, of my guilt and misery. Teach me to prize you as my only treasure, to esteem you, as indeed You are- the Pearl of great price.

Oh! root out of my heart that evil leaven of unbelief, which mars every action; which so awfully dishonors you! Crucify this thief which robs you of your glory, and me of your consolation. Give me a deeper insight into the dark recesses of my heart. Let me descend into this sepulcher, loathsome as the sight may be. Oh! may this view of my pollution endear You to my heart, my Savior and my God. Wash me in the fountain of your precious blood; cover me with the mantle of your perfect Righteousness; purify my soul, through the cleansing influences of your Spirit. Adorn me with Yourself, O Pearl of great price, that I may appear before You as "a bride adorned for her

husband."

The more I read the Sacred Scriptures, the more I find that true religion is seated in the heart. It does not consist in outward forms, however excellent; in orthodox notions, however correct; in frames and feelings, however ardent; in morality of conduct, however admired. It consists in that faith which works by love, which purifies the heart, which overcomes the world. It consists in a vital union to Christ by a living faith; in an entire renunciation of self; in an absolute surrender of the soul to God. It consists in having the understanding enlightened by the truth as it is in Jesus; in having the will swallowed up in the will of God; in having the affections supremely set on things above; in loving God above all created things, and our neighbor as ourselves.

This great work is the operation of the Holy Spirit, and is aptly termed, a new creation- regeneration- the conversion of the soul to God.

Oh! Almighty Savior! You who bled upon the Cross for me; who there poured out your soul unto death for me, how can I adore and praise you as I ought? Alas! in this world, never! All my thoughts, all my affections, all my desires, must ever fall infinitely short of all your praise! And yet, O compassionate Redeemer, you do not reject the sigh of penitence, nor the breathings of the contrite heart. Your ear is open to the softest prayer; to the inmost longings of a loving heart. How gracious are your words; "Whatever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive. Ask, and receive, that your joy may be full." "The high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, the Holy One, says this: 'I live in that high and holy place with those whose spirits are contrite and humble. I refresh the humble and give new courage to those with repentant hearts." "This is what the Lord says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Could you ever build me a temple as good as that? Could you build a dwelling place for me? My hands have made both heaven and earth, and they are mine. I, the Lord, have spoken! I will bless those who have humble and contrite hearts, who tremble at my word.'"

Rejoice, O my soul, at this revelation of love! The heaven of heavens cannot contain You, O my God, and yet You condescend to dwell in the contrite heart! Well may angels rejoice over one sinner that repents, when You, who inhabit Eternity, make his heart your dwelling-place.

What anxious thoughts, what wearying care,

The bosom of the worldling tear!

From morning light, to evening gloom,

Until death consign him to the tomb,

He labors to increase his store,

And thirsts, and longs, and thirsts for more.

Vain man! and why this constant toil,

This digging in the earthly soil?

Your fondest hope, 'tis true succeeds,

But what's the harvest? useless weeds!

Your wealth, with all its glittering store,

You soon must leave- and see no more.

The hour will come when you must die;

With rapid speed your moments fly.

Oh! then what anguish and despair,

What wasted moments, years of care,

Like spectres, will your soul alarm,

And break, of earth, the fatal charm.

There is a Treasure to be found,

A treasure sought on Gospel ground;

He is the merchant truly wise

Who can this precious Jewel prize;

Who, for this Pearl of heavenly birth,

Can give the dearest things of earth.

Jesus, my Lord, this Treasure is,

The source of pure unfading bliss;

Possessing Him, I, all possess,

That can support, and cheer, and bless.

Oh! may this Pearl lie near my heart;

'Twas Mary's choice- her better part,

Which nothing from her could remove,

The gift of God's eternal love.

02.15. CONVERSION OF THE HEART TO GOD

15. CONVERSION OF THE HEART TO GOD

"Turn me again to you and restore me, for you alone are the Lord my God." Jer 31:18

What a wonderful work is the conversion of the heart to God. How far beyond the conception and power of the natural man. It is the work of God. Repenting Ephraim prayed, "Turn me again to you and restore me, for you alone are the Lord my God."

Almighty Father! begin, carry on, and complete this work in me, a worthless sinner. But may I ask so great favor? Your word encourages, yes, commands me to ask it of you. "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call you upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." On what plea can I ask this blessing? On your own infinite mercy. You have revealed yourself in your word, as "a just God, and yet a Savior;" "just, and yet the justifier of him that believes in Jesus;" "as faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Oh! my soul, what undeserved love is this! When God created man, he formed him to show forth his praise. Infinitely happy in himself, he communicated of his own happiness to his creatures. He made man in his own image to manifest his glory. But Adam sinned, and fell! The Almighty, through the riches of his grace, in order to counteract this introduction of moral evil, devised a plan before the foundation of the world, in the execution of which his glory would be displayed, and those of his creatures restored to happiness who sought for mercy in his own appointed way. Jesus, the Savior, was revealed. In the fullness of time, he came forth from the Father, took upon himself our nature, suffered in our stead, made satisfaction to offended justice, and, just before his return to glory, declared, for the unspeakable consolation of perishing sinners- "He that believes, shall be saved." "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

What adequate return could man render to the Lord for all his benefits? What compensation could he make for all this costly sacrifice? None. He was a debtor who had nothing to pay, therefore the Lord, for Christ’s sake, frankly forgave him. Has man, then, no return to make? Yes, he has- a return of gratitude and love. This is what the Lord requires. "My son, give me your heart." We can give him nothing more, and he will accept of nothing less. But how must we give him our hearts? Through his own grace; through the constraining influence of His Spirit. If we love him, it is because he has first loved us. Both the will and the power to turn unto the Lord, and to give him our hearts, is the work of his grace. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Our duty is plainly revealed; we must pray without ceasing, in the name of Christ, for every promised blessing. Whatever God has promised, may be the subject of our prayer, and the object of our pursuit. If we are true believers, the Land of Promise is ours. We may walk through the length and breadth of it, and say- This is freely given to me. Oh! how rich are the inheritors of the promises.

But, how can we know when our souls are converted to God? When we are enabled, through the Spirit, to make a full surrender of ourselves, body, soul, and spirit, to the God of our salvation. Then we may feel assured that the work of Conversion has been wrought within us.

Lord, convert me by your grace. Lead me to the Cross. Fill me with your love, and fit me for your heavenly kingdom. O my soul! what progress have you made in your Christian course since first the Lord of all grace brought you, by his Spirit, into the good old way?

What are your views of God?

Do you reverence his Greatness, his Majesty, and his Omniscience? Are you affected with his Holiness, his Justice, his Power, and his Truth? Have these awful attributes and perfections made you tremble in his presence, when you remember that all of them are directed against you as a sinner?

What are your views of Sin?

When you mourn over its effects, as displayed in the troubles and sorrows, the sicknesses and deaths, which desolate the earth, are you far more grieved at the dishonor which sin brings to God, by lifting its rebellious arm against the Majesty of heaven; and by sinners crucifying to themselves the Son of God afresh, and putting him to an open shame? Is sin beheld by you, as the greatest evil, from where all misery takes its rise? Are you convinced of its deceiving, hardening, and polluting nature, of its baneful, unprofitable, deadly fruits?

What are your views of Yourself?

Have you seen yourself a sinner, a rebel, an apostate creature, deserving of nothing less than eternal fire? And has this view of yourself, humbled you in the sight of that God who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity who hates all unrighteousness, and has declared, that the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all those who forget God?

Have you been convinced of your utter inability to fulfill the righteousness of that law which reaches to the thoughts and intents of the heart; which will accept of nothing less than a sinless obedience, making no allowance for the least deviation from its requirements, but pronouncing him cursed who continues not in all things written in the book of the law, to do them? Has a deep conviction of your own sinfulness, and the utter impossibility of your ever appeasing the wrath of God, or of making an atonement for sin, made you cry out, "What must I do to be saved?" "O! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" How shall I escape the damnation of hell?

What are your views of Jesus Christ?

Have you beheld him by the eye of faith as an All-sufficient Savior; as one who can relieve your needs, supply your necessities, expiate your sins, sanctify your nature, ransom you from hell, and raise you to heaven? Have you received Him as the Lord your Righteousness; by whose merits you are justified? Is he your only hope of glory, by whom you have access unto the Father? Do you believe that as man, he died for sinners, and that as God, he gave an infinite value to all his sufferings, thus glorifying the Law and his eternal Justice more than if ten thousand guilty worlds had undergone an everlasting punishment?

What are your views of the Holy Spirit?

Are you convinced that the great work of Conversion is his work? that it is the office of the Spirit to take of the things of Christ and show them to his people; to apply first the Law to our hearts to humble us, to kill all the noxious weeds of pride and self-love; to lay us in the dust before God; to fill us with self-despair; and then, to reveal Christ to us in all his free salvation and redeeming love? Have you felt the Spirit's power in drawing you from self to Jesus, from the world to heaven, from sin to holiness, from Satan unto God? Convinced that repentance and faith are the gifts of God, have you earnestly and perseveringly sought these promised blessings, pleading the merits of the Son, and imploring the gift of the Holy Spirit to work in you all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power?

If you have felt the constraining influence of divine grace, inclining you to seek the Lord Jesus and salvation through him; have you been faithful to these gracious motions of the Spirit? have you assiduously cherished these workings of grace within you? have they filled you with joy, and made you long for a complete redemption from all iniquity, for an abiding union to Christ by faith?

Are you, O my soul, waiting for the coming of Christ, as Anna and Simeon waited for redemption in Israel? Is every thing here below tasteless and insipid, without an assured saving interest in the work and love of Jesus, in his blood and righteousness, in his prevailing intercession with His Father in heaven? Do you delight in the word of God, in the ordinances of God, in the people of God- yes, in all who bear his image, who promote his glory, and speak his praise, out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue? Are you looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of the day of God? Is the second appearing of the Lord Jesus a delightful expectation, when the universal Hallelujah will swell the chorus of his praise?

If these are your views, O my soul, if this be your daily desire, your daily walk, your daily hope and trust, then rejoice in the Lord always, who has so graciously drawn you to himself, and converted you from a barren desert into the garden of the Lord.

Blessed Jesus, make me sincere. You know that I desire to love you, to be separated from all sin. Unite me to Yourself; fill me with spiritual light; and enable me to go on from strength to strength, until delivered from the burden of the flesh, I appear before you in Zion.

How insensible is the human heart to heavenly things until touched by divine grace. How hard is my heart! Lord soften it. O that I could love my Savior above every other object in earth or heaven. Jehovah Jesus is the adoration of angels, and of the perfected saints in glory. Even on earth, though encompassed with infirmity, and seeing as through a glass darkly, the enraptured believer can say; "Whom have I in heaven but you? and there is none upon earth I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." O that my heart may be given to the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the one God of my salvation. Never shall I feel true happiness until that blissful moment, when my will is lost in the will of God; when all my fugitive affections are fixed supremely upon Him. Blessed Lord, hasten this moment so full of bliss. May it be now, for now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. Tomorrow may find me in eternity. O may I seek you, and find you today, as all my salvation, and all my desire.

Manifest yourself to me as you do not unto the world. Show me my saving interest in the blood of the Lamb. Give me that realizing faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Bestow upon me a broken heart, a lowly mind, a weanedness from the world, a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, a delight in your service, a love to everything which you love; a pleasure in everything which is pleasing unto You.

I live surrounded by Gospel light, and Gospel privileges. Yet, awful thought! I may pass by the Cross, on the way to endless misery. When invited by sovereign love to look and be saved, I may pass by on the other side; not submitting myself unto the righteousness of God. The gospel, though faithfully preached, may fall like rain on the sandy soil. I may perish within sight of the remedy. The cup of salvation may be brought to my lips, and yet I may refuse to drink it. O the blindness and infatuation of the human heart.

Such is the state of the unconverted sinner, living in the midst of gospel blessings. He sinks within sight of the harbor, dashed on the rocks of unbelief, self-righteousness, and the love of the world. Lord, save me from the power of unbelief. Enable me to look unto Jesus as my only Hope, to come to him as my only Help, to receive him as my only Savior, to rely on him as my only Righteousness, to prize him as my only Treasure, to love him as my only Beloved, the chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely.

02.16. FAITH WORKING BY LOVE

16. FAITH WORKING BY LOVE

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." Gal 5:6

When Adam fell, all his posterity fell in him. The Law being holy, just, and good, condemned the fallen race of Adam, for all that the Law can do is to convince and to condemn; but, through the righteousness of the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, the sinner is again received into the favor of God, and accounted righteous in his sight. The righteousness of Christ is the only meritorious cause of a sinner's justification in the sight of God. In this righteousness he stands complete. In this righteousness, he claims a title to the skies. In this righteousness, he answers all the demands of the Law, silences all the accusations of Satan, and is admitted, after death, into the inheritance of the saints in light. Faith is the instrument by which the sinner apprehends this righteousness of Christ, and by means of which it is imputed to him. But faith is the gift of God, wrought in the heart of the sinner through the power of the Holy Spirit. All boasting is therefore forever excluded, since he that glories, must glory in the Lord.

As Christ trod the wine-press of his Father's wrath alone, when he stood in the place of sinners, so will he never allow sinners to share with him in the glory of their salvation. He will not give that honor to another which is due to himself alone. Works, however excellent in their proper place, must never dare to enter into the holy of holies, where none but our Great High Priest can enter. "By his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

Although the sinner is accounted righteous before God, through faith in the perfect righteousness of his dear Son, without his works or deserving, yet, faith, being the operation of the Holy Spirit, necessarily produces the fruits of holiness. Here, then, good works assume their proper place and office. Works, as well as faith, can claim no merit in the act of a sinner's justification before God; that being solely through the obedience of Christ; yet do they adorn our Christian profession, prove the reality of our faith, manifest its divine origin, evidence our being in a state of grace, glorify God in the sight of men, silence the aspersions of self-righteous opposers to the truth, and make us fit for the enjoyment and service of God in heaven.

Blessed Jesus! may I ever view you in this delightful character as- the Lord My Righteousness; then shall I stand with boldness in that day when all your enemies shall be covered with confusion. While I look to you as my only justifying righteousness, O grant that my faith may never cease to work by love. Let every day be employed in your service, that my hope, through faith in your blood, may be unclouded.

"Faith, which works by love," is the concise, but comprehensive declaration of Paul, when describing the nature of saving faith by its attendant love. No words can add to its preciousness. We may dwell upon it, and endeavor to amplify it by human reasoning, just as a small piece of gold

when beaten, may be made to cover a wider surface, but we too often destroy its strength and beauty. "The word of God is living, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Faith in Jesus Christ begets love in the soul; the love of God shed abroad in the heart produces good works; and by works is faith made perfect. Thus the graces of the Spirit, like a chain whose links embrace and strengthen each other, are beautifully combined in the formation of the Christian character. The following passages, so descriptive of the experience of the true believer, show the beauty of Christian graces, and afford the richest matter for devout meditation. Oh! that we may read our characters in these precious lines–

"God blesses those who realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is given to them. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. God blesses those who are gentle and lowly, for the whole earth will belong to them. God blesses those who are hungry and thirsty for justice, for they will receive it in full. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. God blesses those who are persecuted because they live for God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs." Mat 5:3-10

"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation. And this expectation will not disappoint us. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love." Rom 5:3-5

"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Love will last forever, but prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will all disappear." 1Co 13:4-8

"And now, dear friends, let me say one more thing as I close this letter. Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise." Php 4:8

"Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. You must make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others." Col 3:12-13

"So make every effort to apply the benefits of these promises to your life. Then your faith will produce a life of moral excellence. A life of moral excellence leads to knowing God better. Knowing God leads to self-control. Self-control leads to patient endurance, and patient endurance leads to godliness. Godliness leads to love for other Christians, and finally you will grow to have genuine love for everyone. The more you grow like this, the more you will become productive and useful in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But those who fail to develop these virtues are

blind or, at least, very shortsighted. They have already forgotten that God has cleansed them from their old life of sin. So, dear friends, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Doing this, you will never stumble or fall away. And God will open wide the gates of heaven for you to enter into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." 2Pe 1:5-11

"Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God." 1Jn 4:7

O! what a happy world would this be, did all, who profess and call themselves Christians, live under the happy influence of these gospel precepts. Then men would beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks, and learn war no more, when the knowledge of the Lord, thus manifested by it fruits, should cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea.

There is a faith which God abhors; "The devils believe, and tremble." But, Satan cannot love. "Simon himself believed;" but Peter said to him, "I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." There is a faith which God approves- "the faith of God's elect," which is according to godliness; a faith which purifies the heart, overcomes the world, and works by love. This loving faith was displayed in all its subduing power, when Jesus dined at the house of Simon the Pharisee. While a brokenhearted penitent was manifesting by her actions her love to the Savior, then Jesus turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't give me a kiss of greeting, but she has kissed my feet again and again from the time I first came in. You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume. I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." The men at the table said among themselves, "Who does this man think he is, going around forgiving sins?" And Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Luk 7:44-50

Many are superstitiously attached to outward ceremonies; many, also, are as violently opposed to them. Both may be equally destitute of that faith which works by love. If bitter envyings and strife tear their bosoms, and disfigure their profession; if anathemas are hurled against each other, with all the fury of the Roman Vatican; is this, I would ask, the religion of the meek and lowly Jesus? Is this the spirit which he imparts to his followers? Is this the faith which leads to heaven?

In a spirit of love we must declare to the blinded formalist, that Christ will not accept of the form, for the power of godliness, nor the bending of the knee for the prostration of the heart. Religion without love is a mere shadow; yes, a fatal delusion. It is a road of Satan's making; and many, alas! are walking in it. Man is naturally legal. The sinner labors to save himself. No privations are too great to be endured; no mortifications too painful to be suffered, if only the tormented conscience can find rest. But, the severer the penance, the severer is the sting. Peace flies from the wretched soul which seeks for reconciliation with God, by the endurance of self-inflicted austerities. Never can rest be found until the awakened sinner casts himself without reserve on the crucified Redeemer, looking for pardon only through the merit of his blood. Then ceremonies, when used, will be used only as a means to an end. He will not rest in them, as though they

possessed some saving virtue to be obtained by the mere observance of them. Or, if he worships God by some simpler form, he will not ascribe any merit to himself, by adopting what he supposes to be a purer mode of worship, knowing that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature," but "the keeping of the commandments of God."

The garment of Christ was a seamless vest, emblematical of what his church should be. But alas! in every age it has been rent by schisms and divisions. Paul deeply lamented over this evil in the Corinthian church; "Is Christ divided?" "You are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal and walk as men?" In this our day, the same rending of the Church proves the carnality of our hearts, and manifests the absence of that faith which works by love. Oh! when will Christians love as brethren! Tares alas cover the gospel field! We know what enemy has done this.

Blessed Jesus, in the midst of abounding iniquity, in the midst of prevailing errors, in the midst of schisms and divisions, heart-burnings and angry contentions, enable me to embrace your truth as revealed in your word; to worship you in spirit and in truth; to walk in truth, and to follow You with a single eye, who are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. While drawing near to you in the great congregation, may my affections be spiritualized, that I may ever escape the sin of those who draw near to you with their lips, while their hearts are far from you, and who, having the form of godliness, deny the power thereof. Preserve me from the extremes of contending religionists. Keep me in the path of your commandments. Increase in me more and more that faith which works by love, and which assimilates my soul to You–

How blessed is the saint who can trust in the Lord,

Whose heart and whose hope can repose on his word;

Though tempests and storms shall his vessel assail,

His peace is secure, and his joys never fail.

His house is well founded, ’tis built on a Rock,

Though mountains may fall, he can stand the rude shock;

Midst burnings and wastings of earth and of sky,

He lifts up his head, for his Savior is nigh.

Can riches, can honor, can pleasures afford

Such joy, and such peace, as our merciful Lord

Vouchsafes to his people, and now will impart,

To all who approach him with faith in the heart?

How bless’d is the man, who, redeemed from sin,

Has Christ in the soul, and the witness within;

His walk will be steady, through faith in the word,

His heart will be steadfast, through trust in the Lord.

Thus keep me, bless’d Savior- whate’er may betide,

Your presence can cheer, and your Spirit can guide;

And when life is o’er, and its sorrows are fled,

Unite me to You, as my glorified Head.

02.17. WALKING WITH GOD

17. WALKING WITH GOD

"Enoch walked with God." Gen 5:22

The word of God, unlike any other book, has this remarkable feature- that materials for a volume are often compressed in a few words; "God is love." Here is matter for eternal contemplation. All the understandings of men- all the capacities of angels will never exhaust the inexhaustible fullness of this short sentence.

"Enoch walked with God," expresses in its condensed form the principles and practice, the privileges and perseverance, of the true believer. These few words may be expanded, until volumes are written to display in all its loveliness the character so concisely exhibited by the apostle. "It was by faith that Enoch was taken up to heaven without dying—suddenly he disappeared because God took him. But before he was taken up, he was approved as pleasing to God. So, you see, it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that there is a God and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him."

Enoch possessed a principle of faith. He believed in the great sustaining promise of the patriarchal age- in the seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent’s head. "He pleased God;" but without faith it is impossible to please him, therefore Enoch was a believer. He was justified by faith, and by works was his faith made perfect. His practice condemned the world; so also did his prophecy. For, says Jude– "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men (of the apostates in the latter days): "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." Paul declared the same truth– "And God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted and also for us when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven. He will come with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don’t know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power when he comes to receive glory and praise from his holy people. And you will be among those praising him on that day, for you believed what we testified about him."

John saw in vision the same overwhelming judgment; "Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. And the one sitting on the horse was named Faithful and True. For he judges fairly and then goes to war. His eyes were bright like flames of fire, and on his head were many crowns. A name was written on him, and only he knew what it meant. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and his title was the Word of God. The armies of heaven, dressed in pure white linen, followed him on white horses. From his mouth came a sharp sword, and with it he struck down the nations. He ruled them with an iron rod, and he trod the winepress of the fierce wrath of almighty God. On his robe and thigh was written this title: King of kings and Lord of lords." "Behold, he comes with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and

all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him."

Thus, in every age, the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. "Enoch walked WITH GOD." He enjoyed the privilege of adoption. He could call God, Father. He lived in a state of communion with the God of his salvation. But how can two walk together except they be agreed? Enoch pleased God, and was made happy in His love. He was in a state of reconciliation through faith in the promised seed; for all who lived before the advent of Christ were delivered from the curse through faith in the Savior to be revealed- Jesus Christ, the Righteous- the same yesterday, today, and forever. Oh! how great are the privileges of the saints!

"Enoch WALKED with God." This implies PROGRESSION. He persevered in the ways of holiness. He did not grow weary in well-doing. He was not offended with revealed truths, like those who walked no more with Jesus when he declared himself to be the food of their souls. He endured unto the end; and God took him, by an immediate translation, from earth to the Paradise above.

How wonderful are the was of God, and yet how gracious! Each period of time, Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian, was blessed by the manifestation of the divine goodness. Adam was driven out of Paradise. By his transgression, heaven was barred against him; but Mercy, in the person of the Eternal Son, opened the gates of heaven to all believers. To animate the hopes of the redeemed, and to assure them of another and a better world, Enoch was translated during the Patriarchal age; Elijah during the dispensation of Moses; and the blessed Redeemer, when he had finished his work of love, ascended up on high- thus manifesting his victory over death, and entering as our forerunner into the kingdom of glory.

Do not be deceived, Oh! my soul, by false appearances. It is one thing to profess the Gospel of grace, and another thing to possess the grace of the Gospel. It is not the noisy talker about Jesus, but the humble walker with Jesus, who is the beloved of the Lord. The heart of Paul was deeply wounded by hollow professors of the truth. "Dear friends, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example. For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. Their future is eternal destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and all they think about is this life here on earth." "For there are many who rebel against right teaching; they engage in useless talk and deceive people. This is especially true of those who insist on circumcision for salvation. They must be silenced. By their wrong teaching, they have already turned whole families away from the truth. Such teachers only want your money."

The gifts of eloquence and learning may raise a man in the estimation of the world, even though he is destitute of the Spirit of Christ. The humble, but despised Christian, adorned with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is, in the sight of God, of great value, will be owned by the Searcher of hearts, while the pompous professor is no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. He that says he abides in Christ ought himself also so to walk even as he walked. Are these things so? Then, O my soul, unfold the sacred volume, and examine which is the way to heaven, and how you must walk therein. Jesus is the way- the only way, to Heaven. Hear his own blessed words; "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no man comes unto the Father but by me."

Gracious Savior! I bless you, I praise you for this soul-invigorating declaration. There are many ways to hell, but only one to heaven, and You are that Way. Oh! that I may never leave this true, this living, this consecrated way, on which the Patriarchs and Prophets, the Apostles and Saints, have journeyed to the celestial Canaan. But how may I be assured that I am walking on this sacred road; that I am in the way to everlasting glory? You have said; "Search the Scriptures; for in them you think have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me."

O, blessed Jesus, open my understanding, that I may understand the Scriptures. Show me Yourself in all the fullness of your power- in all the freeness of your love. Guide me by your Spirit, for it is not in man that walks to direct his steps. Study, O my soul, the records of eternal life. There you will discover, through the teaching of the Spirit of Truth, whether you are a pilgrim on the road to Zion. In that precious Book you are informed how you are not to walk, if a believer in Jesus–

Walk not after the flesh.

Walk not after the course of this world.

Walk not in darkness.

Walk not by sight.

Walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind.

These important passages stand as beacons, to guard you against the threatened danger. Whatever your profession may be, if you are walking in any of these downward ways, you are going, with hasty steps, to the torments of hell!

Lord! you have said, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." Fulfill this gracious promise to your servant, who is now seeking to walk in the light of your countenance, and by the guidance of your Holy Spirit. Cause me to walk in your statutes faithfully unto the end. Renew my strength that I may run and not be weary, and walk and not faint; yes, that I may mount with wings like an eagle, until I reach your abode of glory.

Search the Scriptures again, O my soul, and learn from these oracles of truth, how you are to walk as a believer, and how you may be assured that you are a believer, if your walk be correspondent to these sacred marks–

Walk with God.

Walk after the Spirit.

Walk in Christ.

Walk by faith.

Walk in love.

Walk in truth.

Walk in wisdom toward those who are without.

Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.

Walk in the light.

Walk as a child of light.

Walk in the fear of the Lord.

Walk worthy the vocation with which you are called.

Walk in newness of life.

Walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.

Walk worthy of God, who has called you unto his kingdom and glory.

Walk as Christ walked.

Thus must you walk, if you will be a disciple of Jesus– a child of God– a temple of the Holy Spirit. And if, through grace, you thus walk and endure unto the end, hear what the Lord says for your unspeakable comfort. "You shall walk with me in white." "You shall come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon your head; you shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Blessed Emmanuel! you know that I desire to walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, but to walk with my whole heart "in the way of your laws, and in obedience to your commandments," to walk by faith in your blood and righteousness, to the honor and glory of your holy name. Like Enoch and Noah may I walk with you. Like Abraham may I walk before you with a perfect heart. Like David may I set the Lord always before me.

Oh! allow me not to walk in the vain imagination of my heart; but in mercy teach me the good way wherein I should go. Then when I walk in the midst of trouble you will revive me; yes, when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil, for you will be with me, your rod and your staff they shall comfort me. O God, who declares your Almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity; mercifully grant unto me such a measure of your grace, that, running in the path of your commandments, I may obtain your gracious promises, and be made a partaker of your heavenly treasure through Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

Oh! that like Enoch I may walk

With God in fellowship divine,

Enjoy the witness of his love,

And in his blessed image shine.

When you shall call me hence away,

I then shall prove the promise true;

While hastening to the eternal world,

Your glory, Lord, bursts on my view.

Like Abraham may I talk with You,

As friends converse who dearly love,

And taste the comforts of your grace,

'Till I shall reach the world above.

As blessed Elijah, strong in faith,

Was borne aloft on wings of fire,

So may my heart on You be fixed,

Ascending on intense desire.

O may I walk with You in love,

And live, as ever in your sight,

Until far removed from sin and woe,

I walk with You arrayed in white.

02.18. THE PRIVILEGES OF THE BELIEVER

18. THE PRIVILEGES OF THE BELIEVER

"All things are yours." 1Co 3:21

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever." John 14:16

How inconceivably great is the goodness of God to his believing people! In his holy word, he assures them, that through his over-ruling Providence, all things shall work together for their good; that he loves them with an everlasting love; that they are dear to him as the apple of his eye; precious to him as the signet-ring on his right hand; that he will be to them as a little sanctuary in all countries where they shall come; that he will never leave them nor forsake them. He denounces a woe on all who offend them, and pronounces a blessing on all who give them only a cup of cold water for his name's sake.

Oh! how great is the goodness of the Lord, which he has laid up for those who fear him, which he has wrought for those who trust in him, before the sons of men! All the promises of the New Covenant are primarily made to Christ, who merited every blessing by his obedience unto death; and they are secondarily made to every believer in Him, who, standing complete in his righteousness, becomes savingly interested in all the promises of God, both as respects this world and that which is to come. Amazing privilege!

Every believer in Jesus is an HEIR OF GOD through Christ! He inherits Him as his portion, in whom he lives and moves and has his being; by whom all things were made, and by whom all things consist. He inherits Him, who fills heaven and earth with His glory; who is the Fountain of all felicity; in whose presence is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore!

O! my soul, never can you thirst enough after this exalted privilege. In yourself, you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; in Christ, you are happy, and honorable, and rich, and glorious! In yourself, you have nothing but sin and misery; in Christ, you are clothed with the garment of salvation; renewed in the spirit of your mind; and filled with peace and joy. In yourself, you are an heir of hell; in Christ, O wonderful thought! you are an HEIR Of GOD. How bright, how dazzling, how surpassing the splendor of the mid-day sun, is this inconceivably great and glorious privilege to be an heir of God!

Give me, O Lord, the steady eye of faith, that as the eagle soars aloft, fixing its eye upon the sun, so I may rise in heart and affection above this lower world, looking unto Jesus the Sun of Righteousness. By faith, enable me to substantiate the things hoped for, and to realize the things not seen. By faith, may I daily anticipate that glorious period, when, aroused by the Archangel's trumpet, my sleeping dust will leave its bed of clay, and with my enraptured soul, be made a blessed vessel in your courts above, there to be filled with your everlasting love!

"All things are yours." Well might Paul say, "God is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us.... That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." Well might he say- "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." A heart penetrated with a sense of the love of God, will be overwhelmed at the view of such amazing mercy. What mind can conceive the fullness of this assurance; "All things are yours." On what is this expansive declaration founded? "You are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Oh! then, my soul, rejoice if grace has united you to the Savior. To every believer, to all the churches of the saints in every age, the Apostle writes; "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

When Jesus was drawing near to the time when he would go to the Father, he promised to his sorrowing disciples another Comforter. As heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, they were not left comfortless. The bodily absence of Christ was to be more than compensated by his spiritual presence. "If any man loves me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." "If I do not go away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." "I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever." "He dwells with you, and shall be in you." "When the Comforter has come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he shall testify of me."

Oh! my soul! have you received this heavenly Visitant? Important enquiry! since without the Spirit of Christ, you are none of his. Contemplate the various operations of the Eternal Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. Examine with minutest scrutiny, whether any of these operations have been wrought in you, thereby proving that you are indeed united to Christ, according to the Apostle "He who is joined unto the Lord is one spirit;" and may the Lord assist you in this important search.

It is the work of the Spirit to convince the world of SIN; to open the eyes of the understanding, that we may see our pollution, wretchedness, and danger; to apply the Law to our consciences, and from a deep conviction of our innumerable transgressions against it, to fill our souls with anguish; to drive us to self-despair, destroying all our towering hopes of gaining heaven by our own deservings; bringing us to the borders of eternal ruin, and there, in the view of everlasting torments, forcing us to cry out with heartfelt exclamation; "What must I do to be saved? how shall I escape the damnation of hell?"

Have you ever experienced these powerful convictions of the Spirit? Have you seen the exceeding sinfulness of sin? Are you made deeply sensible of your great depravity, of your amazing distance from that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord? Have you been deeply humbled at the view of yourself as a fallen, guilty, polluted creature? And has this view humbled you in the dust before God? Has it filled you with true contrition? Has it emptied you of all self-dependence? Has it, in the spirit of true repentance and humiliation, made you cry out, "God be merciful to me a sinner?"

It is the work of the Spirit to reveal the LORD JESUS CHRIST to every contrite sinner, as an all-sufficient Savior, willing, and able, and ready to save all that come unto him, be they ever so vile and worthless. Jesus graciously said– When the Spirit of truth has come, he shall testify of me.

He shall glorify me. He will bring me glory by revealing to you whatever he receives from me. Thus the Spirit applies the reviving cordial of the Gospel to every sin-sick soul. He manifests to every trembling sinner the freeness of Christ's love, the fullness of his salvation, the greatness of his power, the riches of his grace, the efficacy of his righteousness, the preciousness of his blood, the prevalency of his intercession, and to crown all, his willingness to save, even to the uttermost, all who come unto God by him.

He kindles a flame of love in the sinner's heart; moves him to pray to God for pardon through the merits of His Son; inclines him to seek earnestly for a saving interest in this precious Savior; enables him to lay hold on Christ by faith; and transforms him from a rebel, into a humble, loving believer in the Lord Jesus. Thus the Spirit glorifies Christ, by applying the blessings of his salvation to the hearts of sinners, drawing them out of the fatal bondage of corruption, delivering them from the power of darkness, and Making them heirs of glory through faith.

Have I been thus brought to Jesus through the sweet constraining influence of the Spirit of grace? Have I had this view of Jesus as One mighty to save? And believing in him, have I experienced his saving power in my soul, inspiring me with humble boldness to draw near to the mercy-seat? Have I pleaded before God the all-prevailing merits of his dear Son; and have I felt a joy springing up in my heart from a sense of blood-bought pardon? Do I feel the terrors of the Law supplanted by the consolations of the Gospel? Are all my hopes of happiness and heaven derived from the death and sufferings of Christ, and Christ alone?

It is the work of the Spirit to guide believers into all truth; to renew their natures, to sanctify their hearts, to illuminate their minds, to rectify their wills, to purify their affections, to make them new creatures in Christ Jesus. The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of holiness. Through his transforming power, the church is all glorious within, a temple prepared for the residence of the God of heaven.

Oh! how great are the privileges of the saints. They are as a royal diadem in the hand of their God. Well might angels sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Have I been led by the Spirit into the truth as it is in Jesus? Have I experienced a change of heart? Is it now my chief delight to live by faith upon the Son of God, to meditate upon his work of redemption, and to show my love by a prompt, cheerful, unreserved obedience to all his commandments? Is holiness the element in which I move? Is sin odious in my eyes, and hateful to my heart? Am I daily seeking for a more entire deliverance from its power? Do I find the great work of sanctification progressively advancing in my soul? Have old things passed away; are all things become new?

It is the work of the Spirit to ANIMATE, COMFORT, AND STRENGTHEN the faithful in Christ Jesus. Hence he is styled the COMFORTER; the Spirit of consolation, a quickening Spirit. By his gracious influences he sheds abroad the love of God in the hearts of believers; fills them, at times, with joy unspeakable and full of glory, and gives them a peace that passes understanding. He supports them under the severest trials; enables them to rejoice under the greatest tortures; preserves them from the power of evil; guards them from the attacks of Satan; upholds them on their journey through the wilderness, and brings them triumphant to the heavenly Canaan.

Have you, O my soul, experienced these delightful influences of the Spirit of grace, the Comforter? When the enemy comes in like a flood, do you experience this precious promise- "The Spirit of the

Lord shall lift up a standard against him?" Under the various crosses and trials of life, what have been your consolations? Have they been all drawn from the Fountain of living Waters, flowing in a sacred stream of peace and joy? Are the fruits of the Spirit exhibited in all their loveliness in your daily walk? With the Apostle can you say; "I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all my tribulation?"

The Spirit of Christ is the seal of our adoption, the pledge of future glory. As all who are destitute of the Spirit of Christ, do not belong to Christ. As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they alone are the sons of God. Believers, who are the temples of the Holy Spirit, are commanded to cherish his godly motions, to abstain from all appearance of evil, lest, by too near an approach to sin, they be drawn aside by its influence from the path of duty, and so grieve the Spirit of God. They are exhorted to beware of willful transgression lest they quench the holy flame, and thus provoke the Spirit to depart from them, for God has said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man."

Am I sealed with this glorious seal of heaven? Is the image of Jesus impressed upon my soul by the Spirit of holiness? Have I received this divine pledge of the heavenly inheritance? Is the private seal of my adoption into the family of God made manifest by the broad and public seal of my sanctification? Am I afraid of offending, grieving, and quenching the Spirit of my beloved Savior? Do I cherish the godly motions, and pray without ceasing to be more faithful to the outward calls and inward convictions of the Holy Spirit?

Lord, you know all things, you know how I desire to be yours. Impart to me this blessed Spirit, without whom all profession is hypocrisy. May I never separate the precept from the promise, nor the character from the privileges of your people. You have declared, "Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven."

Descend, blessed Spirit, into my longing soul. Take up your abode within me. Convince me of sin. Show me my true character. Lead me to Jesus Christ. Work in me faith and love and every grace. Destroy the power of evil in my soul. Infuse all good desires. Bring them to good effect. Be my guardian and guide; my support through life; my consolation in death; my everlasting portion in heaven. Oh! shine with beams of love on my soul, until I am made, through sovereign grace, to shine as the sun in the kingdom of my Father.

My soul enjoys a sweet repose,

Beneath the Savior’s sheltering grace;

A solace for its direst woes,

Amid the beamings of his face.

Detached from earth’s deceitful joys,

Allured by His attractive love,

I seek a world which never cloys,

A world of light and bliss above.

Instruct your servant, gracious Lord,

Your easy yoke with joy to bear;

Enlightened by your faithful word,

To shun each error’s fatal snare.

Oh! may I close each passing day,

With humble love, with holy fear;

Enjoy your presence on the way,

And ever find your succour near.

By faith, it is, that I am thine,

Powerful Savior, faithful Guide;

Oh! stoop upon your work to shine,

And never let my footsteps slide.

Come, Lord, with your Almighty grace,

Confirm my faith, my strength renew.

Until I shall win the heavenly race,

And gain the glorious prize in view.

Yes! Lord, your goodness, and your love,

Already hears and answers prayer

The Light descending from above,

My soul with holy comforts cheer.

How rich the favor- how divine,

Jesus is mine, and I am his;

All glory be forever thine,

You Fountain of eternal bliss.

02.19. THE SUPERIORITY OF GRACES TO GIFTS

19. THE SUPERIORITY OF GRACES TO GIFTS

"But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way." 1Co 12:31

"Let love be your highest goal." 1Co 14:1

One man may have great gifts while destitute of saving grace. Another may have great grace, and yet possess few gifts. Which of the two is the most to be desired? The enlightened Christian who knows himself, and who has experienced the power of the Gospel, will not be long in determining. Supernatural gifts, such as "working of miracles," "speaking with tongues," "discerning of spirits," etc., which were bestowed upon some of the first Christians; and a special knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, an eloquence in conveying scriptural truths, and an aptitude to acquire languages which some Christians now possess, only tend to puff up and exalt the gifted individuals, if unaccompanied with the graces of humility, self-denial, and love. Hence gifts may be exercised by people who never will enjoy the glories of heaven.

The Scriptures are clear on this point. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied (or preached) in your name? and in your name have cast out devils? and in your name have done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, you that work iniquity."

"When Jesus had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease." Among this number was "Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed him." But what did our Lord say of Judas? "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" And what did Peter declare concerning him at the election of another apostle to fill his office? "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which of these two you have chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." And what place that was, we learn by implication from our blessed Lord. "For I, the Son of Man, must die, as the Scriptures declared long ago. But how terrible it will be for my betrayer. Far better for him if he had never been born!" These words would never have been uttered had Judas' own place been the place where the penitent thief on the cross was to meet Jesus; "Today shall you be with me in Paradise." Judas, like Lot's wife, stands as a monument of God's wrath, and as a warning against false profession.

Grace, however humble be its possessor, though a poor diseased Lazarus, will never be rejected. Grace is the sterling coin of the kingdom, bearing the image of the Sovereign King. When knowledge shall vanish away, when tongues shall cease, and miracles are no longer needed, grace will shine with increased splendor, for glory is but grace perfected. The grace of faith in Christ, love to his name, devotedness to God, activity in his service, self-denial, and spiritual-mindedness, will then receive the smiles of the Great Judge of the living and dead. Oh! that I may daily follow after love, without which all my doings are nothing worth.

Superior gifts make a man more known to the Christian world, and, by some, to be regarded as a kind of oracle. This distinction is highly gratifying to the natural heart; and the more gratifying it is to any one, the more dangerous it becomes to his soul, because spiritual pride is fostered, and self is exalted in the place of Jesus. The graces of the Spirit are of a more silent, unobtrusive nature; they tend to make a man low in his own eyes; they lead him into retirement and spiritual communion with God, and cause him to avoid rather than court the observation of mankind. From hence it is evident that all are not Israel who are of Israel, and that there is no necessary connection between gifts and graces.

The kingdom of God consists not of gifts and ceremonies, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. It is not the able talkers about religion who will be rewarded at the last day, but the humble walkers with Jesus. Many, who are now despised on account of their slender capacities and weak intellectual attainments, or regarded as half Christians, because they cannot win a debate against a witty infidel, or define some mysterious doctrine of Scripture; but whose lives are the most convincing arguments for the power and truth of the Gospel, whose hope is founded on Christ alone, who strenuously oppose all sin, and labor, through the Spirit, to perfect holiness in the fear of God, will receive the plaudit, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord!"

While the gifted, but unsound professors of religion, will be frowned into hell. This, the Great Judge himself has declared; "Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Truly I say unto you, I know you not." "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away." "Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first." "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."

It is very desirable to "covet earnestly the best gifts," to increase in wisdom and knowledge, to be able to speak acceptably to others about the things of God; but still, Peter places grace before knowledge; "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," for, adds Paul, "Knowledge puffs up, but love build up."

Lord, I humbly beseech you to give me grace to be faithful. Impart unto me this invaluable blessing experienced by the early Christians, when "great grace was on them all." May the grace of Christ dwell in my heart, destroying sin and the power thereof, and exciting me to childlike obedience to your will; may the light of Truth irradiate my path, and your Spirit guide me along the consecrated way, until I reach the heavenly world, where all is light, and life, and love forever.

"Follow after Love," -delightful exhortation; as if the Apostle had said- follow after happiness and glory; follow after that, which will form your blessedness in time and eternity. "God is love," and "every one that loves is born of God." Come, O my soul, and think upon redeeming love, until all your powers are lost in this ocean of grace, this infinity of mercy. What? did the Great Jehovah condescend to veil himself in human flesh to save rebellious worms from endless woe, and can I, for whom he lived, and bled, and died, feel no concern about my eternal state? no return to Him, of grateful and adoring praise? no hatred of those sins for which he suffered? no fear of hell? no longings after heaven?

Amazing hardness-dreadful insensibility! Lord, take away this heart of stone, and give me a heart of flesh, a heart susceptible of your mercies. Draw me with the cords of love, and bind my

wayward affections to your Cross. Give me a weanedness from the world, that while my hands are diligently employed in the way of duty, my heart may be set on things above. Impart unto me a spiritual mind, a constant relish for heavenly employments. Let me live in the spirit of this petition; "May your will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Create in me a new and contrite heart; a heart deeply convinced of its own depravity, earnestly seeking for pardon of all sin, through the precious blood of Jesus, and daily growing in holiness through the Spirit of His Grace.

Lord, increase my faith, that being united to Christ, I may become a living branch in the true Vine, a member of his mystical body, a sheep of his pasture, a child of his family, a partaker of the divine nature, an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ. Oh! how wonderful are the revelations of your love; how glorious are the privileges of your people. Lord increase my faith to lay hold on this hope set before me in the Gospel of your Son.

Give me, heavenly Father, I humbly beseech you, an earnest desire to do those things which you have commanded, to avoid whatever you have forbidden, and to obtain those blessings which you have promised to every true believer. Give me a single eye to your glory. May your glory be the end and aim of all my actions. Preserve me from all pride and vain-glory; and make me a little child in humility and simplicity, seeking your honor and glory above every other object in the world.

Fill my heart, O God, with gratitude, and my mouth with praise for all your mercy, grace, and love granted to one so vile and worthless. Oh! that I might every moment live for you, think on you, and speak for you; then would my heart be pure, and my conversation be always seasoned with grace, good to the use of edifying. Happy will that period be when all these obtrusive cares of life will have an end, and nothing will be found to interrupt the work of adoration through the ages of eternity. Come, blessed Spirit, prepare me for your abode of glory; wean my heart daily from this wicked world; impress the Savior’s image on my soul, that when he shall appear, I may be like him, when I see him as he is.

02.20. THE BLESSEDNESS OF A CHILDLIKE SPIRIT, AND A GRATEFUL HEART

20. THE BLESSEDNESS OF A CHILDLIKE SPIRIT, AND A GRATEFUL HEART

"Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." Gal 4:6

No language can adequately express the condescension and forbearance of God towards his rebellious creatures; "Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! This is what the Lord says: "The children I raised and cared for have turned against me. Even the animals—the donkey and the ox—know their owner and appreciate his care, but not my people Israel. No matter what I do for them, they still do not understand." Oh, what a sinful nation they are! They are loaded down with a burden of guilt. They are evil and corrupt children who have turned away from the Lord. They have despised the Holy One of Israel, cutting themselves off from his help." "The Lord Almighty says to the priests: 'A son honors his father, and a servant respects his master. I am your father and master, but where are the honor and respect I deserve? You have despised my name!'" "Turn, O backsliding children, says the Lord." "Return you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." "If you will return, O Israel, says the Lord, return unto me."

The Almighty addresses us in the character of a tender Father, but of a father, slighted and disobeyed. What parent, who has experienced the ingratitude and disobedience of his children, piercing his heart with grief, can read, unmoved, these pathetic appeals? But, while his own soul has been bowed down with sorrow by the conduct of his children, has he not been acting a similar part towards his heavenly Father? And may not the very trials which afflict him, be sent in judgment for his own rebellions against the Father of mercies? How often do we read our sin in our punishment.

Who, then, can fully estimate the blessedness of a childlike spirit? See a family, where the children honor and obey their parents, and where the parents love and watch over their children, and there you behold a lovely oasis, a green spot in this desert world. In such a family, where God is worshiped in spirit and in truth, where love, like a golden belt, binds each heart to the other, you have a little heaven upon earth. But look into a household, where the children resist the authority of the father, and despise the admonitions of the mother; where the brothers and sisters quarrel with each other, and kindle a daily fire of discord- and there, you have a picture of that place where each, hating the other, shall be miserable forever.

The world is ready to stamp with baseness an act of ingratitude towards an earthly benefactor, who may have shown us some occasional favor, or afforded us some seasonable relief; but, it passes over, as a venial fault, our forgetfulness of God. This is bad; but surely it is worse when those who make a profession of religion act as the world does. "My people have forgotten me days without number." "They have forgotten the Lord their God." "They have forgotten their resting-place."

The sin of ingratitude is unspeakably criminal when manifested towards the Almighty Father of mankind, by whom we were created, by whom we are preserved, and from whom we receive every blessing. Happy, indeed, are they who live in the spirit of adoption, and under the influence of grateful love. Blessed Lord, be pleased to give me a thankful heart to taste your gifts with joy. Enable me to trace every mercy to its proper source, even to your Covenant Love in Christ Jesus; to see your hand in all the changing events of life; and to acknowledge your goodness in the bestowment of my daily comforts. But above all, O eternal God, pour into my heart the spirit of praise and adoration for your unfathomable love in the redemption of the world.

Never can I sufficiently extol the grace of God the Father, in devising such a glorious plan of salvation as that revealed in the Gospel; for giving his Son, his Well-beloved, to sufferings, and to death! Oh! the length and breadth, the depth and height of this love, which passes knowledge!

Who can find words to magnify the grace of God the Son, in so freely leaving the bosom of his Father, descending from the heights of glory to the lowest depths of human misery, taking upon him, not the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham, becoming a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, fulfilling all righteousness for ruined sinners, dying the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God, and ascending up on high as the ever-glorified God-Man, there to appear in the presence of God for us, to intercede for us with the Father, and to perfect, by his living care, what his dying love began!

Where shall we begin our praises to God the Holy Spirit, by whom we are enabled to believe in Jesus, to love Jesus, and to bear his holy image; by whose quickening power we are raised from a death in sin to a life of righteousness; by whose almighty aid we are enabled to contend against our spiritual foes; and by whose refreshing, enlivening, comforting, and sanctifying grace, we are supported and animated under all our trials, and made to rejoice in hope of the glory of God?

These mercies, O my soul, demand your loudest praise, for, like their Author, they are immutable and eternal; "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you." "Israel shall be saved with an everlasting salvation, and shall never be confounded world without end." "It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Well might Jeremiah say, "The Lord is my portion, says my soul; therefore will I hope in him."

Are we groaning under a deep conviction of our wretchedness; and do we see ourselves to be nothing but sin and pollution? Let us praise God, who has opened a fountain for sin and for uncleanness, even the precious blood of Christ, which cleanses from all sin.

Are we hungering and thirsting after righteousness? Let us bless God for this spiritual appetite, remembering that in our Father’s house there is bread enough and to spare; that Jesus is the bread of life; that in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and that we are invited to receive out of his fullness and grace for grace.

Are we lamenting our spiritual nakedness, and afraid to appear before God? Let us rejoice that God has provided a garment for us, even the goodly clothing of our Elder Brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose righteousness the Church is clothed, and by whose graces she is prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Are we laboring under inward corruptions and indwelling sin? Let us praise God for those rich promises of his word, which tell us that his grace is sufficient for us; that we shall not be tempted above that we are able to bear; that if we draw near to God, he will draw near to us; that if we seek him, he will be found by us; that sin shall not have dominion over us; that he will bruise Satan under our feet shortly; and that he will make us more than conquerors through Him who has loved us, and given Himself for us.

O my soul, bless the Lord for these abounding mercies. Cease not to praise his holy name. Let every day, as it increases your obligations, stimulate your gratitude and love. But yet remember, that mere verbal religion is unavailing in the sight of Him who demands the heart. Lord give me grace to glorify you in my body and in my spirit which are yours; that, while I offer unto you the sacrifice of praise continually, I may not forget "to do good, and to give," since with such sacrifices you are well pleased, when presented to you on that altar which alone sanctifies the gift- the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do not forget, O my soul, "to do good." Compassionate precept, little understood, and less practiced. The worldly professor of religion may perform many benevolent actions; so also do those who deny the Divinity of Christ; but a work, though beneficial to others, will be unacceptable to God, if done without regard to his will and his glory. The afflicted may be bountifully relieved, even by an infidel or an atheist, acting on the mere impulse of natural sympathy; but, can such an act be acceptable to God? Surely not. How strong is the language of the Almighty to the rebellious house of Israel; "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though you offer me burned offerings, I will not accept them."

How gracious are the words of Christ to those who do good for his name’s sake; "And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward." But, to those who give alms from ostentation or self-righteousness, no blessing is imparted; "When you give a gift to someone in need, don’t shout about it as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I assure you, they have received all the reward they will ever get." "All their works they do for to be seen of men." The quantity cannot supersede the quality of our actions, "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and have not charity, it profits me nothing."

A work, to be really and scripturally good, must proceed from a right principle, be done by a right rule, and be directed to a right end. The ROOT of all acceptable obedience is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, without whom we can do nothing pleasing unto God; but by virtue of our union with him through faith, we receive grace from above, and are made fruitful in every good work. The RULE by which our actions are to be regulated is, not the traditions of men, but the word of God, the Scriptures of truth, which alone are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith, which is in Jesus Christ. The END to which all our doings must be directed, is the glory of God, and the present and eternal welfare of our fellow-creatures.

We must seek in all things to promote the honor and praise of Him who has called us with a holy calling, by employing our talents in his service, laying out ourselves for usefulness, relieving the needy, and comforting the disconsolate, strengthening the weak, and confirming the strong, admonishing the wavering, and reproving the profane in a spirit of Christian meekness and love, that the kingdom of the Redeemer may be extended, through the divine blessing on our labors, by

the suppression of vice, and the promotion of true religion and virtue.

"Lord of all power and might, the Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of your great mercy keep us in the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

How blessed is he who warmly feels

The witness of a Savior’s love;

To whom the Spirit, Christ, reveals,

And draws his heart to joys above.

With child-like love, and holy fear,

He lowly bends before the throne;

He views his Heavenly Father near,

And pleads the merit of his Son.

In grateful strains, he pours his heart

To Him who died his soul to save;

He knows that he will ne’er depart,

Nor leave him in the silent grave.

By faith he views Redemption’s hour,

When Christ, descending from above,

Shall raise him by his mighty power,

And fill his soul with endless love.

Oh! may this blessedness be mine

This child-like spirit now be given;

Then shall the praise be ever thine,

My Savior in the highest heaven.

02.21. THE HARMONY OF CHRISTIAN GRACES

21. THE HARMONY OF CHRISTIAN GRACES

"I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me forever." Jer 32:39

When we contemplate the Church of God as described in the Holy Scriptures, we must be struck with that unity of principle, and that union of heart, which form its beauty and stability. Our Lord thus intercedes for his believing people; "That they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you have sent me." This unity was beautifully exhibited by the church at Jerusalem; "They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved."

The apostolic exhortation enforces this oneness of faith and practice which would unite the Church of Christ, and make it a holy phalanx, against which the gates of hell could not prevail. "Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Always keep yourselves united in the Holy Spirit, and bind yourselves together with peace. We are all one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future. There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and there is only one God and Father, who is over us all and in us all and living through us all."

This lovely feature of the Christian Church was soon disfigured. Paul had to mourn over, and admonish many, whose minds were corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ- "And now I make one more appeal, my dear brothers and sisters. Watch out for people who cause divisions and upset people's faith by teaching things that are contrary to what you have been taught. Stay away from them. Such people are not serving Christ our Lord; they are serving their own personal interests. By smooth talk and glowing words they deceive innocent people." "Now, dear brothers and sisters, I appeal to you by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop arguing among yourselves. Let there be real harmony so there won't be divisions in the church. I plead with you to be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your arguments, dear friends." "For you are still controlled by your own sinful desires. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your own desires? You are acting like people who don't belong to the Lord. When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I prefer Apollos," aren't you acting like those who are not Christians?"

Thus rapidly did tares spring up among the wheat. Happy would it have been for the Church of Christ if this work of the enemy had been confined to the primitive age; but alas! every age has

exhibited his work of destruction. As union is strength, so the arch-enemy well knows, that disunion is weakness.

How glorious will that period be when the universal Church shall experience the fullness of the promise, "I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me."

The graces of the Spirit harmonize and combine together. Like the links of a chain they mutually encircle and strengthen each other. How different are the vices of the human heart. They are, for the most part, discordant. Yet, while they appear to run in opposite directions, and in many cases to oppose each other, they all meet in one point- the destruction of the soul. What can be more opposed, in appearance at least, than the miser and the spendthrift, the libertine and the formalist, the man whose heart is full of the cares of life, rising early, and late taking rest that he may amass a fortune, and the man of pleasure who says to his soul- "Take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Yet, these different vices all conspire the eternal ruin of the soul, and often reign, at different seasons, in the same breast. The libertine in youth often becomes covetous in old age; and the profane character, when wearied with licentious courses, sometimes assumes that of a religious devotee, hoping to atone for his past transgressions, and to merit a reward by a round of formal duties.

How desperately wicked is the human heart. Sin blinds the understanding and perverts the judgment. Men appear to be wise in every thing but religion. Here, they discover themselves to be very fools, and would be ashamed to act in temporal, as they do in spiritual things. What a convincing proof is this of the truth of Scripture, which declares, that the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Oh! my soul, renounce your own imagined wisdom, righteousness, and strength, which in the sight of God is foolishness, guilt, and helplessness. Pray for grace to know yourself, and to receive the truths of the gospel with the humility and simplicity of a child.

That delightful harmony which exists between the various graces of the Spirit is beautifully set forth in the word of God. Blessed is that soul in which the graces of faith, hope, and love; meekness, humility, and patience; self-denial, long-suffering, and resignation, dwell and flourish. Lord create my heart anew, and make it your dwelling-place.

It is important to consider every precept in the Bible, as forming a part of the Christian character. The true believer in Jesus is not presented to us in one entire figure, in any portion of the Holy Scriptures, but the lineaments of it may be traced throughout the sacred volume, as drawn by the pencil of Eternal Truth.

Thus, "To this man will I look, even to him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word." Contrition and poverty of spirit form a part of the believer’s character.

"Always be zealous for the fear of the Lord." The fear of God is another part of this holy character.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart." Love to God is also an essential part of it.

And so with every promise to which peculiar dispositions are attached. The blessings promised to the poor in spirit; to those who mourn; to the meek; to those who hunger and thirst after

righteousness; to the merciful; to the pure in heart; to the peacemakers; to them who suffer for righteousness' sake, are so many blessings promised to those who have the character of a child of God. The Bible, when read with this view of discovering the full length portrait of the real Christian, affords abundant matter for daily self-examination; "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation." "If you love me, keep my commandments." "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another." Thus, self-denial, watchfulness, a prayerful spirit, obedience, and brotherly love, form so many component parts of the Christian character.

Oh! blessed Spirit of truth and love draw these sacred lines upon my soul, that I may become more and more like Jesus, in the whole frame and disposition of my heart. Fill me with every gracious affection. Subdue every evil, selfish principle and passion, and cause me to grow and abound in all the fruits of righteousness. Lord, renew my soul, and make me a monument of your grace.

Who can study the Bible with prayer to understand it aright, and not be convinced that all true religion is seated in the heart? Truly to love the Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the essence of Gospel holiness, and the perfection of the Christian character. If I love the Savior in sincerity, my will must be molded into his, and all my powers become subservient to his glory. The influence of this divine principle will operate on every thought, word, and action. When it does not so operate, it is because this principle has grown weaker, or is opposed by some strongly counteracting evil in my heart. This evil is unbelief, pride, the lust of the flesh, and the love of the world. As this evil predominates, so is the man.

If it reigns in his heart, he is carnal, and under the wrath of God; if it only rebels, and is not allowed to rule, it marks a character renewed by the Spirit of Grace, struggling with those remnants of corruption which will never cease to harass the believer until death ends the warfare, and place the victorious Christian

"Where sin and flesh no more control

The sacred pleasures of the soul."

But, the very circumstance of this evil still dwelling within us, calls forth the graces of watchfulness and prayer. There is no period in the Christian life when watchfulness and prayer become unnecessary. Where can a passage be found, from Genesis to the Revelation, which countenances relaxation in duty, or a freedom from the exercise of vigilance and circumspection? The Bible, on the contrary, is full of exhortations, admonitions, and warnings; declaring that he only who endures unto the end shall be saved; that if any man looks back, God will have no pleasure in him; that he that overcomes shall inherit all things; and that to him who is faithful unto death, Christ will give the crown of life.

How sweet is a life of faith. Oh! that I could live such a life. It brings along with it holiness and happiness. God, who is the Author of it, is glorified by it, and the good of mankind in general is eminently promoted. A true believer in Jesus loves his Lord and Master; he esteems that day as lost which is not devoted to his service; he deems no sacrifice too great for him, who gave himself a sacrifice for sin; all his mental powers are exercised in the cause of his Redeemer, and when he hears of any good being done, through his feeble instrumentality, he rejoices, and gives God the

glory.

Lord enable me thus to feel, thus to act, and thus to live. Undertake for me, that, through your over-ruling Providence, I may become a humble instrument in your hands, of promoting the spread of genuine religion. Shed abroad your love in my heart. Reign the Sovereign of my affections. Make me vigilant and prayerful. Preserve me from unbelief and pride, sensuality and covetousness. Keep my feet in your paths, and bring me to the kingdom of your dear Son, there to employ my perfected powers in loving, serving, and adoring you through the blissful ages of eternity.

02.22. THE BLESSING OF PEACE

22. THE BLESSING OF PEACE

"Then said Jesus to them again; Peace be unto you." John 20:21

"Fools make a mock at sin." Possessed, it may be, of wealth and power, they glory in their shame, despise the godly, and dare even the vengeance of God. The loud laugh, the shafts of ridicule, the finger of scorn, are contemptuously directed against the humble Christian. The battery of infidelity is opened against his principles and hopes. He is held up as weak in intellect, superstitious in his fears, and unfit to be the associate of a man of substance. But it will not be always so.

The time will come when the arrows of the Almighty shall drink up their spirits; and when, awakened to a sense of their danger and of the blessedness of the believer, they shall exclaim, "We fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honor; how is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints! Therefore have we erred from the way of truth, and the light of righteousness has not shined unto us, and the sun of righteousness rose not upon us. We wearied ourselves in the way of wickedness and destruction; yes, we have gone through deserts, where there lay no way; but as for the way of the Lord, we have not known it. What has pride profited us? or what good has riches with our vaunting brought us? All those things have passed away like a shadow, and as a runner that hastens by; and as a ship that passes over the waves of the water, which when it is gone by, the trace thereof cannot be found, neither the pathway of the keel in the waves; or as when a bird has flown through the air, there is no token of her way to be found, but the light air being beaten with the stroke of her wings, and parted with the noise and motion of them, is passed through, and therein afterwards no sign where she went is to be found; or like as when an arrow is shot at a mark, it parts the air which immediately comes together again, so that a man cannot know where it went through....The hope of the ungodly is like dust that is blown away with the wind; like a thin froth that is driven away with the storm; like as the smoke which is dispersed here and there with a tempest, and passes away as the remembrance of a guest that tarries but a day. But the righteous live for evermore; their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them is with the Most High. Therefore shall they receive a glorious kingdom, and a beautiful crown from the Lord’s hand; for with his right hand shall he cover them, and with his arm shall he protect them."

O! that every thoughtless sinner might thus be led to reflect on his own state, and on the blessedness of the despised Christian. In the midst of gaiety and dissipation, the sinner feels a thorn rankling in his bosom. The word of God has declared it, and it cannot be reversed; "There is no peace unto the wicked." "They are like the trouble sea, when it cannot rest." Satan is a hard master; his wages are present and future misery. The sensualist is a slave to his lusts. He is bound with fetters. Hurried on by his passions, he plunges from one sin into another, until, satiated with worn-out indulgences, enfeebled in body and mind, seared in his conscience, and hardened in heart, he dies, the wretched victim of his love of sin.

"What scenes of horror and of dread,

Await a sinner’s dying bed!

Death’s terrors all appear in sight,

Presages of eternal night.

His sins in dreadful order rise,

And fill his soul with sad surprise,

Mount Sinai’s thunder stuns his ears,

And not one ray of hope appears.

Tormenting pangs distract his breast,

Wherever he turns he finds no rest,

Death strikes the blow- he groans, he cries,

And in despair and horror dies!

Not so the heir of heavenly bliss,

His soul is filled with conscious peace,

A steady faith subdues his fear,

He sees the heavenly Canaan near.

His mind is tranquil and serene,

No terrors in his looks are seen;

His Savior’s smiles dispel the gloom,

And smooth his passage to the tomb."

Happy believer! who lives in the sunshine of heavenly love; who dies beneath the smiles of the Prince of Peace! To him, what is earth with all its vanities? Thorns and thistles may spring up around him, but they hurt him not. The cares and afflictions of life are sanctified to him, while he looks not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. Under every trial, the peace of God rules in his heart, and fortifies him against the attacks of Satan. Being justified by faith, he has peace with God. Through the power of the Spirit he follows after peace with all men; and when called from this world of strife, he enters into peace, into that peaceful region, where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest.

Peace is a precious gift. It is the fruit of the Spirit, the legacy of Christ to his people, the portion of God’s children, the promised blessing to his Church. "All your children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of your children." Paul styles the Almighty, the God of Peace. Under this endearing title the richest mercies are conveyed. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." "May the God of peace sanctify you wholly." "May the God of peace make you

perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ." No wonder, then, that the Apostle should close his Epistles with this holy desire, "May the God of peace be with you."

Our blessed Lord, in his gracious discourse with his disciples, spoke words of peace and love; "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you." "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." How true, and yet how supporting to every real believer- "In the world you shall have tribulation" "In me you shall have peace."

Tribulation springs from many sources; the malice of wicked men, the assaults of wicked spirits, the corruption of our wicked hearts. Where is the Christian who has not to mourn over the sin that dwells in him? Who is not tempted by Satan? Who does not experience the hatred of the world? The more faithful we are to Christ, the more devoted we are to his cause, the more we exhibit his holy image by the holiness of our lives, and the more we shall suffer from the united attacks of men and devils. But oh! precious promise- "In me you shall have peace." Abiding In Christ by faith, enjoying the indwelling of his Spirit, and resting in our heavenly Father’s love, we shall rise superior to every tribulation, like the Alpine traveler who ascends until he leaves the storm beneath his feet.

After his resurrection, Jesus was the same peace-bestowing Savior. When little expected, the doors being shut for fear of the Jews, Jesus appeared in the midst of his sorrowing disciples, and said unto them, "Peace be unto you." Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. The loving Redeemer said to them the second time, "Peace be unto you." And, as if to show them the abundance of his grace, he appeared again, after eight clays, and said, "Peace be unto you." Can we be insensible to such love as this? Oh! that every heart may be softened by the Savior’s love. What can exceed the touching history of the resurrection, as given us by John, when the question is put, "Do you love me?" May all who read these searching words reply, with Peter’s warmth and Peter’s sincerity, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Blessed Jesus! enable me by faith to cleave to you in every trying hour. When the waves of affliction run high, and threaten to overwhelm my little vessel, may I, through grace, firmly confide in your power and love. Allow me not for a moment to doubt your goodness. You, O blessed Savior, can be touched with the feeling of my infirmities. You, my compassionate High-Priest, will plead my cause on high. Pour the balm of consolation into my soul. Strengthen me with faith in your promises, and in mercy overrule all the vicissitudes of life for my spiritual good. Enable me at all times to look unto you. Give me grace to perform the duties of today, and to leave with you, in faith, the events of tomorrow. Preserve me, O Lord, from all unreasonable cares and anxieties, knowing that without you not a sparrow falls to the ground.

"In me you shall have peace." Sweet declaration! Oh! that my heart were filled with your peace! Adorable Redeemer, take full possession of my soul, that I may be wholly, unreservedly, and forever yours. Make me a habitation for yourself. I am not worthy that you should come under my roof; but, O, for your mercy’s sake, dwell in my heart by faith, then shall I experience the joys of your salvation, and the unutterable blessings of peace and love; then shall I walk before you in newness of life, and be daily preparing for that new heaven and that new earth, wherein dwells righteousness.

Sweet is the peace which Christ bestows,

A peace the worldling never knows;

’Heart’s-ease’ grows on Emmanuel’s ground,

Which only near the Cross is found.

Though great my trials, grief, and care,

My Savior will the burden bear;

His grace and promise never cease,

He kindly utters words of peace.

Let not your troubles make you fear,

Believe in me- I’m always near;

Though while on earth, you tried shall be,

Yet still, your peace is found in me.

Should waves dash over your fragile bark,

And all around be wild and dark,

My word can bid the tempest cease,

And all be calm- and all be peace.

Oh! precious words of love divine,

What rays of bliss around me shine;

My grateful song shall never cease,

Since Jesus calls Himself my Peace.

02.23. THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST

23. THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Eph 3:8

The work of conversion was never more wonderfully displayed than in Saul of Tarsus. The man who thought that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, and persecuting the followers of Christ, even unto death; boldly preached the faith which once he destroyed. From a proud Pharisee, he became, in his own eyes, less than the least of all saints; and from a reviler of the Gospel, and a despiser of the Gentiles, he was made a chosen vessel to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation before kings and rulers, and to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

The heart of Paul was full of the loving-kindness of the Lord! Language seemed too weak to express his debt of gratitude, or to speak his Savior's praise. Enlightened by the Spirit of Truth, he saw in Jesus all that was gracious and glorious. Christ was the theme on which he loved to dwell. Christ crucified was his glory. In the midst of philosophers, he determined to know nothing but Christ crucified. In the synagogues of the Jews, he feared not to declare, the only foundation of the sinner's hope, the only name whereby one can be saved. Christ, crucified was the Alpha and Omega of his commission. He was sent, and he delighted in his mission, to preach both to Jews and Gentiles, the unsearchable riches of Christ.

It would have been well for the Christian Church, if all her ministers, in every succeeding age, had drank into the spirit of the Apostle, and made Christ Crucified the great subject of their preaching. Take this Truth away, and the key-stone is removed from the arch. The Church, destitute of this foundation, is built upon the sand. In this Truth, all the prophecies and promises unite; and from this Truth, as from a center, all the consolations which gladden, and all the divine influences which purify the heart, proceed. The whole of Revelation, before the coming of Christ, was but an unfolding of the Covenant of grace. In the fullness of time Christ appeared as God manifest in the flesh. To him, who is the end of the Law for righteousness, gave all the prophets witness. He died upon the cross. He made an end of sin. He brought in everlasting righteousness. He glorified the Love, Justice, and Holiness of God, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

How unsearchable are the riches of Christ. How wonderful, how surpassing all human conception are the mysteries of grace. Oh! that I could feel my soul softened under the beams of mercy, which emanate from Eternal love, and shine with so mild a glory in the person of Jesus Christ.

"Stronger his love than death and hell,

Its riches are unspeakable;

The first born sons of light,

Desire in vain its depth to see;

They cannot reach the mystery,

The length, and breadth, and height."

Nothing but sovereign grace and power can save me from sin and hell. When I look into my heart, what do I there behold? A den of wild beasts; a cage of unclean birds; a nest of vipers; a loathsome sepulcher. Pride turns from the view. Self-love sickens at the sight. Can I recover myself from this abject state. Alas! no! All ability to perform any thing that is good and acceptable to a holy God was lost in Adam, from whom I have derived a nature altogether sinful and corrupt. Power, indeed, I have to provoke my Creator, and to rebel against the sovereignty of God, but none to serve Him aright. What, then, can such a creature expect? Infinite justice demands my destruction to vindicate the holiness of God, whose law I have broken times without number. All excuses fail. In the bitterness of self-reproach I can only confess, that I have destroyed myself, that God is just, that I deserve to feel the heaviest stroke of his righteous indignation.

But, oh! my soul, contemplate the unsearchable riches of Christ, in extending a free unmerited pardon to you; yes, even to you; promising to blot out all your sins, if you will only believe in his word and trust in his grace. Lord, enable me to believe, to receive you by a loving faith; to live upon you day by day; yes, every fleeting moment, for strength to conquer inward corruptions, to subdue my enemies, and to perfect holiness in your fear. Put forth your power in my soul. Dispel the mist of ignorance and error. Dissipate the dark cloud of doubts and fears. Arm me with strength for the performance of every duty, however arduous, and with might to withstand my spiritual foes, however violent their opposition. And oh! divine Savior, complete the unsearchable riches of your grace in the consummation of all felicity, even an everlasting deliverance from the guilt and power of sin; an everlasting enjoyment of your glorious presence in heaven; an everlasting resemblance to all your moral perfections; an everlasting union to all the blessed saints and angels; an everlasting separation from sorrow, pain, and death. Oh! may these unsearchable riches be my present and future portion! May I know, and love, and serve you here, and then see you as you are, and love and serve you as I ought, in your kingdom of bliss and glory.

The unsearchable riches of Christ, which are the portion of every true believer, are neglected, forgotten, or despised by an unbelieving world. Pleasure, wealth, and power, form the world’s trinity. Before these idols they bow down in adoration. All their thoughts, time, and talents are employed in their service. No sacrifice is deemed too great to obtain possession of these vanities. Thousands, who call themselves Christians, who have been baptized in the name of Christ, and who make a nominal profession of Christianity, worship these idols which Satan has set up. Everything to which we give the heart, becomes our idol. This was the sin of the Israelites of old- They set up their idols in their heart.

The low views which men in general have of the infinite Holiness of God, is the chief reason why they consider sin as a light thing, and seldom trouble themselves about it until death opens their eyes, and the terrors of hell get hold upon them. Too many, alas! even in their departing moments, feel no bands in their death; but die with the same unconcern in which they lived. The soul-destroying errors of Socinianism spring from this fatal source- inadequate views of the justice and Holiness of Jehovah, and the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

The Holiness of God is one of his brightest attributes. Mercy may be withheld, as in the case of the fallen angels and impenitent sinners, "He did not take upon him the nature of angels." They are reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day." "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." Justice, also, may be satisfied, and sheath the sword of vengeance. Christ suffered the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. But holiness cannot be dispensed with. This perfection of Deity is glorified both in the salvation of the believing penitent, and in the destruction of the wicked. "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," is the angelic note of praise- the adoring theme of the hierarchy of heaven.

At the Cross of Christ, Holiness shines forth in all its brightness; while love kindly raises the sinner from the lowest depths of wretchedness to the highest seat in glory. "Today shall you be with me in Paradise." Oh! my soul, stand still and behold the salvation of God. Pray without ceasing, that these unsearchable riches of Christ may extend even to you. Then shall you become a monument of redeeming grace, and mingle your everlasting praises with the ransomed hosts above.

Blessed Jesus! out of your fullness may I daily receive wisdom and strength. The riches of your grace are unsearchable, but not inaccessible. Never can I comprehend the height and depth of your redeeming love, yet every moment I can taste its sweetness, and feel its sustaining power. Oh! how vast are your designs, how glorious your purposes, as revealed in the covenant of grace. All is infinite. Your love is an everlasting love. Your covenant is an everlasting covenant. From everlasting to everlasting, You are God. Oh! that my heart may now commence the never ending song- "Worthy is the Lamb!" Hallelujah! Amen!

"This God is the God we adore,

Our faithful, unchangeable Friend;

Whose love is as great as his power,

And neither knows measure nor end.

’Tis Jesus the First and the Last,

Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;

We’ll praise him for all that is past,

And trust him for all that’s to come."

02.24. AN EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF

24. AN EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF

"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." 2Co 4:3-4

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." Heb 3:12

Truly, a heart of unbelief is an evil heart. Out of such a heart every EVIL proceeds. A bitter fountain cannot send forth sweet water. An unbelieving heart is the laboratory of Satan! "in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

Unbelievers are the slaves of Satan; they "are taken captive by him at his will." When the glorious gospel of our God and Savior shines around them, they see it not. As the meridian sun is hidden from the naturally blind, so is the gospel hidden to those who are lost, through the blinding influence of unbelief. "Satan, the god of this evil world, has blinded the minds of those who don’t believe, so they are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News that is shining upon them. They don’t understand the message we preach about the glory of Christ."

Contradictory as it may seem, many virtues approved by men, may be exhibited by those that are lost. Generosity, sympathy for the afflicted, elegance of manners, patriotic displays of courage in defense of his country, and such like popular virtues, may form a wreath around the brow, or emblazon the tomb, of the unbeliever. But, what is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God, if faith working by love is lacking in the heart. The trumpet of fame has sounded the praises of many, even to the ends of the earth, who, at the last trumpet, shall hear these words sounded out before an assembled world; "Depart from me, you cursed ones, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

How empty is the breath of human praise! And yet, how many pant after it, and even risk the salvation of their souls to obtain it. Oh! that men were wise, that they would consider their latter end! Lord teach me heavenly wisdom. Give me to see and feel, that all true honor comes from you. To be your child, to form a part of your redeemed church, to know and serve you in the gospel of your Son, to esteem Christ precious, and to love him with all the heart, is infinitely above the smile of monarchs, or the plaudits of the world.

What a DESTRUCTIVE sin is unbelief. It is like a dungeon in which the prisoner is enclosed without any possibility of escape. Nothing but the mighty power of God can "bring out the prisoners from the prison, and those who sit in darkness out from the prison house." Unbelief is the root of all evil. Its effects in the soul are of the most deadly nature. The whole human race is tainted with it, yes, is become radically corrupted by it. From Adam to the present time, and from this period to

the last hour of man’s existence upon earth, multitudes have been, are, and will be defiled and destroyed, through the subtle poison of unbelief. "When the Son of Man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?" We read indeed of brighter days and purer times, when Satan shall be bound for a thousand years; blissful period! when Christ shall reign in the hearts of his people, as the Universal King; when he shall reign before his ancients gloriously; but soon, alas! does this happy period draw to its close. Satan shall be again loosed out of his prison. He shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth. The enemies of Christ, innumerable like the sand of the sea, shall compass the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city, when fire shall come down from God out of heaven, and devour them. Wickedness will therefore once more deluge the earth.

But He, who is King of kings, and Lord of lords, shall come with his mighty angels in flaming fire, to take vengeance on those who know not God, and that obey not the gospel of his Son. Then will the heavens pass away with a great roar, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up. Then will be seen the great white throne and him who sits on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven will flee away. Before the King of Glory will then be gathered all nations. The dead, small and great, shall stand before God. The books shall be opened; and the dead will be judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to their works; and whoever is not found written in the Book of Life, will be cast into the lake of fire.

How consoling to the tempest-tossed believer are the words of Paul; "For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus comes, God will bring back with Jesus all the Christians who have died. I can tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not rise to meet him ahead of those who are in their graves. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the call of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, all the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever." "Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. For them the second death holds no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him a thousand years." "Since everything around us is going to melt away, what holy, godly lives you should be living! You should look forward to that day and hurry it along—the day when God will set the heavens on fire and the elements will melt away in the flames. But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world where everyone is right with God. And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to live a pure and blameless life."

This future glory is of necessity encompassed with clouds. But enough is revealed to animate our hopes, to stimulate our exertions, to inflame our love, to strengthen our faith, though we cannot chronologically arrange the glorious events which shall follow each other until the final consummation of all things. Different views are taken, but every view should lead us to the conclusion of Peter; "Since everything around us is going to melt away, what holy, godly lives you should be living!"

Oh! that I may have grace with deep humility to contemplate this dreadful, yet, to every believer, delightful period, when Jesus shall come with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also

which pierced him, when he shall be surrounded by all those who love his appearing, on whom he will then pronounce the sentence of blessedness, and receive them into the joy of their Lord.

Infidelity is the enemy of man. It robs him of his support, of his consolation, of his hope. It presents before him a dreary waste-land, at the end of which is nothing but darkness and despair. Though all are not infidels, properly so called, rejecting the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and scoffing at the revealed plan of salvation through Jesus Christ; yet, all are by nature under the power of unbelief. Thousands, who profess to receive the Bible as the word of God, and who would take offence at being called infidels, act as though they did not believe it. While they profess that they know God, they in works deny him; while they call him Lord, Lord, they do not practice the things which he commands. It is sad to think how much practical infidelity is concealed under the garb of a religious profession. "They say, and do not."

Unbelief, like a mighty stream, runs through the whole territory of our fallen world. Its spring is found in Paradise, where our deceived parents ate of the forbidden fruit. As their posterity increased, this river of death grew wider and wider. Wherever a human being is to be found, whatever be his country, language, or color, there we shall find a portion of this stream, whose pestiferous exhalations destroy the fair beauty of the moral world, and convert the whole earth into a waste howling wilderness.

Blessed be God! there is a river, whose streams make glad the city of God, the Church of the Most High. This river, pure as crystal, proceeds from the fountain of Eternal Love, and flows down to earth, through the adorable Redeemer of mankind. When the dreadful flood of unbelief burst forth in Paradise, threatening to overwhelm the new creation, this life-giving stream of Sovereign Love began to flow. A spiritual Eden was graciously commenced. Trees of righteousness were planted and nourished. A people was formed who should show forth the Redeemer’s praise. The eleventh chapter of Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews, most beautifully describes this garden of the Lord. Thousands in every age have borne witness to the truth, by faith and love, by patience and hope; exhibiting in their lives the fruits of the Spirit, and the grace and power of the adorable Savior.

Oh! that I may become one of these highly-favored plants, that all who are near and dear to me may be trees of righteousness of the Lord’s planting, that he may be glorified; yes, that all mankind may bear fruit to the glory of God. If I am a child of God, I shall implicitly believe his holy word. If I truly believe his revealed will, I shall labor through grace to obey it. If I obey it from the heart, my whole walk and conversation will evidence my obedience. I shall then hate what God hates, and love what he loves. I shall not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of my mind. I shall not set my affections on earthly, but on heavenly things. I shall willingly take up my cross and follow Christ, though the path lie through the reproach of men, and tribulation for the gospel’s sake.

Knowing that circumcision avails nothing, nor uncircumcision, but a New Creature, I shall be mainly anxious to experience the power of godliness, while maintaining the form. I shall dread the state of those who rest in a dead formality, who substitute the shadow for the substance, the sign for the thing signified. "The kingdom of God ’is not food and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." "The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power."

Lord, enable me to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, in all goodness, righteousness, and truth, that I may have a clear and undoubted evidence that I am born from above, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and made a temple of the Holy Spirit. Perform in mercy, this work of love on my soul, through your own rich grace, and for the sake of that beloved Savior who died for the chief of sinners, to whom I may look with hope and confidence for pardoning, purifying, and glorifying grace. Oh! how great is your unspeakable, unsearchable love. Like yourself, it is infinite and eternal! "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name."

02.25. The Evil of Pride

25. The Evil of Pride

"God resists the proud." Jas 4:6

There are two principles which rule and govern the hearts of natural men- Pride and sensuality. These two evils are continually in operation, the one, against the soul-humbling, the other, against the soul-purifying, doctrines of the Gospel.

Salvation by grace, through faith in the blood of Christ, is most offensive to the pride of the natural man. The idea of being wholly indebted to another for admission into the kingdom of heaven, is extremely disgusting to self-love. Such an idea is rejected with disdain by every heart, unhumbled and untaught by the Spirit of God. Fallen man needs to have some share in the great work of salvation, to have something whereof to boast. But God has declared that this shall not be. No flesh shall boasts in his presence. "He that boasts, let him boast in the Lord."

From this principle of self-righteous pride have arisen all those perversions of the Gospel which have abounded in every age, and which Paul so warmly reprobates in his Epistle to the Galatians. It is a principle deeply rooted in our fallen nature, and which nothing but the Holy Spirit can eradicate. It forms a part of that remnant of corruption which believers feel and bewail, and against which they daily fight and pray. In proportion as it operates, it occasions obscurity in their views of divine truth, and deadness in their affections to spiritual things. It grieves the Holy Spirit, and tarnishes the glory of the Cross. Pride, assuming every form, either worldly or religious, can go with us into our closets, or attend us at the sanctuary. Like a subtle poison, it can insinuate itself into our prayers and praises. Unseen, and unsuspected, it mars our best duties, and creates that self-admiration, that desire for human applause, which corrupts the heart, and steals it away from God.

O blessed Jesus, what need have I to look unto You for grace and strength. Save me from pride and vain-glory. Often do I feel and lament their baneful influence. If I speak for you, O, how does the poison work unseen by every eye but Yours! As you alone can behold this hidden evil of the heart, so do you in mercy destroy its influence. To You, blessed Savior, do I look. You know what is in me. Your eyes are on all my ways. Oh! wash me in the cleansing fountain of your precious blood. Purge me from this foul stain of corrupted nature. Make me truly humble and abased before You. Purify my soul, then shall I become as a little child in simplicity, teachableness, and humility. The work is all your own. To You be all the praise.

The more exalted views I have of the Holiness and Purity of God, and of the extent and spirituality of the divine Law; the deeper sense I have of the evil of sin, and of the depravity of human nature; the more shall I value the precious doctrine of Justification by faith only, through the blood and righteousness of Christ; the more shall I feel the necessity of the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit, and the more shall I acknowledge salvation to be all of grace, flowing freely from the love of God the Father, displayed in the voluntary sufferings of God the Son, and made savingly

known to sinners, through the power of God the Holy Spirit.

But, if I reverse all this, if I have low views of the divine Holiness, making the Almighty such an one as myself; if I consider the Gospel merely as a mitigated law, lowering the standard of holiness, that all may be admitted into heaven- if I have high conceptions of the dignity of human nature, and inadequate views of the evil of sin; in that proportion the glory of the Gospel will appear dim in my eyes, the righteousness of Christ will be considered as a make-weight in the scale of human merit, and the operation of the Holy Spirit as nothing more than an auxiliary to the natural powers of man.

The former view exalts the glory of God, and humbles the sinner, while holiness is promoted; but the latter, springing from pride, eclipses the splendor of the Deity, obscures the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness, like a dark cloud intervening between us and the orb of day; while the wretched worm of the earth, inflated with pride, sinks into endless woe. Which of these two statements, I would ask, may we reasonably suppose to be a revelation from God? Let conscience speak. Let the word of truth speak. Let the convinced sinner speak. All will proclaim, "Let God be glorified."

Oh! what cursed pride dwells in the heart of man. But what will become of proud looks, and proud pretensions, when Christ shall sit on the throne of his glory, and render unto every man according to his works? Then will the contrite soul, who, while on earth was trodden down by the foot of pride, be exalted to the heights of glory; then will the proud sinner, once admired and applauded, be hurled into the depths of hell.

Lord, clothe me with humility. Empty me of all overweening thoughts of myself. Make Christ more precious to my heart. Draw me to Yourself. Then shall I form a part of your little flock; and be found among your people, in the day when you make up your jewels.

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall;" but, "before honor is humility." By nature, I am blind to my real state and character. Pride and self-love form an impenetrable veil, which hides me from myself. Others can see, and point out my defects. Hence arises the value of a faithful friend. Blessed Spirit of Holiness, remove the veil, open my understanding, and discover to me the true state of my soul.

It is a fact, in spiritual things, that we never know that we are blind, until we are taught by the Spirit. The Pharisees said to our Lord, "Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If you were blind, you should have no sin; but now you say, We see; therefore your sin remains." These very men, who said, "We see," were addressed by our Lord as blind. "Woe unto you, you blind guides." "You blind Pharisee! cleanse first that which is within." It is only when the Spirit opens the eyes of our minds, that we see and feel our ignorance, and can mourn our spiritual darkness. Until then, we fancy ourselves to be very wise and good, notwithstanding we are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

O you lowly Savior! impart unto me lowliness of mind. When on earth, "your voice was not heard in the streets." You abstained from every display of your almighty power, except when called forth in acts of love and pity. All your miracles were wrought to bless our race, or to manifest forth your glory. Devils and diseases fled at your command; winds were hushed to silence; and the raging waters sank into a calm. At your all-powerful voice, the dead arose; and nature, through all her

realm, confessed You to be the Lord. But man confessed You not! The world was made by you, and the world knew you not. You came unto your own, and your own received you not. Oh! give me grace to receive you in faith and love, that I may have the privilege of becoming a child of God, being born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Hide pride from me. Give me a single eye, which aims at nothing but your glory. Keep me from the proud insinuations of Satan, from the swellings of a corrupt and carnal heart.

It is of great importance in the Christian life to obtain a right knowledge of ourselves. This can only be obtained by earnest prayer for divine illumination, by a diligent study of the Word of God, and by frequent and impartial, self-examination. While thoroughly searching our hearts, we shall find much within us to mortify our pride; but the more we are enabled to discover the hidden evils of our hearts, and to crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts, the more we shall value and delight in the Gospel plan of Salvation. At the Cross of Christ we shall learn to know ourselves, and Him, of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets did write. We shall see, in letters of glory, those messages of grace, which proclaim a free pardon and everlasting life to all who believe in, and receive, Christ crucified.

Oh! that I could, at this moment, throw wide the doors of a willing mind to admit the Lord of Glory, that he may henceforth reign as King supreme over every affection of my heart. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!

Though the heart be renewed by divine grace, the infection of nature does remain in those who are regenerated, and too often rebels, notwithstanding the watchfulness and care of the believer. "In me," says Paul, "(that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing." This indwelling sin may not, through grace, be allowed to break out into open acts of vice, but it struggles and fights within; "When I would do good, evil is present with me." "I find a law in my members, warring against the law of my mind." This inbred evil excites to pride, sloth, spiritual indifference, earthly-mindedness, fleshly lust, self-confidence, carnal ease, and a thousand other evils destructive to our peace, and grieving to the good Spirit of our God.

To whom, then, can I look for deliverance from these evils, but to Him who has said, "My grace is sufficient for you." "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." This is the great and gracious promise of the New Covenant, for which I am encouraged to pray in the name, and through the merits, of the blessed Jesus. Lord, vouchsafe this blessing, the pledge of every other blessing which flows to our ruined world through the death and intercession of your dear Son.

02.26. ON HYPOCRISY, AND DEADNESS TO THE WORLD

26. ON HYPOCRISY, AND DEADNESS TO THE WORLD

"In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness." Mat 23:28

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

The Bible addresses the hypocrite, and the sincere worshiper of God, in words which cannot be misunderstood. Each is painted in his true colors, by that hand which cannot err. He who looks at the heart cannot be deceived by outward appearances. He sees through the veil which conceals the motive from our view. Man may deceive his fellow man, and often does. That charity which hopes all things forbids mistrust, until facts expose a character which even charity can no longer screen. How often is religion wounded in the house of her friends. The falls of the sincere, as well as the scandals of hypocrites, give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, and bring a reproach upon that Gospel, whose command is, "Abstain from all appearance of evil.."

There is scarcely a grace in the true believer, which does not find its counterfeit in the hypocrite. A hypocrite is nothing but 'a pretense' of something excellent. He plays a part, and impersonates a character, which is not his own. Were there no excellencies in religion, or were those excellencies not held in estimation, there would be no hypocrites. Hence we find, in seasons of fiery persecution, but few, if any, who will be hardy enough to risk their worldly interest, ease, or reputation, to obtain a name which is branded with obloquy, and followed by death. But when religion obtains credence in the world, when the profession of it raises a person in the general esteem, and when it opens the door to some valuable place, or preferment, then these hypocrites abound, like summer flies, fluttering in the beams of the mid-day sun.

We may use an old adage, "All is not gold that glitters." There is a living faith, and a dead faith; a blessed hope, and a false hope; a fervent love, and a mere verbal affection; "with their mouth they show much love;" a filial fear, and a slavish fear; a spiritual joy, and carnal excitement; a peace which passes understanding, and a delusive peace; a godly sorrow, and a worldly sorrow, which works death; a genuine humility, and an hypocritical humiliation. We read also of a desire to be something when we are nothing; and of a vain endeavor to appear esteemed in the eyes of men; and yet, to stand, on acceptable terms with the Great Searcher of hearts.

Alas! that we should take such pains to impose upon ourselves, and deceive others. Wretched, indeed, is our state, when insincerity and deception are hourly needed to prevent exposure and disgrace. Truly pitiable is that man, who, conscious of his falls, and dreading to have them known, is alive to every 'whisper'. Oh! how invaluable is simplicity and godly sincerity; a heart full of the love of Christ, and a life on which slander cannot justly breathe! Such a one is conscious of much evil over which to lament. He mourns in secret, with Daniel, over his transgressions; with Paul. over the sin which wars in his members; with Isaiah, he cries out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips;" and with Peter, I am a sinful man, O Lord." But before men

his walk is blameless. He shines as a light in the world. He dares to be singular, though made a by-word and a proverb of reproach.

Lord, have mercy upon me, a poor, fallen, miserable sinner! Oh! allow me not to lie on the couch of carnal security, or to be bound by the chains of that false hope and false peace, which Satan throws around the souls of countless millions. Without your almighty power I must perish; for nothing, O blessed Jesus, but your grace can rescue my soul from death and hell. When I look into my heart, I may well turn from the sight. What swarms of evils do I discover, unknown and unseen by the world. I do indeed loathe and abhor myself. O give me grace to repent before you in dust and ashes. I sigh for deliverance. I long for your presence. I want the enjoyment of your favor. It appears like winter in my soul. Darkness covers me. I know, and precious is the knowledge, that You, O blessed Jesus, are the Savior and Friend of sinners. Be pleased to say, "I am your salvation," and the joyful tidings conveyed by the Holy Spirit to my soul, will cause light, and life, and joy, and gladness, to abound within me. Methinks I hear the distant sound of mercy sweetly advancing towards me; oh! let me believe, and not despair. Let me trust, and not be afraid. Let me lie at the foot of your Cross, and there behold your bleeding wounds, until every wound in my soul be healed, and all be holiness and peace within.

As the hypocrite lives for the world, so does the true believer live unto God. The one is ever seeking the praise of men; the other, the approbation of God his Savior. The hypocrite’s hope perishes with the earth; the hope of the believer will be realized when sublunary things shall have passed away. O! that I could feel my heart dead to all things here below, and alive only unto God.

This desire to die unto all things here below, may appear to many, to be inconsistent with our natural state, as inhabitants of earth, where various objects require our close attention, and call forth continual application; where relative duties demand our anxious care; and public duties our active labors. Yet still the desire is a Christian desire. "You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

Without this spiritual deadness to the world, I shall never be able rightly to fulfill the duties which God requires of me. A heart, glued to the world, a heart enchained by its pleasures, profits, and cares; a heart, in which the world sits enthroned, can never be a heart acceptable unto God. Such a heart can never serve both God and Mammon. Two masters so opposite in their commands, can never, by the same servant, be wholly and universally obeyed. A man might as readily hope to reach the North Pole, while steering towards the south, as to think of attaining to the favor of God, while seeking, with all his powers, the favor of the world.

The first and great commandment is, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart." But how can I even aim at this high command, if created objects have the upper, or equal place in my affections? To be dead to the world, is to be weaned from it; to live above it, and not to be captivated by it. This deadness to the world may exist with the greatest vitality, as regards the fulfillment of relative duties. I may be all alive and active in the performance of duties which are more immediately connected with the world, and yet, at the same time, as respects my heart and affections, be dead to it. Oh! this is a great attainment- to be in the world, and yet not of the world. Without this, I cannot be a Christian. Jesus said to his disciples, "If you were of the world, the world would love his own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

And in his intercessory prayer, "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word." "I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours." "I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it."

To be, then, a worldly Christian, is a contradiction in terms. Nothing can be more evident than this; that every true disciple of Christ, like his Lord and Master, is not of the world. He is different in spirit and in practice. As Jesus went about doing good, so do his faithful servants. Avoiding the superstitious abstractions of monkish indolence, and the distracting pursuits of nominal Christians, the true believer, with his heart in heaven, labors with prayerful zeal to glorify, in every station, his God and Savior.

If it be asked- How can this be done? The reply is ready. Through the grace and power of Christ, sought for by diligent prayer. Oh! how encouraging is the Savior's command; "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find." "All things whatever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive." Faith, working by love; faith, overcoming the world; will set all inferior objects in their due place and order. A heart, in which Christ reigns, knows well how to estimate the vanities of time, and the glories of eternity; as the artist can appreciate the exquisite touches of the master, while he passes by the rude attempts of the mere learner.

The second great commandment is; "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This command calls forth, at once, all the energies of the mind, and all the best feelings of the heart. This beautiful order of the commandments is most important. When I can love God supremely, then I place the world and all things in it at the foot of his throne, and look unto, and worship, and place all my dependence upon, and seek all my happiness from, God and God alone. This is to honor him, in some humble measure, from whom I have received my being, and on whose will I every moment depend.

When I can love my neighbor as myself, with a pure heart fervently, then selfishness is destroyed, that weed of fallen nature, which so rankly covers the soil of the natural heart, and chokes the good seed which may be sown upon it. Alas! when I examine my affections, and all the secret springs which move and guide my outward actions, what cause have I to be humbled and confounded before my Almighty Creator! What spiritual idolatries, what backslidings in heart, what worldly motives, what wandering affections, what selfish principles, what evils of every name, too often rise and rebel in the heart of the true believer! He groans, being burdened. He cries out- "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Lord! purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Sprinkle my conscience with the atoning blood of Jesus. Elevate my motives, spiritualize my affections, and wean me from the world. You can supply my every want out of your fullness. Blessed Lord, I want to love you supremely, and my neighbor as myself. I want to be made conformable to your Will, to be renewed after your Image. O, perform this great, this gracious, work upon my soul. Deliver me from all iniquity. Purify my heart by faith, and fill me with holy, heavenly love, to the praise of your own everlasting grace, through Jesus Christ my Savior.

02.27. HUMAN CORRUPTION AND ABOUNDING GRACE

27. HUMAN CORRUPTION AND ABOUNDING GRACE

"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Rom 5:20

All orthodox Christians agree on the doctrine of the Fall; that the whole human race fell in Adam, as their federal head; and that we are by nature the children of wrath. They agree in this truth, that death has passed upon all men, for all have sinned, and therefore lie under condemnation, and are exposed to the righteous judgment of God. The Scriptures are most clear on this solemn subject. This doctrine militates against the pride of our darkened understandings, and the boasted morality of the world. Some treat this doctrine as monstrous, others as fanatical. But all, who are taught of God, receive it in deep self-abasement. Lord give me grace to embrace, in the simplicity of faith, all those humbling truths of your holy word, which, at once, crucify self love, and prepare the heart to receive Jesus as the only Savior from guilt and condemnation.

The doctrine of the Fall and its direful consequences, may, in some small degree, be exemplified by what we witness around us. In how many families are certain maladies perpetuated, which are styled hereditary, descending from father to son, yes, even to children’s children. How frequently have the profligacy and prodigality of parents entailed upon their posterity disease and poverty. What millions of our fellow-creatures have groaned from age to age under the iron yoke of one bloody conqueror. The conquests of Mahomet have to this day held in bondage the Christian churches in the East, while the spiritual despotism of Popery enslaves its millions in the West. When I compare the present state of man with his original formation- when I view him as he once was, perfect in holiness, peace, and love, and as he now is, full of iniquity, disquietude, and enmity, I feel the force of my Savior’s words to Nicodemus, "Marvel not that I said unto you, You must be born again."

When I contemplate the Almighty Creator in all his infinite perfections, and man in all his vileness; when I survey the spotless mansions of glory, and the polluted habitations of earth; I am constrained to say, Amen, to my Savior’s declaration, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Let me well observe this important truth, I must be born again, not of water only, but of the Spirit. What does this teach me? Surely that a great change must necessarily take place, before a mass of corruption can be made fit to inherit incorruption. The change is great, but the power which effects it is omnipotent. The cause of this change is the sovereign love of God. With Him this blessedness originated, and by Him it is performed, otherwise it could not be said, "By grace are you saved." "Salvation is of the Lord." The means for effecting this change were ordained by infinite wisdom, and are revealed and applied to a lost world through the Holy Spirit. The end of this change was designed by the Father of mercies, to display the divine perfections, to destroy the powers of darkness, and to diffuse unnumbered blessings, in time and eternity, through the redemption of sinners by the death and glorification of His beloved Son.

Oh! how transporting will the heavenly anthem be! "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." Lord! be graciously pleased to effect this unspeakably blessed change in my soul. I have daily to mourn over an evil heart of unbelief. I feel so much of self, mixing with my better motives; so much of earth, mixing with my spiritual duties; so much of distrust and slavish fear, mixing with my professed faith in you, that I may well exclaim with Job, "I abhor myself."

Lord! undertake for me. Hold me up and I shall be safe. Create in me a new and contrite heart. Wash away all my corruptions. Cover me with your spotless righteousness, and make me fit for the inheritance of the saints in light. Lord, enable me daily to come unto you, to spread all my needs, and sorrows, and sins before you; yes, to lay them all by faith at the foot of the Cross, where grace, and mercy, and truth unite to save, and bless such a hell-deserving sinner as I am. Oh! how sweet is your call of love- "Come unto me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Look unto me, and be saved." "Do not be afraid, only believe."

Lord enable me to come on the warrant of your word; for you have said, "Him that comes to me I certainly not cast out." Make my soul joyful in your salvation. Put a new song into my mouth, even a Psalm of thanksgiving unto my God.

How deadly are the fruits which unbelief produces; insensibility to eternal things; the alienation of the heart from God; a love for carnal delights. We naturally turn away from that which never captivates our affections. We choose darkness rather than light, because our deeds are evil. The only obstacle to loving God supremely, arises from the rebelliousness of our will to his holy law, and from an aversion to the humbling method of salvation, as revealed in the Gospel. This state of mind constitutes our guilt in his sight, and renders us deservedly the objects of his wrath.

Every day I have to mourn over this spiritual insensibility. I want to feel my heart all alive to God. I want to feel my soul melted with godly sorrow, and expanded with holy joy. I want to experience that indescribable emotion of contrition and peace which sweetly blends in the heart of the penitent believer, and excites the soul to praise, even when the eye is moistened with the tear of grief. Sorrow for sin, and joy in the Savior, form that peculiarity of feeling which a stranger cannot understand. Lord! may I daily know more of it. Give me a saving knowledge of yourself, and a growing taste for spiritual blessings.

All the angelic beings are under the perpetual influence of the highest love and reverence for God, and all of them delight to do his will. All the spirits of just men made perfect in heaven, are actuated by the same exalted principle of love. The Church on earth is taught by her divine Lord to pray, "May your will be done in earth as it is in heaven." The families in heaven and earth are one. If, then, a soul under the influence of this guilty disinclination of heart to love and serve God, should, in such a state, be called out of time into eternity, how could it be fit for the society of saints and angels, whose bosoms burn with everlasting love? How could such a soul enter into their enjoyments or employments? Heaven would be worthless, so far as he is concerned. It would be no place of happiness to such a soul. Every thing around it would run counter to the evil principle within him; and hence it is evident that, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

There are few delusions which men more successfully practice upon themselves than this- the hope of going to heaven when they die. This, like some healing plaster, is universally applied to ease the conscience. No matter how evil the life may be; Satan still whispers, as he did of old- "You shall not surely die." The sinner, trusting in the father of lies, goes on in his wickedness; thinks that God is too merciful to punish through eternity, the failings committed in time; and that all will end well at the last. Hell is truth learned too late!

O, my soul, pray without ceasing to be saved from these wiles of Satan; from this wretched state of alienation from God. The more I meditate on this important subject, the more I see the necessity for my being made a New Creature in Christ Jesus, before I can possibly relish or delight in the purchased possession. Many are apt to suppose, they must necessarily be happy, if they can only gain admittance into the celestial city, without considering what constitutes the bliss of heaven. Without love to God, without a delight in his service, without a hatred of sin, heaven would be no heaven to them, even if they could be admitted into it. "The pure in heart shall see God." "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

Vain, then, are the hopes of the hypocrite. "Nothing evil will be allowed to enter—no one who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty—but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life." Against such, the door will be forever shut. Lord, renew my soul in righteousness. Give me a delight to do your will. Guard me against the deceitful workings of unbelief. Enable me to resist the wiles of the devil. Shine upon my path, and guide me, by your Spirit, to the realms of glory.

"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Blessed declaration! Had it not been so, wretched would our condition now have been! We would have lain in the darkness of despair, waiting for the blackness of darkness forever! But, light has sprung up; the voice of mercy is heard, and sinners may rejoice in God their Savior. The God of all grace invites us to the mercy-seat. The Spirit of Grace conducts us there. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

How wonderful is the work of grace in the heart! It is a progressive work. It springs from God, and leads to God. The first operation of the Spirit in the soul of the sinner is LIGHT. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This light being a spiritual, searching light, produces conviction of the evil and turpitude of sin. This CONVICTION being of an awakening, softening nature, causes the feeling of deep contrition on account of original and actual transgression. CONTRITION, when abiding, leads to confession, to a humble, heartfelt acknowledgment of guilt and misery. CONFESSION, when flowing from a believing view of the Cross of Christ, ends in a blessed CONVERSION of soul to God, an entire surrender of the heart to him who claims it. When conviction, contrition, confession, and conversion, have formed the new creature in Christ Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, then comes CONSOLATION, a loving spirit; a joyful spirit. Consolation being of a strengthening nature, produces CONFIRMATION in the ways of God, stability and strength. "The joy of the Lord is our strength." The whole ends in a full and final CONSUMMATION of all blessedness in the region of celestial glory.

How precious are the ascending steps from earth to heaven. How glorious is the work of grace in the soul of man. Here wisdom, power, and love, are richly displayed. Pride has no share in this blessedness. God is the Author and Finisher of Salvation. To Him be all the praise throughout all ages. Amen and Amen.

02.28. INDWELLING SIN

28. INDWELLING SIN

"But if I am doing what I don’t want to do, I am not really the one doing it; the sin dwelling within me is doing it." Rom 7:20

Sin, in all its forms, is hateful to God. He beholds it with abhorrence, and has declared that "the soul that sins, it shall die." All men are dead under the Law, because all have sinned. And had not God graciously sent his dear Son into the world to pay the penalty due to sin, and to die the just for the unjust, the whole human race must have perished everlastingly. Even now, none shall be saved, who have the blessing of a preached Gospel, and of the Scriptures of Truth vouchsafed to them, except they repent and believe in Jesus, are born from above, and walk before God in newness of life. The state of the heathen, who have never heard the joyful sound, and to whom Christ is unknown, will be righteously determined by Him, all of whose ways are just, and whose paths are equity and truth. Enough is revealed, to awaken our fears respecting them, and to quicken our endeavors, to make known unto those that Savior, who so graciously said to Saul of Tarsus, "I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

How clearly is the state of the heathen described by the Savior of the world. In unison with this message to Saul, was that given to all the Apostles just before the ascension of our Lord. "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." "Go therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Had the ignorance of the Gentiles been their security, this message need not to have been delivered. The very words of Christ convey the strongest expression of danger, and the necessity for his being declared the Only Savior of Sinners, to the ends of the earth.

It is not uncommon to hear people speak of the comparative safety of the heathen, since the heathen cannot reject what is not offered, nor disbelieve what is not made known unto them. Thus, many excuse themselves from aiding Missionary Societies, as if we were carrying a curse instead of a blessing to the Gentiles, inasmuch as their guilt will be greater by refusing the offered Savior. This reason would equally have operated against the coming of Christ into our world, because all men have not faith, and millions, to whom the Gospel is preached in vain, will perish! Unbelief lies at the bottom of these objections. How different were the feelings of the angelic host on their announcement of the Savior’s birth to the shepherds, when they sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." How different were those of Paul when he wrote to the Ephesians, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Oh! that my heart may be warmed with love to the Savior, and with a tender concern for the perishing millions of mankind. Blessed Lord, let me never desire to be wise above what is written, or to set my reason against your Wisdom, or my will, against your Sovereignty. May I receive the Gospel by a loving faith, and labor to make it known with a loving heart. You have said, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Enable me to offer up this prayer, for the extension of your kingdom, and for the increase of faithful ministers, in reliance on your grace, and in dependence on your power. Oh! hasten your kingdom, accomplish the number of your elect, and fill the earth with your glory.

Those who believe the Gospel, who receive Christ into their hearts by faith, ascribe all their salvation to sovereign grace. They are made the temples of the Holy Spirit, and serve God with delight in the Gospel of his Son. But while they remain in the body, they must struggle against the remainders of sin. Sickness, adversity, unkind treatment, persecution, with various other ills of life, are not joyous, but grievous; yet, God, is often pleased to bring his children into these furnaces, to purify them from the dross of sin, and to make them instrumental in producing the peaceful fruits of righteousness to the glory of his grace.

But sin is ever abhorrent to a holy God, and distressing to a renewed mind. Can the believer, then, derive any benefit from the sin which he hates, and against which he hourly combats? These Canaanites in the land, though grievous to the spirit of a true Israelite, as thorns are to his flesh, may be overruled by Infinite Love to teach him many lessons.

These Canaanites remind him of his former condition, of the rock from where he was hewn, and of the hole of the pit from where he was dug; of his natural depravity, wretchedness, and misery, that so, he may loathe himself in his own sight.

These Canaanites constrain him to acknowledge the grace of God in saving him, when he had nothing to expect but fiery indignation and judgment without mercy.

These Canaanites make him distrust him self, through the constant experience of his own weakness in resisting the world, the flesh, and the devil.

These Canaanites cause him to trust altogether in the divine power of his Savior, from the repeated victories which he obtains over indwelling sin, by looking with a single eye to Jesus, the Captain of his salvation.

These Canaanites bring into exercise the graces of faith and patience, courage and self-denial, watchfulness and prayer. The weapons of his warfare are not suffered to rust, having daily to fight the good fight of faith.

These Canaanites make him value the blood and righteousness of Christ, which rise in value, in proportion to the true and saving knowledge which he acquires of himself. Thus, the more he is convinced of his sins and imperfections, the more earnestly does he seek after a better righteousness to justify him in the sight of God, even the spotless righteousness of Jesus Christ.

These Canaanites make him long more ardently for the rest which remains for the people of God; for that pure world, where sorrow cannot enter, where indwelling sin will never harass the soul, but where he will forever behold his adorable Redeemer, and be made like him, when he shall see him

as he is.

Indwelling sin, thus uniformly opposed, hated, and watched against, and more and more overcome and rooted out of the soul, shall not be allowed to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The promise is most precious to every true believer; "Sin shall not have dominion over you."

Blessed Jesus! grant that sin may be increasingly hateful to my soul, as it is hurtful to my peace. Enable me to grow in all the graces of the Spirit, resisting the motions of sin in my flesh, and crucifying every evil affection and lust, until I lay my body in the grave, and ascend to You, my life and my all, my treasure, and my eternal home!

02.29. THE INWARD CONFLICT

29. THE INWARD CONFLICT

"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." Rom 7:18

How varied is the life of the true believer. At one time on the mount, at another time in the valley. Sometimes he can rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, at other times, he groans being burdened, and is almost tempted to say with David, "I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul." There are seasons of peculiar mental distress with which the tried believer is alone acquainted. At such a season, it seems as if Satan were let loose upon his soul to agonize it with his fiery darts; as if the foul sediment of inbred corruption were stirred up from the very bottom of his heart.

When the Christian would fondly enjoy the tranquil delights of peace and spiritual consolation, how often is he constrained to say–

"Instead of this, he made me feel,

The hidden evils of my heart,

And let the angry powers of hell

Assault my soul in every part."

Can he be easy under such distressing experience? Oh! no!

"Lord, why is this, I trembling cried,

Will you pursue your worm until death?"

Hear, O my soul, the gracious answer, so accordant with the revealed word–

"This is this way, the Lord replied,

I answer prayer for grace and faith."

If you should ask; Why in this way so painful to endure? "These inward trials I employ,

From self and pride to set you free,

And break your schemes of earthly joy,

That you may seek your all in me.

This is indeed a trying dispensation; but even this inward conflict, painful as it is, is often sanctified to us by that divine Spirit, who can turn our darkness into light, and make crooked things straight. What Satan intends for evil, the God of love and power can overrule for good.

When the believer, through neglect of watchfulness and prayer, has fallen into a state of spiritual apathy; when the cursed leaven of self-love and self-righteousness have secretly been working their way into his duties; when the world has, by insensible degrees, gotten a hold upon his heart; then some sudden assault of the Devil sets his soul in alarm. Awakened by his fears, he is driven to earnest prayer. His rebel lusts, now in arms, and led on by Satan, threaten to overcome him. Terrified, and overwhelmed at the sight of his sins, and at his utter inability to help himself, he cries out in the agony of his soul; "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He loathes and abhors himself. He seeks for pardoning mercy at the cross of Christ. And there he obtains forgiveness, and comes off more than conqueror, through him who loved him and gave himself for him. "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," is his song of triumph.

The believer, by these repeated struggles, is convinced of his constant liability to Satan's temptations; of the proneness of his heart to depart from God; and of his daily need of sanctifying, sustaining grace. His language now Is–

Prone to wander, Lord I feel it,

Prone to leave the God I love;

Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it,

Seal it from your courts above."

By trials inward and outward, the children of God are taught, that this poor world is not their rest, because it is polluted; that they are traveling through an enemy's country; that they must fight their way to glory, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, remembering that he, and he only who overcomes, shall obtain the crown.

Happy is he who learns wisdom from his own trials, and those of others. Oh! that my spiritual armor may be always bright. Indolence and supineness is the rust which blunts the edge of the sword, and gives the enemy an advantage over us. I know that my foes are mighty, but my Redeemer is almighty. I know that I am weak, but my Savior's grace is all-sufficient. Oh! that I had faith, strong faith, to lay hold upon his promised aid. Then would I put my enemies to flight; for the encouragement to the fighting Christian is, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Let me never forget, that if I yield to a small temptation, the enemy will present one more powerful, as my spiritual strength will be weakened to resist it. Thus, by degrees, and often rapidly, the unwatchful Christian is hurried into frightful sins.

God does not will the death of a sinner. He does not will that any should perish. His pathetic exclamation by the Prophet is- "Why will you die?" How strange, that any creature should be so infatuated, as to reject the gracious offers of pardon and peace, when God incarnate, crucified and slain, and now risen and glorified, stands with outstretched arms, with arms of love and pity, to receive and bless us forever! Yet such a creature am I! O my soul, be ashamed and confounded in the dust. You, even you, would still reject this bleeding love, if God himself had not first loved you, and drawn your affections through the sweetest, softest influence, to choose Him for your portion, and seek your all in Him. Oh! wondrous Love! Oh! love beyond degree! Lord, shed more and more of this love abroad in my heart. Give me more of your blessed Spirit's grace and influence. Subdue

my rebel lusts. Preserve me from the attacks of Satan, from self-sufficiency and pride. Keep me humble, watchful, and thankful; pure, meek, and holy. Defend me from the contagion of a wicked world, from the fear of man, from all dissimulation, hypocrisy, and deceit. Make me simple and sincere, upright and without duplicity before you. Cause me to abound yet more and more in knowledge, faith, and love, until all my powers are perfected in glory.

Sin is the dishonor, the disease, the death of the soul. It brings, in this world, disgrace and condemnation; and in the next, shame and everlasting torment. Oh! how I long for entire sanctification. Blessed Jesus, you alone can wash away my crimson sin. Nothing but your precious blood can remove the foul pollution. To you I come, to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Lord, plunge me beneath this sacred flood, that I may come out of it pure and clean.

Oh! Almighty Purifier, Oh, eternal Spirit of Holiness, sit upon my soul as a refiner's fire. Kindle a flame of love in my heart, that may burn to your glory. Allow me to see the preciousness of Jesus, his beauty and adorable perfections. Enable me to walk in his footsteps, to copy his example, to delight in his commandments. Root out of my heart all pride and worldly lust, and implant in their stead, humility and a heavenly mind. Give me a relish for spiritual employments, holy meditation, and fervent love.

"Faint, yet pursuing," was the state of Israel of old. I feel my spiritual weakness. How difficult it is to have the mind wholly fixed upon God. The clouds are not so shifting, nor the winds so fleeting, as my thoughts. I try to fix them upon heavenly things; for a few moments they seem to settle upon objects of eternal interest, and then they slide insensibly away, until starting as from a reverie, I am grieved to find, that my thoughts have wandered to the ends of the earth. Oh! the deceitfulness and instability of the heart!

Blessed Jesus, bind my heart to your Cross with the cords of love. Let not the enemy allure my affections from you, or fill my mind with vain imaginations. Let me be wholly taken up with you. Enable me to keep eternity in view; to live and act as one who must shortly appear in your presence. O blessed expectation to the true believer! Do I love your appearing ? Am I longing to behold you without a veil between? Then shall I be admitted into your presence, where is fullness of joy. But, have I truly believed on the Son of God? Am I united by faith to the living Vine? Do I daily receive the vivifying sap, the grace of the Savior, that I may bear the fruits of holiness? Has the Spirit sealed me unto the day of redemption?

Blessed Lord! make this sure to my soul by your inward work of grace, and by my outward conformity to your will. I wait upon you. You have promised to bless the waiting soul. Your word is truth. Then I will trust and not be afraid, for You, You only, are my salvation.

"I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." What swarms, not only of wandering, but of foolish thoughts, crowd into the mind, when we want to be abstracted from the world and wrapped up in holy meditation. All this proves the depravity of the heart, and shows what corrupt creatures we must appear in the sight of God, when we appear so vile in our own.

What a blessing it is to know that this spiritual malady may be healed; that Jesus came into the world to save the lost. All are sick unto death. All, are lost. But Jesus, the kind Physician, the good Shepherd, has come to raise the dead, and to restore the lost. Hasten, then, O sinner, to this adorable friend. He has said, "Come unto me," yes, he has given you this blessed assurance, that

him that comes, he will never cast out. Why then, this backwardness to come to Jesus? He is the tenderest of Friends, the most ready of Benefactors. Let him not have to say in your case, "You will not come to me, that you might have life."

Ah! but he has declared- "No man can come to me, except the Father, who has sent me, draws him." And why can you not come? It arises, not from any secret decree which foreordains your destruction, and presents an impenetrable barrier to your approach to the Savior; but it springs altogether from yourself. Unbelief, pride, prejudice, the love of sin, and the love of the world, the fear of man, and carnal security, keep you from closing in with the offers of salvation. In the day of judgment every mouth shall be stopped, and the whole world shall become guilty before God. No excuses will then be made, which now pacify the conscience. No pleas will then be put forward in arrest of judgment, which now lull the sinner to sleep on the lap of carnal security. All shall then acknowledge the justice of the sentence; "Depart from me, you cursed ones, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Remember, O sinner, that the very circumstance of your not being able to come of yourself to the gracious Savior, proves you to be a child of the Fall, and in a state of guilt and misery, since it arises solely from the rebelliousness of your will, and the total alienation of your heart from God. Beware, then, lest you make this moral inability, which is the fruit of the Fall, an excuse for keeping you away from Christ. Rather say, I cannot, because I will not. My stubborn will, like a chain, binds me to sin and Satan, and nothing but almighty power can set me free. Under this deep conviction of your lost and undone condition, cry fervently to the compassionate Savior, that he would plead his precious blood in your behalf before the eternal throne, that the Father of mercies may send the Holy Spirit into your heart, to lead you to the Cross; and there by uniting you to the blessed Jesus, cause you to triumph over the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

This is the way, the only way to obtain peace and purity, when pardon is sealed to the conscience by the Holy Spirit. Yes! when Jesus says, "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven," then the Comforter sheds abroad the love of God in the heart; a sweet peace is enjoyed in the soul, and purity reigns within. Oh! how happy is such a believer. Worlds cannot purchase his inestimable blessings. He beholds the ’treasures of earth’ as the dust beneath his feet, when he compares them with the love of his Savior, and an assured hope of heaven.

Lord give me this willing heart to come to you; this humble faith to receive you; this holy love to rejoice in you; this full assurance of hope that I shall reign with you forever. Then will my joy be full; I shall glory in tribulation, and daily experience the felicity of Paul, which his own words so feelingly express, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Inward calmness I desired,

Hope, this pleasing dream, inspired,

Long, I sought from earth to gain,

Joy, which earth could not contain.

Conscience filled me with dismay,

Fear consumed me night and day

All my sins, before me spread,

Seized my soul with guilty dread.

More, I panted for repose,

More, I added to my woes;

If a calm appeared to reign,

Guilt awoke the storm again.

Without Jesus- far from peace,

Wandering through this barren place,

Often I said with deepest sigh,

Sinner, you are doomed to die.

Precious Savior! heavenly Friend!

All my wanderings You did end

From your Cross, Salvation flows,

There I find a sweet repose.

There, by precious blood divine,

Cleansed from sin, and sealed thine,

Justice did my debt remove,

Cancelled by Eternal Love.

02.30. MOURNING OVER SIN AND HATRED OF IT

30. MOURNING OVER SIN AND HATRED OF IT

"I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning." Psa 38:6

A lover of the world will perhaps say, If the effect of religion is to make me like a mourner bowed down with grief at the funeral of some beloved friend, let me escape it. Life is given us for enjoyment. Our natural appetites were formed to be gratified. Therefore, as the time is short, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.

All this might seem reasonable, did we die like the beasts that perish. But, even were this the case, formed as we are with minds capable of improvement, and living as we do under a Divine Moral Government, where cause and effect are made to operate for our weal or woe, would it not increase our temporal enjoyment to cultivate the virtues of temperance, sobriety, and prudence, with all the charities of domestic and social life? Every day’s experience proves the truth of this, from the destructive consequences which result from a life of thoughtless dissipation, and those anti-social crimes which desolate the earth.

The whole framework of society, with its complicated changes, demonstrates a Moral Governor of the world, who has established laws over which the libertine, the spendthrift, and the infidel have no control. Do men throw the reins upon the neck of their lusts? They fall unhappy victims to their excesses. They live not out half their days. Do they squander away their property in splendor or dissipation? They sink into the depths, either of poverty or disease. Do they deny the immortality of the soul, or a day of future retribution? They are emboldened in crime, until, violating the laws of their country, they pay the penalty by dying an ignominious death.

If these things are so, what a friend is true religion to mankind. What unnumbered blessings follow in her train. But what is true religion? It is the religion of Jesus Christ, as revealed to us in the word of his grace. The entrance into this way of life is indeed strait, and the path in which we must walk is narrow; but, though it be commenced with tears and sorrow, the tears of repentance, and sorrow for sin, it will terminate with songs and everlasting joy.

The way of the world, on the contrary, allures the heart by its gaieties and pleasures, but its end is eternal death! "Blessed," then, " are those who mourn; for they shall be comforted." "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy." "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." "What sorrows await you who are rich, for you have your only happiness now. What sorrows await you who are satisfied and prosperous now, for a time of awful hunger is before you. What sorrows await you who laugh carelessly, for your laughing will turn to mourning and sorrow."

What an evil and bitter thing is sin! How dreadful are the polluting injections of Satan. But here lies the believer’s comfort, that the Spirit of Light is greater than the spirit of darkness; that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. As God is a sin-hating, and a sin-avenging God; so is sin a soul-tormenting, and a soul-destroying evil. We behold its direful effects in our fallen world, under

every form of misery. But at the Cross of Christ, the awful character of sin is written in letters of blood! There we learn its dreadful nature, so offensive to a God of Holiness, so rebellious against a God of Justice. Either the Eternal Son of the Most High must suffer in our stead, or a world of sinners must perish everlastingly!

Oh! may a view, a saving view of the Cross of my Emmanuel, melt my whole soul into contrition and love. Crucify, O Lord, your enemies and mine. Slay them all before you. Let no Agag, no first-born of the flock, be spared. Fortify my heart against the inroads of Satan. Enable me to keep a constant watch against those inbred corruptions, from which nothing but death will wholly rid me.

Mourning over sin may appear to some, as little better than the cant of the enthusiast. The language of humiliation does not necessarily prove the heart to be humbled. But when the soul, like David's, is truly broken and contrite, it will express its feelings, without regard to the opinions of men; it will pour out its sorrows to God, who hears and answers prayer. "I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning," is not the language of the nominal, but of the deeply tried and experienced Christian. It is most important to examine ourselves, for nothing is so easy as self-deception.

When sin is working within us, do we allow the enemy quietly to carry on his work of destruction, or do we fly instantly to the throne of grace for strength to resist him? The efficacy of believing prayer is truly wonderful. When the soul is troubled; when it is bowed down under the weight of conscious guilt; the prayer of faith, resting on the promises, and pleading the merits of Christ, obtains deliverance, and is turned into a song of praise.

The liberated Christian, though released from his fetters, does not forget his state of bondage, nor does he cease to humble himself before his pardoning God. The language of his heart is, Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you. I long for your sanctifying grace. I mourn over my abominations. I desire the indwelling of your Spirit. I pant after a greater conformity to your will; an increased delight in the way of your commandments. I wait for your call to leave this world, and enter into the heavenly rest, where all your saints enjoy a state of perfect holiness, an eternal separation from all evil, an everlasting enjoyment of your presence and love.

If these, O my soul, be indeed your real feelings and desires, fear not the malice of Satan. These longings after Christ, and holiness, and heaven, if genuine, are the undoubted marks of your adoption into the family of God, however much they may be derided by an ungodly world. The voice may be Jacob's voice, when the hands are the hands of Esau. Hypocrites can speak with oily smoothness, when war is in their hearts. They can speak the language of piety, while indulging in every vice. Surely, then, it is needful to watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation- lest we deceive ourselves.

O, tempted believer, know for your comfort, that sins hated and opposed, though they distress, will not be allowed to destroy you. Temptations resisted, shall not hurt you, if, like Jesus, you can repel the Tempter by the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Your safety lies in resting continually on the faithfulness of Jesus; in living in a spirit of watchfulness and prayer. Temptations prove that an enemy is near. In a moment, he can attack you with the battery of hell. Be vigilant; be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; then shall you be able to stand in the evil day, for when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him.

Come, O blessed Spirit of Grace, with all your saving power. Descend into my soul, destroy every rebellious inclination, erect the standard of the Cross within me, and when you have enabled me to resist the devil, to crucify the flesh, and to renounce the world, then, O then, receive me into the happy region of glory, where all the church triumphant shall sing the conqueror's song.

"As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," is the believer's motto. Godly sorrow and holy joy are blended in his daily experience. He acknowledges his vileness, and esteems Christ precious in his Nature, his Person, his Offices, his Character, and his Work.

Oh! that I may have grace more deeply to enter into the views and feelings of the true believer. Blessed Jesus! speak peace to my conscience, create purity in my heart, destroy the seeds of evil, implant the living principle of faith, and make me wholly to live to you. Seal salvation to my heart. Give me the inward witness, the Spirit of adoption, the earnest of the future inheritance. Leave me not for one moment, lest I fall; and bind me to yourself by the strong, indissoluble bonds, of redeeming, everlasting love!

How precious is the Grace of God. All blessings flow from this eternal fountain. Lord! pity a poor polluted worm, who now looks to You as the God of all grace, mercy, and peace. Take away the heart of stone, my hard, rebellious, heart, which yet pants after You. O, make me sensible of your infinite mercies, and of those innumerable transgressions which are known only unto You. Save me from my secret faults, faults to which I may be blind, through the deceitfulness of sin. Give me self-knowledge. Cause me to know the worst of myself, however humbling, however painful, the disclosure may be. I have no hope but in the atonement of Jesus, my only Savior. May I ever trust in his blood, who is God manifest in the flesh. May I ever be found in him, who is the Lord my Righteousness.

Oh! heavenly Father, send down the Spirit of your Son into my heart, that I may be filled with light and love. Save me, blessed Lord! from the captivating influence of earthly things. My foolish heart is ever wandering from You, the true, and only center of felicity. Everything around me is fleeting and unsatisfying; yet assuming an importance which it does not possess. My soul is boundless in its desires, being formed for immortality. It seeks after happiness, and what but your infinite goodness can satisfy the cravings of my never-dying soul? O, in mercy, draw my heart, and fix it in Yourself. Unite all my scattered affections to fear your name. Let every thought be submissive to your sway.

Satan is never idle. His suggestions are perpetually presented to the mind in one form or otter. If gross sin be hateful, and a temptation to it would drive the believer to fervent prayer, the arch enemy craftily avoids such an awakening temptation. He, therefore, attacks the believer in another way. By a constant succession of trifling, unprofitable, suggestions; by presenting images of earthly things before the eye of the mind, by filling the imagination with a thousand dreams and fancies, he labors quietly, and without alarm, to draw away the heart from God. He thus distracts the mind, dissipates the thoughts, and entangles the affections, until, at length, the grieved Spirit of God withdraws his comfort, and leaves the unwatchful believer in a state of darkness, bordering on despair.

O, blessed Jesus, you mighty Conqueror of this enemy of my soul, shield me by your grace; arm me with your power, and enable me to resist and overcome this dreadful foe. Lord, I am

helplessness itself. Undertake for me. I am nothing but guilt and misery, save me, for your mercy's sake.

02.31. THE BURDEN OF SIN DEPLORED

31. THE BURDEN OF SIN DEPLORED

"For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened." 2Co 5:4

The worldly-minded professor and the formalist, are alike insensible to the evil of sin. With their lips, indeed, they can say, "We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings. The remembrance of them is grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable," while they neither feel sorrow for sin, nor groan under the weight of it. From the table of the Lord, the one can pursue his pleasures, and the other his covetous desires. The one clothes his vices with specious names; the other covers the evil of his heart with a punctilious observance of outward duties. Both stand on the same level in the sight of God, though each despises the other. The formalist considers the worldling as profane; the worldling views the formalist as hypocritical. Pride reigns in both. The love of God dwells in neither.

If we calmly survey what passes around us, we cannot but be pained, if taught of God, to see what trouble people take to impose upon themselves. Everyone has some excuse to make for what he does. If you speak to a man of the world, he will soon tell you, that it will not do to be singular; that we must conform to the maxims, customs, and fashions of the world, if we would avoid the odious name of ’saint’.

If you converse with the formalist, he will extol, as of the first importance, the rites and ceremonies of his Church, while he sneers at experimental religion, the religion of the heart, as being enthusiastic, and carrying things too far. Even among real Christians, those, whose hearts have been converted to God, but differing from each other on some points of church discipline and government, we too often see a lamentable lack of that charity, which is the bond of perfectness. This is truly a mournful sight! Oh! that the enemies of the Gospel could say of us, as the persecutors of the Church once did, "See how these Christians love one another."

Few, alas! in this evil day, when divisions distract the Church of Christ, are able, in a spirit of brotherly love, and Christian fellowship, to unite with Paul in his Catholic prayer; "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." The extreme of all parties seize upon the keys in a spirit of Popedom, and open or close the door of admission into the Church, as they think proper. There is a Pope in every heart. How many are turned out of the church, whom Christ will own when he makes up his jewels. Oh! what an unspeakable blessing it is to know, and to feel assured, upon the inspired truth of God, that Christ alone holds the keys of Sovereign Authority and Power. "All power," said he, "is given unto me in heaven and m earth." "I am the first and the last; I am he that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." "These things says he that is holy, he that is true, he that has the key of David, he that opens, and no man shuts; and shuts, and no man opens."

It may be replied; Did not our Lord say to Peter- "I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you shall

loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." He did, and Peter was peculiarly honored in being the first to open the door into the Christian Church, both to Jews and Gentiles. On the day of Pentecost, through his preaching, three thousand souls were added to the Church, from among the assembled Jews at Jerusalem. And, in the house of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit was imparted, and repentance unto life was granted to the Gentile company, who also heard from the lips of Peter the words of eternal life.

Peter, in common with the other Apostles, was inspired to declare the will of God, which should be binding on the Church in every age. To him, as well as to the rest of the Apostles, was given power to exercise a salutary discipline in the Church, and to separate from it, heinous offenders. This being done, according to the revealed Will of God, would be ratified in heaven.

Paul, "called to be an Apostle," though, as he expresses it, "as one born out of due time," had an equal commission with the twelve. He use this apostolic authority in the Church of Corinth, by cutting off, for a time, an offending member. "Also in the Church of Thessalonica. The same discipline he exercised over Hymeneus and Alexander. The power thus delegated by our Lord, as Head of his Church, was not for destruction, but for edification. Peter, therefore, writes, "Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." So also writes Paul; "To spare you, I came not as yet unto Corinth. Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy." "I may seem to be boasting too much about the authority given to us by the Lord. But this authority is to build you up, not to tear you down."

These passages clearly show how the Apostles used the keys of authority in the Church, and expose the arrogant pretensions of the Church of Rome, as if she were the sole proprietress of the keys, the mother and mistress of all churches, and the Pope, the successor of Peter, and the Sovereign Pontiff, to open and shut the kingdom of heaven as he pleases. Instead of employing ecclesiastical authority for the edification of the Church, the Papal Hierarchy employs it for the sole purpose of establishing their own power, of filling their own coffers, and of persecuting even unto death (when able so to do) the saints of the Most High, who dare not conform to their idolatrous rites, nor receive their anti-Christian dogmas.

Instead of teaching her sinful members to look unto Jesus for pardon and peace, and to trust only in the merits of his blood for acceptance with God, who fulfilled all the righteousness of the law for us; she sends them to the Priest, who, at the confessional, puts himself in the place of God, and then absolves them in the plenitude of his power. They return pacified in their consciences, by this priestly quietus, regardless of the One Atonement which Christ made for sin.

Instead of directing her members to the great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, who ever lives to make intercession for us, and whose intercession alone can prevail with God; this Apostate Church sends her blinded votaries to the Virgin Mary, as "the Mother of divine grace," "the Queen of all saints" thus lowering the majesty and glory of the Son of God, the Savior of the world. And, as if this did not sufficiently eclipse the Sun of Righteousness, she multiplies her intercessors, and fills her sanctuaries with the images of her idol saints!

Happy would it be, if many in the Protestant Church did not tread so near the multiplied errors of the Church of Rome. We are ever prone to extremes. There is a danger of undervaluing the blessed instituted sacraments of our Lord; and there is also a danger of unduly exalting them, beyond the design for which they were appointed. The only fountain of grace is God in Christ. All grace flows down to, us from the ever adorable Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Neither creatures nor sacraments have any inherent virtue in themselves to confer grace, They are not the fountain, but channels or golden pipes, through which the golden oil of grace is conveyed to the believing soul, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Without faith in the heart of the recipient the Holy Communion of the body and blood of Christ, will be but an empty channel, through which no living water will pass to the soul.

Oh! what a blessing it is to be a Bible Christian, to bear the Image of Christ, to be a temple of the Holy Spirit. Without this, no forms of religion, however excellent; no Church, however pure, to which we may have nominally belonged, can help us when Christ comes to judgment. We may then say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name?....and in your name done many wonderful works?" but the Great Searcher of hearts will answer- "I never knew you; depart from me, you that work iniquity." We may now loftily exclaim, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we", but, at the righteous revelation of God, we shall be found to be no better than heathen temples, in which the idols of self-righteousness, pride, and persecuting zeal have had the homage of our hearts.

Oh! my soul, in the midst of abounding iniquity, in the midst of errors and heresies, keep near to your Almighty Savior. I groan, being burdened with a body of sin and death. How long shall vain thoughts lodge within me? Oh! that they may be forever removed. I trust I can say- "I hate vain thoughts," and yet, alas! how they swarm, at times, like locusts, darkening the air, and devouring every green herb of the field. It was said by the Prophet, "O, Jerusalem! will you not be made clean? when shall it once be?" Lord, make me clean, even now. Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me. Holiness is happiness. I want to feel every evil motion subdued, every thing contrary to the will of God entirely done away. I know that there is no arriving at sinless perfection in this life.

But, perfection is the Christian’s aim. It was Paul’s desire for his converts; "This also we wish, even your perfection." An absolute freedom from all sin, in mind, affection, will, and conduct, forms one of the glories of heaven, where, in the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, will be gathered, the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and the spirits of just men made perfect. There they shall be arrayed in linen, white and clean, which is the righteousness of saints. Their sanctification will then be complete when they see Jesus, and are made like him in the perfection of holiness.

Is there a point at which the Christian may stop striving? No, there is not. While running the heavenly race, we must forget the things which are behind, and reach forth unto those things which are before, and thus press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. "As many as be perfect," all who have attained to a ripeness in Christian graces, and who have come to "full age" in Christian experience, will be thus minded.

The two great commandments are, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength, and you shall love your neighbor as

yourself." Where is the soul in this corrupted world, who, before conversion, truly loved the Lord? The question will be intuitively answered, "It cannot be found." And where is the soul who, after conversion, has never had occasion for one moment to mourn over cold affections, or wandering desires after earthly things? Where is the man who can boldly affirm, I have never, since the hour of my conversion, in any one instance, sinned against God. He who can say so is lamentably ignorant of himself.

Oh! that I may have grace to humble myself in the presence of Him who looks at the heart. I have no ground for self-complacency, no reason for self-exultation. I have daily cause for mourning when I review my own heart– that vile, deceitful, hateful thing. And yet, I have daily cause to rejoice in the Lord, whose faithfulness and truth, whose forbearance and patience, whose pity and love, are like himself, infinite, unbounded, unsearchable.

Oh! that I had a vigorous, lively, active, faith. This, like the strong west wind in Egypt, which drove the locusts into the Red Sea, would drive away the hated evils from my heart. Guilty fears, painful apprehensions, dire forebodings, misgiving thoughts, anxious cares, tumultuous imaginations, with all the swarms of worldly lusts, carnal desires, and whatever else is formed and fostered in my wretched heart, would then be all destroyed like Pharaoh’s army, through the almighty power of Jesus.

Be glorified, O Lord, in my complete deliverance from the bondage of corruption and the dominion of sin. Fill me with spiritual light. Bring me into the glorious liberty of the Gospel, and at last conduct me safely through the Jordan of death into the celestial Canaan. While a sojourner in the wilderness, guide me by the pillar of fire; screen me with the overshadowing cloud; feed me with the heavenly manna; refresh me with the waters from the smitten rock. Give me a holy courage in your cause, a holy confidence in your mercy, a holy consolation in your exceeding great and precious promises. Strengthen me to fight manfully under the banner of the Cross, to face my enemies without fear, knowing that He, who is with me, is greater than all they who are against me. As a good soldier of Jesus Christ, may I have grace continually to advance, never to retreat.

In your divine armory, you have furnished me with the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, but nothing is provided for the back. The cowardly Christian, who flies from his foes, is exposed to the fiery darts of Satan, and may fall vanquished on the field of battle. "Go forward," was your command to Moses, when Israel was enclosed by mountains, the army of Pharaoh behind then, and the Red Sea before them. They obeyed your word, the waters were divided, they passed in safety between the liquid walls, they saw their enemies dead on the sea shore, and sang a song of gladness unto the Lord who had triumphed gloriously, who had made the host of Pharaoh to sink as lead in the mighty waters.

Oh! give me grace to "go forward," to follow the Captain of my salvation, strengthened by his promise, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life."

Chapter 59

02.32. TRUE WISDOM THE SOURCE OF HAPPINESS

32. TRUE WISDOM THE SOURCE OF HAPPINESS

"Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.... Happy is every one that retains her." Pro 3:17-18

Earthly things can never satisfy the enlarged desires of an immortal soul. This is the reason why worldly people are so restless and changeable. Temporal objects soon cloy and satiate, therefore they fly from flower to flower like vagrant butterflies, until death closes their idle chase after an unreal happiness.

Did they possess true wisdom, they would discover the source of true felicity. Christ and happiness are inseparable. If we find true happiness, it is because we have found Christ; for, if we find Christ, we must be happy. The pardon of sin, peace with God, purity of heart, and the hope of glory, cannot fail to render the believer blessed.

The first lesson which we learn in the school of Christ is HUMILITY. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Many are eager to dive into the deep things of God, before they have well learned the first principles of the gospel of Christ. Hence arises that caution of Paul in his Epistle to Timothy, respecting the ordination of men to the ministry; "Not a novice, (one newly come to the faith) lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil." "Lay hands suddenly on no man."

There is something dangerously pleasing in exercising our ingenuity, and in disputing about the hidden mysteries of our holy religion. But this unhallowed spirit not infrequently leads to unscriptural theories, and even to skepticism itself.

Another lesson which we learn in the school of Christ, after the knowledge of our own nothingness, and the all-sufficiency of the Savior, is the SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD. "His counsel shall stand, and He will do all his pleasure." Through his word, the Almighty has communicated his will concerning us. We know no further than he has been pleased to make known his ways unto us; therefore, to argue, and draw inferences, and make deductions, and come to conclusions upon those things, around which infinite wisdom has drawn an impenetrable veil, is presumptuous and sinful. True wisdom is ever accompanied with humility.

The Scriptures plainly declare, that man is a responsible creature, possessing an immortal spirit. He is treated as such by all those arguments, warnings, threatenings, promises, encouragements, and entreaties, which are scattered throughout the sacred volume, to alarm and allure him, to rouse and draw him to the fountain of happiness, to his God and Savior, from whom he has revolted, to whom he is invited, and through whose sovereign love alone he can be saved.

The Scriptures plainly declare, that man is in a state of spiritual death; utterly helpless, and unable to repent, believe, and obey, through any natural power or willingness of his own; that if left to himself he must inevitably perish, like a man tied hand and foot and thrown into the sea. We are

tied and bound with the chain of our sins, and if not saved by another, must be lost forever.

The Scriptures also declare, that God’s foreknowledge is infinite; that he sees the end from the beginning; that nothing can happen without his command or permission. This is proved by prophecies clearly foretold, and minutely accomplished, without forcing the human will; the guilt of the accomplishment resting upon the sinner, who acts freely, while the counsels of heaven are wisely and mysteriously fulfilled. "Him," said Peter to the Jews, "being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

This short view should teach us the impropriety, yes, the impiety, of refusing to admit any truth of Scripture, because it does not exactly square with our preconceived ideas of the Christian system. Hence arises the necessity of continually reverting to our first lesson, HUMILITY. Like the letters of the alphabet, this sweet grace of the Spirit forms the basis of true heavenly knowledge, from the first rudiments to the highest attainments in the school of Christ; yes, the higher we advance in heavenly wisdom, the lower we shall fall in self-abasement. "Children, young men, and fathers," must all be clothed with humility, but more especially the matured Christian. In heaven, the angels veil their faces with their wings. In heaven, the saints cast their crowns before the throne.

Blessed Lord! give me the spirit of a little child. Let me never reject your counsel, nor rebel against your sovereignty. Clothe me with humility, fill me with love. Teach me to do your will. What I cannot comprehend, give me grace to believe. It is enough that You have said it. Enable me daily to repose my soul on your promises. I know that all good comes from you; all evil from myself. You are the source of true felicity, the fountain of living waters; in the fullness of your grace you have invited me to come, that I may "take the water of life freely." Lord, I come at your command, and by your power; O save me for your mercy’s sake.

Without attempting to explain and make clear the deep, yet holy decrees of the Almighty, or to reconcile by human arguments those truths which, however apparently at variance, are in perfect unison with each other, let us rather study the divine word as a practical book, showing us what we must believe and do, in order to obtain eternal life. The wisdom of God is not confined within the narrow limits of our contracted conceptions, no more than his creation is contained within the circle of our powers of vision. All the sublime revelations of Jehovah throw a glory around his justice, holiness, and love. All his perfections blend and harmonize at the Cross of Christ. The blessings of redemption are promised by the Father, purchased by the Son, and bestowed through the Holy Spirit. All proceed from the unmerited, sovereign grace of the Triune Jehovah. Sinners lying under the curse of a broken law, and bound by the chain of a will at enmity with God, are now redeemed and restored to the image of God, and a child-like obedience to his will.

If our hearts have been humbled, if we have been brought under a consciousness of guilt and misery to the foot of the Cross, if we have been led to renounce our own fancied righteousness, and, if we have been enabled to lay hold upon Christ as our Savior, as our Advocate with the Father, as our only hope of glory; and if, in consequence of this apprehension of Christ by faith, we feel our hearts drawn to him in love, choosing him as our portion, and walking in him as our way, in opposition to all worldly portions and ways, not fearing his reproach, but glorying in the Cross- then we have discovered the source of true happiness, then we possess that inward witness of which John speaks; that testimony of the conscience, and that witnessing of the Spirit with our spirit, of

which Paul speaks; and that manifestation of Christ to our hearts, of which He himself speaks to his disciples. Then we may look back to our election in Christ, and forwards to our being with him in glory. Where is boasting? It is excluded. Where is license to sin? It is forever banished from this holy ground, where proud reason must put off her shoes from off her feet.

Here nothing can stand, but what is humble. Here none can walk, but the redeemed of the Lord. Holiness and humility flow from the electing love of God, not from the natural working of the heart. God alone shall be exalted, who alone is to be adored. Woe to that rebellious worm who shall dare to tear the laurels from the Savior's brow, and place them on his own. Man fell through pride. He is saved through humility, for

"Christ will sooner abdicate his own,

Than stoop from heaven to give the proud a throne."

Oh! gracious Savior, may I ever look to you in a spirit of humility, follow you in a spirit of humility, and seek to glorify you by a spirit of humility. Preserve me from the pride of reason, and the pride of works. Empty me of self, and replenish me out of the fullness of your love. Direct me aright through the mazes of this erring world. Allow me not to lose, through sloth or unbelief, the pleasures of heavenly wisdom. Shine upon my soul, and increase my trust in you, while passing through this contentious, sinful region, to your abode of glory.

What can more conduce to the happiness of the soul than to know that we are the Lord's. This knowledge, blessed be God, is not unattainable; it is a knowledge essential to our peace. Some may call it presumptuous, but so did not John, or he would not have said, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may believe on the name of the Son of God." Again he wrote; "Hereby we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us." Oh! happy experience.

The Spirit's witness does not consist in mere rapturous feelings, ecstasies, and impulses, which are often the offspring of a heated imagination, strong passions, and enthusiastic emotions; but it consists in those filial dispositions of love, and fear, and reverence, which are accompanied with joy and peace in believing, and cause the happy believer to abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Oh! that this may be my blessed experience! Paul, who enjoyed this precious witness, declares, that "experience works hope; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given unto us." We cannot, therefore, have a well-grounded hope of glory, through the righteousness of Christ, if we have not the inward experience of the love of God in our souls, which is the Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry, "Abba Father," and to draw near unto God in Christ, as the Father of mercies, yes, as our Father, and the God of all consolation. In this way, the Spirit witnesses with our spirits that we are the children of God, by filling us with love to God, and transforming us into the image of God; that, being made his children by adoption and grace, we may bear a resemblance to our heavenly Father in righteousness and true holiness.

The religion of Jesus is a religion of love, from its promulgation to its consummation. God is love. The fruit of the Spirit is love. The work of Christ is love. Oh! that I may live under the constraining influence of love,

"This is the grace which lives and sings,

When faith and hope shall cease,

’Tis this shall strike our joyful strings,

In the sweet realms of bliss."

The more we possess of this grace, the more we shall resemble God the Father, Son, and Spirit; the more we shall enjoy of heaven in our own souls; the more we shall create a little heaven around us; and the more we shall be fitted for that pure world, where love reigns eternal in every redeemed, in every angel’s breast.

Oh! happy state! the work of sovereign grace. Compared with this blessedness, how beclouded are the prospects, how unsatisfying the pleasures and pursuits of a fallen world. True wisdom is the only source of true felicity. To cultivate these views and feelings, these principles and affections, is far better than to spend our time in vain researches after those things which the human mind can never fathom; or to spend our breath in disputations which can yield no profit.

A pious and humble search after truth, a holy contemplation and discourse upon the sublimities of Christian doctrine; a reverential meditation on the deep things of God, into which even angels desire to look, is not forbidden. But a disputatious spirit, a love of controversy, a war of words, a desire of victory, a pertinacity in maintaining our own opinions, a readiness to judge those who differ from us as unbelievers, betrays an unhumbled, an unsanctified heart. Such a spirit engenders strife, sows discord, divides the church of Christ, fosters vain-glory, and, like a nipping frost, checks the growth of the heavenly plant, and destroys those brotherly affections which characterize the children of God.

To contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, is a Christian duty, but we must contend in a spirit of love. The revelation of the divine will was not made to promote our natural love of curiosity, but to show us our state and our duty, and to bring us, through the operation of the Spirit, to a child-like conformity to this revealed will. Our blessed Lord evidently proves this, when he says; "I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in your sight." The worldly-wise are allowed to remain in the darkness of their boasted wisdom, while humble, docile minds are enlightened from above. "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way." "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God."

Under the darkest cloud, and in the deepest waters, may these gracious promises support and comfort me- "Do not fear; for I am with you." "When you pass through the rivers, they shall not overflow." "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." "All things work together for good to those who love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth." "What I do, you do not know now; but you shall know hereafter."

Blessed Lord, be pleased to impart the spirit of wisdom and revelation, that I may know You as my covenant God and Father, and Jesus Christ as my friend and Savior; that I may receive the truth in love, not daring to dive into your decrees, those secret things which you have wisely concealed from man. Teach me what I ought to do; show me the path of life, and enable me to walk therein. Give me an increase of faith and love, of peace and joy, until my soul, made happy in your love, shall take its flight beyond the shadows of this world, to where the glories of redemption will be unfolded to the Church triumphant, amid songs of never-ending praise!

Would you be happy here below?

Let not your heart on earth remain;

Can fleeting pleasures, mixed with woe,

A solid happiness contain?

Would you be happy here below?

Beware of pleasure’s gilded snare,

Its painted vanities forego,

Which end in tears and dark despair.

Would you be happy here below?

Seek not the wealth which worldlings prize,

A nobler treasure seek to know,

Eternal in the blissful skies.

Would you be happy here below?

Avoid false honor’s empty name-

A glare, a momentary show,

Which leads to everlasting shame.

Would you be happy here below?

To heaven direct your warm desire,

There, let your constant footsteps go;

There, let your wishes all aspire.

Would you be happy here below?

Oh! love the Savior–Prince of Peace;

Then anguish you shall never know,

Your joy in Him will never cease.

02.33. THE PRECIOUSNESS OF CHRIST

33. THE PRECIOUSNESS OF CHRIST

"Unto you who believe, he is precious." 1Pe 2:7

Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, has taught us what is truly precious.

"You were not redeemed with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ."

"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious."

"Unto you therefore who believe, he is precious."

O! that Christ may ever be precious to my soul in all his offices, characters, and relations, which he bears in the covenant of grace to his believing people. Faith, which receives Christ into the heart, is also a precious gift of God. Thus writes the Apostle, "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ." "You greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." "His divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who has called us to glory and virtue; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

The experience of God’s children is the same in every age. David, in the overflowings of his love, sang- "How precious is your loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings." "How precious are your thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!"

If we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, we shall daily feel him to be precious. His righteousness is our garment of salvation. His Truth our shield and buckler. All this blessedness we freely enjoy, without money and without price. O what can be more transporting than the assurance that Christ is mine, and I am his. What would we be without Christ? Miserable and undone! To make us value the Savior, the Spirit makes us feel our ruined state. He shows us our wretchedness, and causes us to feel it, that we may long for deliverance.

Were we not sinners there would be no need of a Savior, for the whole need not a physician, but only those who are sick. Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He came to seek and to save that which is lost. Hence we find, that to feel our malady, to feel our need of Jesus, is requisite to our believing application of Him, and our believing dependence upon Him. "Unto you therefore who believe, he is precious."

Some people are apt to think that something must be done, in order to render them fit to receive grace; that something like a price must be brought in their hand. This is the leaven of Popery, the leaven of self-righteousness. This is the barrier which prevents many from coming to Christ. Oh! the deep-rooted legality of our fallen nature! They cannot conceive that Jesus will receive the vilest who come unto him. Hence they try to remove their 'leopard spots', their 'Ethiopian blackness', by outward reformation, while the corruption lies deep within. Wearied with the vain attempt to keep the innate evil from ripening into outward acts of wickedness, they are led through grace, to throw themselves in self-despair at the feet of Jesus, crying– "God be merciful to me a sinner." "Lord save me, or I perish."

And are they repulsed? Oh! no! The loving heart of the Savior receives them; the loving arms of the Savior embrace them, as the father did the returning prodigal; they obtain a full forgiveness, through faith in his blood; they are clothed with the robe of his righteousness; they receive the ring of reconciliation; a feast of fat things is provided for them; and they are filled with peace, and purity, and joy.

Thus, while nature is always moving in a circle, and never reaching the center of happiness, grace, by a direct line, leads the sinner at once to Christ. "As many are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." The Spirit always leads the sinner to the Cross, where we are admitted into the family of God; for, says Paul, "You are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

How invaluable is a childlike spirit; to feel our will acquiescing in the will of God. This spiritual feeling is the work of the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to guide us into all truth. No power of reason, no stretch of intellect, no determination of the will, left to its natural action, can raise us above the effects of the Fall. As water, by its own power cannot rise above its own level, no more can we.

To receive Christ into the heart by faith is the sole operation of the Spirit; for John declares that "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on his name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Christ is the author and source of all blessedness. Where can rest be found but in Him whose precious name is Emmanuel, God with us? None who trust in him shall ever be confounded. To suppose such a thing, would be to contradict his own word. It is the natural unbelief of our hearts which keeps us away from Christ, and consequently from holiness and happiness.

Did all the world truly believe, all the world would assuredly be saved; for the command of Christ to his disciples was, "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believes, and is baptized, shall be saved." If all had believed the word of his grace, all would have been saved, to whom the Apostles declared the unsearchable riches of Christ.

There are many shades in the moral character of mankind, some lighter, some darker, but all, without exception, are naturally unbelievers in heart, and while remaining in this awful state, they exclude themselves from those blessings which a merciful God has provided for us through the gift of his Son. How precious is faith, and because precious, how rare a thing it is! The boasted virtues of worldly morality are as common as the pebbles in the brook; while the graces of the Spirit, like precious stones, are only here and there to be seen.

O! that my heart were overflowing with love to Jesus, and ardently longing for his salvation. He is precious to those who believe. Do I esteem Christ as the pearl of great price? Am I willing to part with all that the world and the flesh hold dear, to obtain this inestimable treasure? Lord impart Yourself to me. Dwell in my heart, as in a temple consecrated to your glory. May the fire of holy love ever burn on the altar of my heart, and never go out.

What daily need we have to watch against spiritual lukewarmness. This evil state of heart will creep insensibly upon us without much watchfulness and prayer. A daily humbling sense of our sinfulness, a daily feeling of our need of Jesus, a constant looking unto him, and a believing application of his precious blood and righteousness, can alone keep us in a lively, dependent, loving, obedient frame of mind. O that we may be in earnest about salvation, then will our peace flow as a river.

The God whom we serve is a God of love. How marvelously has he manifested forth the glory of his grace in the redemption of the world. But, alas! we have heard so long, and so often, about the dying love of Jesus, that it ceases to affect our hearts with that intensity which those feel who are first awakened to a sense of their danger and deliverance. Should it be thus with us? Is not this leaving our first love? Must it not be grievous to an infinitely loving, and precious Savior? Oh! that I may hourly mourn over this lamented, this hated coldness, at the foot of the Cross, until I become like the burning seraphim, a flame of love.

What a wonderful provision has a God of mercy made for our present and future happiness. He wills our good. We, strange to say, seem to will our own misery, for thus said our Lord, "You will not come to me, that you might have life." Oh! how much we forsake our own mercies, when we forsake the Fountain of living waters, and hew out to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

The reason why people in general are so averse to true religion, must be from their wrong apprehensions of it. They look upon it as a system of restraints, a withholding from them the beloved enjoyments of the world. But, what can be so consonant with right reason, as to devote ourselves to the service of that God from whom we receive our being, and every other good thing connected with our existence? It is in Him we live, and move, and have our being; and it is to Him we are indebted for all our comforts as traveling pilgrims. But, how immensely is our obligation to live to his glory increased, when we consider, that we are not our own, being bought with a price, and that price no less than the precious blood of his own dear Son. Nothing but the blinding, hardening, deceiving nature of sin, and the influence of Satan on our minds and hearts, can keep us from this most reasonable devotedness of ourselves to God. Herein lies our guilt. From hence, arises our misery.

O that I may now be like my Savior in holiness; live near to him in daily fellowship; and when released from the body, dwell forever with him in glory.

02.34. THE LIFE OF FAITH

34. THE LIFE OF FAITH

"The just shall live by his faith." Hab 2:4

The life of the redeemed through Christ Jesus is a life of faith. Being united to the glorified Head of the mystical body, the Church, believers receive all their spiritual life, all their vital influence from above. Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. All his people live by and through Him. He is their hiding-place, their refuge from every danger; their life is hidden with Christ in God; because he lives, they shall live also. Thousands call themselves Christians, who know nothing of the life of faith. They are zealous for their Church, but it is a party zeal. Some floating images of the truth pass through their minds, but no abiding principles of the Gospel influence or sanctify their hearts. There is a wide difference between speculative and experimental religion. The one, is the religion of the head, the other, the religion of the heart. If the mind is merely enlightened, the soul resembles a star-lit night in winter- clear, but cold. When the heart is brought under the influence of the Sun of Righteousness, the soul, abounding in the fruits of the Spirit, presents the lovely appearance of summer- all is warmth and beauty.

The merit of works is the doctrine of the Church of Rome. The doctrine of justification by faith alone, without the deeds of the law, is the peculiar characteristic of the gospel, and forms a touchstone whereby to judge of the soundness or unsoundness of Protestant churches. The doctrine of justification by faith through the righteousness of Christ, as it brings the highest glory to God, so it secures the best interests of holiness in the heart of the believer. The fact is, at once, both true and striking, that the very individuals who renounce their own works in the article of their justification before God, and therefore are charged with encouraging licentiousness, are the very individuals who, from their anxiety to maintain good works as the fruits of faith and evidences of their justification, are stigmatized as methodistical, and being righteous over-much, by the self-righteous boasters of good works. But the tree is known by its fruits.

God is infinitely just, therefore he demands an infinite satisfaction from his rebellious creatures. His law is holy, and demands a sinless obedience to all its requirements. What we esteem a small breach of the commandments, is punishable with eternal death- "Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

Can a finite creature give an infinite satisfaction? Can a being conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity, with a heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, keep the law of God whole and undefiled? It is impossible. The attempt is vain. Let a person try for one day to keep the entire law of God, reaching as it does to the thoughts, purposes, desires, and affections of the heart, without the least possible deviation from its demands, and he will, in one hour be led to cry out, if sincere, "God me merciful to me a sinner."

Man has devised many ways to escape the way of God’s appointment; but after all his labors, he remains a guilty sinner still. Penances cannot remove guilt, neither can the Purgatorial fire, that

unscriptural ordeal of the Romish church, purge it away. Superstition may use its whips and scourges, its rough-haired garments and frequent fastings, to mortify the body and propitiate heaven, but all in vain -the old Adam gathers strength by the very means employed to subdue the inbred evil. All prove, at last, to be no better than a spider's web, a refuge of lies.

O blessed Redeemer, preserve me from the fatal leaven of self-righteousness; from the wily crafts of Satan. Lead me to a saving knowledge of myself. Teach me the good and the right way to the mercy-seat. You are the way. Oh! may I daily walk with you by faith; holding sweet communion with you, and deriving all my strength from your fullness. While renouncing every work which would dare to join itself with you, in my acceptance with the Father, may I be ever zealous of good works, thus proving myself to be among that little flock to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom. Save me from Romish errors, from every anti-christian doctrine which would raise man and depress you. Oh! make me faithful in maintaining the truth, and fearless in boldly confessing you before men.

Almighty God, in his infinite wisdom, has devised a plan which his love and power have executed, and which, through his grace, he has revealed to us in the gospel of his Son. By an act of inconceivable mercy, he has made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Jesus being made under the law, became our righteousness, by fulfilling in our nature all its requirements, and by suffering in our stead all its penalties. The moment, therefore, that we truly believe, and receive him into our hearts by faith, we are justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses. All that the law can do, is to convince and to condemn. It is the gospel alone which enlightens and saves the soul.

Precious faith, the inestimable gift of God, is what we need. This grace, by uniting us to Christ, puts us in possession of all his merits, makes us interested in his salvation, and opens a direct way of access to God, who views us in his Son, as his adopted children. Oh! what a blessed revelation of mercy and grace! No wonder, if Satan strive to hide it from our view. Happy are they who, tasting the sweetness of this redemption, can sing with David- "This God is our God forever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death."

As 'justification by faith alone' strikes at the root of human pride, it is no marvel if the proud sinner, as well as Satan, rise against it. It requires no small degree of humility to renounce all creature dependence, all our fancied excellence, and to trust solely in the finished work of Jesus for acceptance with God. This blessed state of heart is the work of the Holy Spirit. He can so take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us; he can so guide us into all truth, as to make us delight in every thing which we naturally dislike; that is, an entire renunciation of our own supposed goodness, and an entire reception of Christ and his righteousness.

When this glorious work is wrought in our souls, then we become the very members of Christ's mystical body; we pass from death unto life, we are made the heirs of eternal glory. Oh! transporting privilege! the heirs of perdition to be made heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ! Truly this is the rest, and this is the refreshing. How delightful are the words of Paul; "We which have believed do enter into rest." Yes! even now, in this tumultuous world, we enter into rest. We rest in the love of God; we rest on the bosom of our Redeemer; we rest in the promises of his grace, and thus coming to him, and relying upon him, we find rest unto our souls. Christ is the only resting-place for the weary soul. "There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked." But, "in me,"

says Christ to his people, "you shall have peace."

The carnal heart naturally hates this revelation of grace, and the character which it produces. Religion in its present form is so uncongenial to the natural man, that it requires not the aid of moroseness or austerity to render it unpalatable. Though it come to him clothed with humility, with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, and smiling with benignity and love, yet he turns with aversion from this lovely object. Thus it was when He, who was the chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely, came unto his own; his own received him not; they saw no beauty in him, nothing that they should desire him.

If the natural heart dislikes the religion of Jesus, how careful should real Christians be, lest by a lack of the due exhibition of Christian graces, they should prejudice the ungodly against Christianity itself. True religion is lovely in its native character. We disfigure it too often by unchristian tempers, and thus impede its influence in the circle in which we move. Bad temper, like an impure dross, sullies the crystal cup of domestic comfort. What contradictions we often hear- "He is an excellent Christian, and would be quite a pattern, if it were not for his temper, which often carries him beyond the bounds of moderation!" Nothing is more common than such an observation among professors of religion! He is a good man- but this spoils all.

Oh! did we live a life of faith in the Son of God, we would live in the daily cultivation of heavenly tempers. Our study and aim would be to tread in the steps of the meek and lowly Savior; to drink deep into his spirit; and by a life enhancing godliness, to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. Knowing from where these blessings flow we should "wait on the Lord." How expressive is the Hebrew word for wait. "It implies the extension of a right line from one point to another. The first point is the human heart, the line is its intense desire, and the last point is God, to whom the heart extends this straight line of earnest desire. He who, while he waits on God, keeps his way, is sure to have the further blessings of which he is in pursuit."

Oh! that my wandering heart may thus be led to proceed in one unbroken line of holy, heavenly desires, towards my God and Savior. Blessed Jesus! the work must be yours. You, you alone can bind my runaway affections to Yourself. You, who are the Life, O quicken me to live a life of faith in you. Perform your work of love in me, and then, through all eternity, my work of praise will never cease.

How precious is a life of faith,

In Jesus’ never-failing word;

To credit all the Savior says,

To trust the promise of the Lord.

It gives a calm, a sweet repose,

Which gilds the varying scenes of life;

A peace, the true believer knows,

While passing through this world of strife.

His mind is kept in perfect peace,

When stayed upon his faithful God;

While terrors on the sinner seize,

Beneath Jehovah’s vengeful rod.

When judgments, like the thunders roll,

And nations quake through guilt and fear;

When earth is shook from pole to pole,

Believers feel their Savior near.

They walk with Jesus, and are blessed;

They walk in love, and can rejoice;

They walk to their celestial rest,

Their souls’ delightful, happy choice.

Along this consecrated way,

Which all the saints of old have trod,

I hasten to the eternal day,

To you, my Savior, and my God.

02.35. SEEKING AFTER GOD

35. SEEKING AFTER GOD

"O God, you are my God; early will I seek you." Psa 63:1

The real value of a thing is not to be estimated by the eagerness with which it is sought. If this were to be our rule of judging, we would be sadly deceived.

To amass wealth, men rise early, and late take rest. To obtain this object of their desire, they navigate oceans, traverse deserts, endure privations, and often risk life itself.

To gain worldly glory, the warrior braves the cannon’s mouth, combats in the blood-stained field, snatches the laurel-wreath from the very hand of death, and expires amid the shouts of victory.

To immortalize his name, the man of science wastes the midnight oil, and wastes still more the oil of life. Health droops beneath the mental toil; he lights the torch of fame, and dies!

To tread the flowery paths of pleasure, multitudes devote their days. Each thought, each hour, is drawn into the circle of dissipation. Like summer-flies, they bask in the sun-beam of delight; and like these insects of a day, they quickly disappear, unregretted by the world.

In this anxious search for riches, glory, fame, and pleasure, so all-absorbing, so incessant, God is forgotten. That Being, who is the First Great Cause of all, man seeks not. How powerful are the calls of Infinite Love; "Seek my face." "Seek the Lord while he may be found." "Seek me, and you shall live." But the gracious sound falls unheeded on the ear.

Oh! Heavenly Father, give me grace to seek you with my whole soul, to seek you with the best affections of my heart, the best powers and faculties of my mind. May all my talents, my time, my tongue, my worldly substance, be employed in your service; for only of your own can I render unto You. To You be all the praise, O source and giver of every good.

As the wild uncivilized Indian barters the precious metals of his country for worthless beads and trinkets, so, many professing Christians, though baptized in the name of Christ, barter their precious souls for the empty baubles of the world. Did we know God through the teaching of his Spirit; did we know the value of our own souls, oh! how differently we would act. Then would our language be that of the Psalmist, proceeding from the fullness of our hearts, "O God, you are my God; early will I seek you."

Truly delightful is the contemplation of the love of God in Christ. Here all is light and life. Multitudes are enveloped in darkness, because they hate the light of truth. But, when the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts, when the light of life bursts upon their souls, when Jesus reveals himself to them, in all the fullness of his salvation; then the mists of unbelief fly before the beams of Truth, and their souls are filled with peace and joy.

"God is love." Precious revelation of his grace! Calculated to call forth every expression of thankfulness, and to awaken every grateful feeling. Oh! that my cold heart could resemble the seraphims above, who, burning with sacred fire, surround the throne of Jehovah. As God is love, so all his purposes towards his people are love. He wills their happiness. His tender mercies are over all his works. His law is love, forbidding nothing, but what, if indulged in, would harm us; and commanding nothing, but what, if obeyed, will make us happy. How hateful, then, is rebellion against infinite love! How justly deserving everlasting punishment.

All God’s afflictive dispensations are the fruit of his love. They are correctives, for the spiritual health of his children. The Gospel of Christ affords the most sublime exhibition of divine love. All our thoughts are lost in this infinity of grace. Oh! that I may have these quickening views of the boundless love of God more vividly impressed on my soul. To every humble penitent, the Scriptures breathe nothing but peace. It is to the hardened infidel, and to the proud Pharisee, that they speak in language of severity. And yet, even to such characters, expostulations are made and pardon offered, if they will only turn to the stronghold, as prisoners of hope. Thus all our misery springs from ourselves. Oh! how supporting it is, under a conscious feeling of innate corruption, to know, that God desires not the death of a sinner; that he is waiting to be gracious; that he can, and will, subdue our iniquities, if, through grace, we apply to him for the balm in Gilead, if we go to him as the Physician there.

Unbelief, interwoven with pride, the love of the world, and the lust of the flesh, forms the barrier between our souls and God. What need, then, there is for humiliation and self-loathing before the slighted Majesty of heaven! Humility, love, and purity, were the holy features of the Redeemer’s character while on earth; and if we ardently seek after his blessed image, we shall, even here, be like him in the beauties of holiness.

How gracious is the promise; "You shall seek me, and find me, when you search for me with all your heart." What words can more clearly express the entire affection of the heart. A divided heart will never obtain the blessing; we must seek with all our heart, if we would find God. There is something peculiarly forcible in the monosyllables of the Bible. "You shall find me when you search for me with all your heart " "You are my friends," said Jesus, "if you do whatever I command you." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." "If we love one another, God dwells in us." "If we ask any thing according to his will, he hears us." "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Most delightful also are the possessive pronouns, when we can make them our own. "O God, you are my God; early will I seek you." "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks upon me; you are my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God." "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also has become my salvation." "All things are yours."

Precious truth! if believers in Jesus, heaven will be our eternal home. Both the negative and positive felicity of heaven afford matter for the sweetest meditation. "There shall be no more curse." "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain." "There shall be no night there." Such is the negative happiness of heaven.

How glorious is the positive felicity. "The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." "His servants shall serve him. They shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads. The Lord God gives them light; and they shall reign forever and ever."

Oh! who would not seek after God with all the heart, to enjoy, through the Savior's grace, such blessedness as this! But, we must have a spiritual perception and a spiritual taste to know and relish heavenly pleasures. No man ever went to heaven whose heart did not go before him. "Where your treasure is," said our divine Redeemer, "there will your heart be also." We find it to be so in earthly things; and it is equally so in spiritual things.

O my soul, are your affections placed on things above? Is Jesus the supreme object of your love? Are all created treasures lost in the one eternal Treasure, the Savior of mankind? Can you truly say "Whom have I in heaven but You? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides You." What are the common actings of sincere attachment? They are these five-

1. We love to think upon the friend who is dear to our hearts.

2. We love to speak affectionately of him to others.

3. We love to converse with the person whom we esteem.

4. We love to dwell with the beloved object of our regard.

5. We love to do all acts of kindness, and to endure much self-denial, for his sake.

Can you, O my soul, transfer all this to the Savior, and feel, by holy experience, these actings of love towards him? Happy, indeed, are they who daily love to think of Jesus; to speak of him; to converse with him by prayer and reading his word; to dwell with him by faith; and to do and suffer with cheerfulness, all his righteous will. Such "disciples indeed," have heaven let down into their souls, and ascend by these steps to the courts above.

How different is the experience and conduct of mere nominal professors, who, though called Christians, are only heathens in disguise. They never truly seek after God, nor confess their sins with brokenness of heart. They endeavor to conceal their sins, not knowing, or not heeding, the inspired caution, "He that covers his sins shall not prosper." They cover their sins by forgetting them; but God has them in remembrance. They cover their sins by denying them; but God will declare their iniquity. They cover their transgressions by framing excuses for them; but God will stop their mouths in judgment. They cover their iniquities by hypocrisy; but God will make manifest the secrets of their hearts. Surely, then, such conduct cannot prosper. It must bring down the wrath of the Almighty; while he who confesses his sins with humble penitence at the foot of the Cross, and heartily forsakes them through the power of the Holy Spirit, shall have mercy.

O adorable Savior of sinners, manifest Yourself to My soul. Like David may I seek you early. With Daniel may I set my face unto You the Lord my God, to seek by prayer and supplication your pardoning and restoring grace. You have promised to be found by those who seek you with their whole heart. O may I have grace in my search for happiness, to find You the very source and center of felicity. Your presence is heaven below, while journeying to the heaven above. Fill me

with your Spirit; and when my days on earth are ended, receive me to Yourself, where joys unspeakable will never cease.

Gracious is my heavenly King,

Sweet employ his praise to sing;

Ever loving, ever kind,

He has bid me, seek and find.

I would seek Him in his Son,

Who, by grace my heart has won;

Seek Him through his Spirit’s power,

Every day, and every hour.

Lord, to me Yourself impart,

Cheer and bless my waiting heart;

Give me mercy, grace, and peace,

Foretaste of eternal bliss.

May I now your love possess,

Traveling through this wilderness;

Until I reach your dwelling-place

And behold you face to face.

There with glorious sons of light,

Clad in pure celestial white,

With my harp of gold I’ll sing,

Endless praises to my King!

02.36. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS

36. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS

"Salvation belongs unto the Lord; your blessing is upon your people." Psa 3:8

Moses, who saw with inspired vision the blessedness of the righteous, might well exclaim while blessing the children of Israel; "Happy are you, O Israel who is like unto you, O people saved by the Lord!" "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long."

Man makes many attempts to save himself, but "Salvation belongs unto the Lord." "I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no Savior." "I, even I, am he that blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember your sins." Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One, who shall save his people from their sins; therefore Jesus is Jehovah. Oh! that I may unite in heart with David- "But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them sing joyful praises forever. Protect them, so all who love your name may be filled with joy. For you bless the godly, O Lord, surrounding them with your shield of love."

If we have a saving interest in this redemption which is by Christ Jesus, how calmly may we repose on the promises of God; how quietly rest under the shadow of his wings. When the shades of night advance, we can say, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for you only, Lord, make me dwell in safety." If surrounded by enemies; "I will not be afraid of ten thousands that have set themselves against me round about." If living in times of national convulsions; "God is our refuge therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." When threatened with persecution- "When I am afraid, I will trust in you." When awaiting the hour of dissolution; "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me."

The man who can thus possess his soul in patience; who can thus confide in the faithfulness, power, and love of God, is truly blessed. In the midst of storms he enjoys a calm; and when men’s hearts are failing them for fear, he can lift up his head, knowing that his redemption draws near. In times of national degeneracy, when, in the expressive language of Micah, "the best of them is a brier; the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge;" when the caution is given; "Trust not in a friend, put no confidence in a guide; keep the doors of your mouth from her that lies in your bosom;" and when "a man’s enemies are the men of his own house;" in such a time of iniquity and trial, the believer can say with unshaken confidence; "I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. Rejoice not against me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be light unto me."

Truly this is the triumph of faith! The believer’s sky is not always free from clouds, but though unseen, the sun is still in the heavens. Jesus ever lives, the Sun of righteousness never sets. The beams of grace on earth, and the beams of glory in heaven, shine with undiminished luster. Faith can pierce through the darkening vapor, and rejoice even in a cloudy day. "There is not a case of

discouragement for which the word of God does not provide a remedy. There is no darkness which Christ cannot remove; no guilt which he cannot take away; no corruption which he cannot subdue." Oh! what a Savior is Jesus Christ.

Well might Peter say- "Unto you therefore who believe, he is precious." How precious is the blood, the righteousness, the intercession of Christ. What a mercy, that there is a fountain opened, not sealed; that we, have an Advocate with the Father, not an accuser. For these blessings we should offer unceasing praise. Our Christian experience must have long since taught us, that this world is not our rest; that here joys and sorrows are mysteriously blended together; but that in Christ is peace, and in heaven is unsullied bliss. True happiness is inseparable from the love of God in Christ. How can earthly things, however splendid or profuse, which "perish in the using," satisfy the desires of an immortal mind? Wealthy people are not, by consequence, happy, simply because they have wealth. A glare is thrown around them, which dazzles the eyes of common beholders; but the eye of faith can discover vanity and vexation of spirit beneath the gaudy equipage, the lordly mansion, and the show of wealth.

Oh! that the peace of God which passes all understanding, may now and ever be my portion. There is something extremely delightful in enjoying the blessings of Providence, not only as pleasant in themselves, but as the gifts of covenant love. This gives a double relish to all the innocent enjoyments of life. But Jesus has said, "Whoever of you that forsakes not all that he has, he cannot be my disciple." When tried by this touchstone, O what worldly alloy will be found in our hearts, in the midst of much religious profession. Lord! make me sincere; make me wholly yours. Whatever I love, may it be in subordination to my love to you; and never allow me for one moment to set up an idol in my heart. Reign in me as the Sovereign of my soul. Sway all my powers, until mortality be swallowed up of life.

That man is truly blessed who can say with David, "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance." With the Lord as our portion, we shall have abundant cause to sing, "The lines have fallen unto me in pleasant places; yes, I have a goodly heritage." Our gracious Savior, of whose resurrection this Psalm is strikingly prophetic, will show us the path of life, and finally, through his sovereign grace, lead us into his presence, where is fullness of joy, and place us at his right hand, where are pleasures for evermore. Should the doubting Christian ask- And can all this blessedness be mine? Can such a sinner as I be admitted to this glory? Is it not rather a pleasing dream? Jesus himself answers the question, to all who truly love him; "In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also." Thus all is "substantial and sincere." If Christ is our portion; if we persevere unto the end, he will receive us to himself, as His portion, in the day when he makes up his jewels.

Oh! that I may have grace to lean only on the hope of his heavenly mercy. Jesus can cause the swelling Jordan to open its waters before me, that I may have a safe passage into the celestial Canaan. At that eventful hour, Faith can make a cheerful heart, and Hope a smiling face, while Love sheds its sunshine of delight over the soul. John Newton beautifully observes, that "Faith is nothing else than the soul’s venture. It ventures to Christ, it ventures for Christ; and it ventures in Christ." While possessing this simplicity of faith, I may boldly venture, like Peter, on the boisterous lake, and feel its liquid pavement to be as a rock beneath my feet.

To the true believer, afflictions are blessings in disguise. If the Captain of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings, shall we shrink from the Cross? It has been well remarked, that "God had one Son without sin; but, that he has none without suffering." The school of the Cross is the school of light, and there must all the children of God be taught, to fit them for the perfect state of glory. An ignorant person, who sees the mariner heaving such a weight of ballast aboard his ship, would suppose he intended to sink her at sea. Just so, whatever the world may think, the troubles and trials of the saints shall never sink them, but keep them from being overturned by every squall, that they may arrive with safety at the haven of rest, having their anchor fixed "within the veil."

Every trial is intended for my good. My foolish heart would be too much attached to earth if the spade were not inserted to loosen the fibers, and disengage the root, that when transplanted, I may bear a richer fruit in the Paradise above. My heavenly Father, whose love and wisdom are infinite, knows exactly what I need, and how much suffering is needed to promote the spirituality of my mind. Shall I then repine at his dispensations of love? To say practically from the heart, "May Your will be done," is not the result of nature, but of grace. How blessed, how peaceful is the believer, who can thus drink into the spirit of his Redeemer!

A murmuring spirit increases every evil. It doubles the affliction. It adds a sting to sorrow. If our hearts are in heaven, the trials of earth will be light and momentary, for love can sweeten every care, and lighten every cross. A Savior’s love disarms affliction of its sting.

Oh! that we may learn wisdom by every dispensation of Providence; and yield more fruit by every application of the pruning knife. The divine husbandman prunes every branch in Christ, that it may bring forth more fruit. Whatever makes us more like unto God in his communicable perfections, whatever brings us into a nearer communion with him, through faith in his beloved Son, must increase our holiness and augment our happiness. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of grace and glory. "It should be joy to us, that the eternal Son should come to seek and save us; that he has made a full atonement for our sins; that he has conquered sin and death; that he lives as our Intercessor and Advocate with the Father; and that he will come again to perfect and glorify his persevering believers.

Those, therefore, live below the use and end of the Christian Revelation, who are not filled with spiritual joy. Believers should rejoice in their happy relation to God the Father, as his adopted children; in their happy relation to the Son of the Father as being members of his mystical body and co-heirs with himself; in the pardon of their sins; in the sanctification of their natures; in the prospect of grace and glory that will be revealed at the return of their Lord and Head from heaven. Were they confirmed in their holy faith, how would they rejoice. "The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."

O, God of my salvation, enable me to glorify you by an unshaken faith in your promises; and an undeviating walk in the way of your commandments. Under every trial, may no murmur escape my lips, no hard thought of you be indulged in my heart. As love is inscribed on all your dispensations, so may love be visible in all my actions. Give me daily to experience the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered; unto whom you will impute no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deception.

02.37. THE BELIEVER'S PATH TO GLORY

37. THE BELIEVER’S PATH TO GLORY

"We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Acts 14:22

When I consider how short-sighted we are, and that all which lies before us is "a dark unknown," it is our happiness, as well as our safety, to be guided by One who cannot err, who sees the end from the beginning, who knows what is best for us, and who has promised, if we love him, to make all things work together for our good. Yet, alas! how unwilling we are to acquiesce in his will. How much we want the completion of our own wishes, as if every disappointment was necessarily a discomfort.

With what tender forbearance does our heavenly Father treat his wayward children. If he crosses their inclinations, it is for their good, that he may subdue their rebellious wills to himself. Oh! that mine may be subdued unto him.

We are journeying to the place of which the Lord has said He will give to us. At every stage of our journey we should erect our Ebenezer; our grateful monument of praise. "Hitherto has the Lord helped us," must be the inscription; "I will never leave you, nor forsake you," our traveling promise for support.

The Christian pilgrim is commanded to look backward; "You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not." And, also to look forward; "Behold, I send an Angel before you, to keep you in the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared."

It is important thus to retrace our steps, that, reviewing the Lord’s dealings with us, we may be filled with humiliation and thankfulness; and to look heavenward, that our faith and hope may be strengthened. We are too apt to forget our sins, as well as our mercies; and to neglect our preparation for the future, in the midst of present occupations, trials, or enjoyments. It is good to be humble, thankful, contented, resigned, and dependent. The more we sit loose to the world, and the more we shall enjoy its lawful blessings. But, the more we idolize it, and the more it will be made our cross. These lessons we learn in the school of Christian Experience.

We naturally shrink from trouble, though born to it as the sparks fly upward. Trouble is both penal and medicinal. Evil pursues sinners; but, though "many be the afflictions of the righteous, the Lord delivers them out of them all." How gracious is the voice of covenant love; "You shall consider in your heart, that, as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you. Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him."

This is the end and design of the Lord’s chastisements. He does not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men. It is not for his pleasure, as if he delighted in our pain; but for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. Oh! that my heart may be molded into the will of God. Nothing

but almighty grace can subdue our rebellious wills, and bring them into a state of child-like submission. David knew this well by happy experience; "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept your word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn your statutes."

How often do our affections, like silly, wandering sheep, stray from the Good Shepherd. And as it is said of sheep, that when they once lose their way, they cannot retrace their steps, so is it with our foolish hearts. When once we leave the fold we would never return, if left to ourselves; therefore David in his pastoral Psalm, says; "He restores my soul; he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." And in Psa 119:1-176; "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant; for I do not forget your commandments." Our blessed Lord, who is himself the "Good Shepherd," has described his love to us by the parable of the lost sheep; and the joy of angels over our salvation. What a kind, compassionate, faithful Shepherd is Jesus, who gave his life for the sheep, and has declared "that they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of his hand." O that I may love him more and more.

When afflictions are sanctified to us, they are indeed good. "The Lord gives medicine to heal our sickness." His precious declaration is; "I am the Lord that heals you." "He heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds." "Bless the Lord, O my soul who heals all your diseases." While walking in this consecrated way to glory, our hearts can sing in unison with that of David; "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies."

It does, at first sight, seem surprising, that mercies should not lead us to God as powerfully as judgments. But perhaps the reason may be, that afflictions tend to embitter the world to us, whereas prosperity gilds it with a brighter line. Being naturally prone to love the world, and tasting, in seasons of prosperity, some of these many blessings which sweeten life, we are apt to rest at the cistern, and to forsake the fountain. This state of heart forms one of the plainest indications of the Fall.

When God in mercy opens our eyes to see our real condition, then we find that our cistern is broken, and that He only can impart the Living Water. There is, alas! much selfishness in thus coming to God, only that he may heal us. While he smiles upon us by his bounteous Providence, we remain contented with the creature. How dishonoring to our gracious Benefactor!

Oh! how patient is our compassionate God and Savior! There is something most elevating and ingenuous in David's experience; "There is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared." To fear God because he is ready to pardon, manifests a highly spiritual frame of mind. Nature is rebellious, but grace is submissive. To justify God in all his dealings is the very essence of genuine piety. "I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right." But the carnal mind complains. We are naturally murmurers and complainers. The natural man is ever ready to find fault with the divine proceedings, and especially if they affect himself. How different was the state of David's mind, who could add, "I know, O Lord, that you in faithfulness have afflicted me;" afflicted me according to covenant love, covenant promise, and covenant truth. Happy state, indeed!

Such assurance as this, enabled a dear servant of Christ to say, when about to leave this world "My pleasures are all to come." To produce such blessedness, the Gospel must be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes. Nothing human can impart such peace and joy, at a

time when nature is sinking into the arms of death. Oh! that I may never rest, until I obtain this blessed assurance of faith and hope, which is the sweet attendant on the Christian pilgrim as he journeys towards the heavenly Zion.

If the desire of grace, is for more grace, for it is from God alone, that "all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works, do proceed;" I humbly hope I have some evidence of being in the way to glory. But when I look at the matured Christian, as exhibited in the word of God, and contrast this picture with my own infantile state, I have abundant cause for deep humiliation, but none for despondency. All praise to sovereign grace. There is treasured up in Jesus such a fullness of mercy and power, and such a freeness of will to bestow, that I am encouraged to come relying on his faithful word, and to feel assured that I shall not be sent empty away. O what a privilege to be thus invited and encouraged to cast myself simply upon the covenant mercies of God my Savior. Jesus never said to the seed of Jacob; "Seek me in vain."

It is one of the Lord’s dealings with his beloved children, to make them feel their weakness and his power; their pollution and his holiness; their nothingness and his all-sufficiency. The more we are brought under the teachings of the Holy Spirit, the more we shall find the truth of this remark. It is the great design of God in the Gospel dispensation, to humble our naturally proud hearts, to bring down our naturally self-righteous spirit, to root out our naturally idolatrous affections. And while He does this through his almighty power, he clothes us with humility, he covers us with the Savior’s righteousness, he implants in us a supreme love to Himself, thus destroying the old man of sin, and raising up in us the new man, which is renewed in knowledge and true holiness.

While journeying through this wilderness, we must expect vicissitudes. Many things may occur to repress our spiritual exhilaration. At one time, "Jesus wept." At another, He "rejoiced in spirit." At one time he could say, "Father, I thank you." At another, "Why have you forsaken me?"

If we are founded on the Rock, Christ Jesus; if we have His Spirit dwelling within us; then we may, and ought, to cultivate that peace which the world cannot take away, and which can only be really shaken by willfully allowed transgression. Oh! that I may have a firm hold on the promises. They are in Christ yes, and in Him, Amen, to the glory of God. We change as the wind, in the state of our feelings; sometimes high, sometimes low, now on the mount, now in the valley, but our Divine Redeemer is ever the same. His love is infinite, his mercy is everlasting on those who fear him. In Him we may safely confide. However rough the waves which dash against our fragile bark; however boisterous the winds which oppose our passage heavenward; Jesus can speak the word- "Peace, be still," and all is hushed into a calm. How often has He to say to my trembling heart- "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

If it be asked; Has the believer no seasons of dejection except what arise from the weakness of his faith? He has. In the spirit of Christian sympathy, he can weep with those who weep; and mourn over the sins of others. How touching is the compassion of the Almighty as recorded in the tenth chapter of Judges; "The children of Israel said unto the Lord, We have sinned, and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel." A different kind of grief was manifested by our Lord respecting the hypocritical Pharisees; "He looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts."

The tender-hearted Paul was often pained by the insincerity of some, and the unbelief of others. He could weep over the falls of professors, and the obstinate rejection of Christ by the Jews; "Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears," was his language to the Corinthians.

Bodily infirmity will depress, the spirits. From bodily weakness our spirits may be weak; but this feeling of depression, as it arises, not from spiritual, but natural causes, forms no ground for our writing bitter things against ourselves. The Lord "knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." Jesus did not say, He that rejoices shall be saved, but, " He that believes shall be saved." If, then, we truly believe with the heart unto righteousness; if we love the Savior with a supreme affection; if we desire and endeavor to do the will of God from the heart, we may possess our souls in peace, though, from much bodily sickness, we cannot realize the ecstatic triumphs and joys of faith. This spiritual elevation is delightful, but not indispensable to our safety.

Some have a naturally optimistic temperament, and can rise above the lowering effects of disease. Others, from nervous affections, are soon cast down, and see every thing through a gloomy medium. But, in all these cases, God looks at the heart. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. He will, at all times, speak peace to his people; and enable them to glorify him in the fires, either by a song of thanksgiving, or by a calm and childlike resignation to His will.

Here, then, is solid ground on which to stand. Our salvation does not rest on feeling, but on faith; not on our works, but on sovereign grace. The tried believer longs to die, and to be with Christ. It has, however, been asked- Is it right to indulge anxious desires to depart and to be with Christ, when so many duties require our stay? If this desire arise from a mere wish to escape the troubles of life, it is not a Christian desire. The longing desire after heaven which the believer feels, must always be subservient to the Divine Will. Ready to depart, yet willing to stay, is the proper position of a child of God- willing to stay and do the work, however arduous, assigned to him by Infinite Wisdom; and yet, ready to depart from dearest, tenderest friends, when the Lord calls him to his kingdom of glory. O ! what a blessed preparation of soul is this. How much should we seek after it. It is a compound of faith, love, spiritual-mindedness, hope, resignation, obedience, and joy.

"We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." This must be true, whether it arise from the "thorn in the flesh;" the malice of Satan, the enmity of the ungodly, or the remainders of sin in our heart. Here lies our comfort, that chastisement is the expression of our heavenly Father’s love; that every affliction is administered by the hand of parental affection. What can be more soothing than to recognize a Father’s hand in every infliction of his providence? There is no mixture of wrath in the cup prepared by a loving parent. It may be bitter, but it is medicinal. Its effects may be painful, but they are not penal. This assurance reconciles the mind, and enables the obedient child to say- "The cup which my heavenly Father gives me, shall I not drink it?" "Father, not my will, but your be done." Such a spirit as this is most pleasing to God. It is the product of his own grace. The more we possess of it, the more we resemble the divine Jesus, who has left us an example, that we should follow his steps.

Blessed Jesus! enable me to glorify you by bearing your cross along the consecrated path to glory. Give me a holy courage in your cause; a fearless determination to confess you before men; a cheerful resignation to your will under every tribulation. Save me from lukewarmness. Keep me

from embracing error, however adorned, or by whomsoever sanctioned. Enable me to discern the chaff from the wheat; to distinguish between the doctrines of men, and the truths of your own word. Preserve me from a temporizing spirit, from a wish to please men at the expense of principle. At all times, and in all places, may I boldly declare my trust in you, my love to you, and my zeal for you. In seasons of national defection, may I be found faithful; and at last, when death shall shake his dart over me, enable me, in the fullness of faith, to exclaim, "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

How happy the saint of the Lord, Whose heart to the Savior is given,

While crossing the valley below,

His treasure and hope are in heaven.

He feels the sad burden of sin,

And longs to depart and be free;

he knows where true rest can be found,

My Jesus! ’tis only in thee.

Oh! may I with longing desire,

Pursue the bright path to your throne;

And leaving all idols behind,

Be sealed, by You, as your own.

Whom have I in heaven, but Thee?

And on earth, what, with you, can compare;

Oh! when this frail body shall fail,

Let me rise all your glories to share.

Your word has pronounced the bliss;

When shall I this blessedness see?

"Where I am enthroned in light,

There, my servants enthroned shall be."

02.38. THE BELIEVER'S PORTION

38. THE BELIEVER’S PORTION

"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" Rom 8:32

Who can grasp the fullness of this revelation of mercy? The Possessor of all things, if we are his children through the Son of his love, will freely give us all things! We cannot possess a greater gift than the Creator himself; and this gift shall be ours if we truly believe. Paul, whose heart glowed with love, has assured us of this; "You are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." To confirm this precious truth, the adorable Savior has promised; "He who overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my Son." "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne."

What a boundless prospect of glory lies before the humblest believer in Jesus! However low he may appear in the eyes of the great ones of the earth, he is beheld as a KING’S SON by the inhabitants of heaven. It is truly a blessed sight to behold the poor, "rich in faith," and the rich, "poor in spirit." "The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all." For both, the same Savior is provided, the same Spirit offered, the same volume written, the same promises are given, and for both the same heaven is prepared. All stand on the same level before God. The rich and the poor are liable to the same diseases, to the same diversified trials and temptations. They are alike hastening to the same dust of death, to the same bar of judgment, to the same eternity, to the same abodes of bliss or misery. Shall, then, the foot of pride spurn away the lowly Lazarus? It may; but, before long, when death shall lay the despiser and the despised in the grave, the one, though here the child of poverty, if a child of God, shall shine in robes of glory; while the other, though now surrounded by the glare of splendor, if an enemy of God, shall be enveloped in flames of fire. "To the poor the Gospel is preached," was one of the blessed marks of his Messiahship which Jesus gave to the messengers from John the Baptist.

A more pitiable sight cannot be seen, than a man sunk in poverty and disease, and, at the same time, sunk in the depths of sin. He has nothing but wretchedness here, and nothing but torment in the world to come. Oh! that the spirit of grace may lead every such child of woe to that friend of sinners, whose blood cleanses from all sin, and whose love can rescue the vilest who flee unto him.

The pleasure-loving sinner, having all that heart can wish, and withholding himself from no joy; casting off the fear of God, and breaking through every restraint, either of conscience or religion, is an object of deepest pity. He may, for a time, fare sumptuously, be flattered, and envied by others; but soon the pleasing dream will end. The rich and the poor, if rebels against God, though separated from each other while on earth, shall meet together in that place where wealth and poverty are disregarded, where proud distinctions shall be lost; and where all shall be blended in

one common ruin.

The privileges of the believer in Jesus are treasured up in the name of Jehovah, so graciously proclaimed to Moses; "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, patient, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." David delighted to dwell on this precious name- "You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious; patient, and plenteous in mercy and truth." "You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all those who call upon you." "Let Israel hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." "The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And those who know your name will put their trust in you; for you, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you."

Oh! what abundant cause have we to bless the God of our salvation, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever; who changes not. The book of Psalms is a rich treasury; a casket full of precious jewels. The experience of the true believer is there recorded with peculiar faithfulness, whether he be on the mount of praise, or in the valley of humiliation. The Church in every age has been enlightened, comforted, and strengthened by these songs of Zion.

Happy are they who can unite with David, and say, "Save your servant who trusts in you." "I cry unto you daily." "Unto you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul." "In the day of my trouble I will call upon you." If this be our prayer, then our rejoicing will be that of David; "I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; and I will glorify your name for evermore. For great is your mercy toward me; and you have delivered my soul from the lowest hell." "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being."

The believer, thus brought into covenant with God, has access by faith into this grace wherein he stands, and can rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Being justified by faith, he has peace with God. Through the indwelling Spirit, he enjoys the peace of God. By faith he is made a child of God, and receiving the Spirit of adoption, can cry- Abba, Father. The promises are his portion. They are as wells of salvation, out of which he draws the waters of comfort. The perfections of God in Christ are his Tower of Strength. The Almighty is his shield, and his exceeding great reward. Through life, he lives in the smiles of his Savior; and through eternity, he shall dwell in his presence and glory.

Oh! my soul, are you thirsting after these blessings of grace? What can the world give you in lieu of these glories? Earthly crowns and scepters are but baubles, when compared with the unfading crown of glory. Soon will all the splendors of royalty pass away, and the grandeur of the great be forgotten; but not so, the dignity of the children of God, for whom a kingdom is prepared. "Come, you blessed of my Father," will the King of Glory say to his now despised subjects, "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." To such he now says; "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life."

Surveying this heavenly glory, so richly prepared for the saints, the beloved Apostle breaks out into an anthem of praise, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

The Christian, who lives in the enjoyment of these privileges, will be anxious that others shall enjoy them too. He will labor in his humble measure to spread the savor of the Redeemer's name, which is as ointment poured out, yielding a sweet fragrance. The promises of God cheer his heart, and animate his endeavors. He knows in whom he has believed, and is assured, that every word of God is true, that His counsel shall stand, and that He will do all his pleasure. He opens the sacred volume, and reads with delight, "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." His heart responds–Amen! to the desire of David, "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name forever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen."

He reads again; "The Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord, and his name one." "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering; for my name shall be great among the heathen says the Lord of hosts." "They shall fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun." "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him. For the kingdom is the Lord's; and he is the governor among the nations." "They shall teach no more, every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, says the Lord." "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

He reads again- "All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord, when they hear the words of your mouth. Yes, they shall sing in the ways of the Lord; for great is the glory of the Lord." Oh! precious declaration or Eternal Truth. Not merely one or a few, but "all the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord." And when will this blessing be accomplished? "When they hear the words of your mouth." Not, when they shall hear the words of fallible men, but, "the words of your mouth;" your own infallible word of Truth; the Truth of the everlasting Gospel.

Oh! that this word may run and be glorified by the conversion of kings unto You. Then will they "sing in the ways of the Lord;" rejoice in your salvation, and stir up their subjects to praise you too. Yes, then shall your Church be protected and nourished; for kings shall be her nursing fathers, and their queens her nursing mothers; when all flesh shall know that you are the Lord, her Savior, and her Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.

What can effect so great a work? nothing but almighty power. He, whose name is "wonderful," can alone bring upon the earth so vast a blessing. The work will be as rapid, as it is great- "Who has ever seen or heard of anything as strange as this? Has a nation ever been born in a single day? Has a country ever come forth in a mere moment? But by the time Jerusalem's birth pains begin, the baby will be born; the nation will come forth." "Rejoice with Jerusalem! Be glad with her, all you who love her and mourn for her." "I will comfort you there as a child is comforted by its mother." Oh! how sweet! "As a child is comforted by its mother;" -with all the tender feelings, and sympathies, and affections of a loving mother, "so will I comfort you."

The God of nature is the God of grace. Suppose a person, blind from his infancy, to be restored to sight in the depth of winter, when all was leafless and barren, and the ground covered with snow; and suppose his blindness to return, but again to be removed during the height of summer, when

all is clothed with verdure, and the earth enameled with flowers; would he not conceive himself to be placed in some other world? The change is not greater than that which will be experienced, when Satan shall be bound, and the Spirit poured out from on high; when Jesus shall reign in righteousness, when he shall have dominion from sea to sea; when all kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him; when his name shall endure forever, and be continued as long as the sun; when men shall be blessed in him, and all nations call him blessed.

Oh! what a cheering, supporting grace is faith in the truth of the unchangeable Jehovah. If He withdraws his presence, we shall resemble the barren waste; but if He grants his smile, we shall be like the fruitful Eden, lovely in flower, and sweet in fragrance. "You are like a private garden, my treasure, my bride! You are like a spring that no one else can drink from, a fountain of my own. You are like a lovely orchard bearing precious fruit, with the rarest of perfumes: nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, myrrh and aloes, perfume from every incense tree, and every other lovely spice."

O! Adorable Savior! how can I sufficiently bless You for these revelations of your Truth, for these promises of your grace. Satan may now be called the god of this world, for alas! millions acknowledge his sway. But, before long, you will take to Yourself your great power and reign as Lord Supreme, for you only are Jehovah, and of your kingdom there shall be no end. Reign now, blessed Jesus, in my heart! Take up your abode within me. Give me this pledge, this foretaste of the millennial blessedness. May my every thought be brought into captivity, my every desire be bounded by your will. Enable me to realize the privileges of your people until I reach the temple above, where nothing will be heard but songs of praise, where nothing will be seen but sights of bliss.

Jesus, your boundless love to me

No thought can reach, no tongue declare;

O knit my thankful heart to thee,

And reign without a rival there;

Yours wholly, yours alone, I am;

O be alone my constant flame!

O grant that nothing in my soul

May dwell, but your pure love alone

O may your love possess me whole,

My joy, my treasure, and my crown;

Strange flames far from my heart remove;

My every act, word, thought, be love!

O Love, how cheering is your ray!

All pain before your presence flies;

Care, anguish, sorrow, melt away,

Wherever your healing beams arise;

O Jesus, nothing may I see,

Nothing desire, or seek, but thee!

Still let your love point out my way!

How wondrous things your love has wrought!

Still lead me, lest I go astray;

Direct my word, inspire my thought;

And if I fall; soon may I hear

Your voice, and know that love is near.

In suffering be your love my peace;

In weakness be your love my power;

And when the storms of life shall cease,

Jesus, in that important hour,

In death as life O be my guide,

And save me, who for me have died.

02.39. CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

39. CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

"Finally, all of you should be of one mind, full of sympathy toward each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds." 1Pe 3:8

What a lovely object would the Church of Christ present to the world, did all its members live in the spirit of the gospel. The conversion of the world to the faith of Christ would then be hastened, if all who believe in Jesus were cemented together by holy love, and actuated by the Holy Spirit. The declarations of Scripture are clear and decisive on the beauty and blessedness of Christian fellowship. "By this," said our Lord, "shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another." To the Thessalonians Paul wrote; "But I don't need to write to you about the Christian love that should be shown among God's people. For God himself has taught you to love one another. Indeed, your love is already strong toward all the Christians in all of Macedonia. Even so, dear friends, we beg you to love them more and more." "The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you." Peter exhorted the Christians, to whom he addressed his epistle, to add "to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity."

Did all the churches of Christ, in the apostolic age, manifest to the world the graces of brotherly kindness and charity? Were there no disfiguring traits in the character of the primitive believers? Alas! we have to mourn over the corruption of the heart, even in the purest age of Christianity! With the apostolic admonition, "Love must be sincere," Paul had to warn the church at Rome, "I beseech you, brethren, mark those who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them." For the Corinthians, he drew with the pencil of truth, guided by the Eternal Spirit, the most beautifully finished portrait of Christian love. And yet, over this very church, for which, on some accounts, he could thank God, he had also deeply to mourn– "There are contentions among you." "There is among you envying, and strife, and divisions." "You wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren." "It's not the Lord's Supper you are concerned about when you come together. For I am told that some of you hurry to eat your own meal without sharing with others. As a result, some go hungry while others get drunk." "For I am afraid that when I come to visit you I won't like what I find, and then you won't like my response. I am afraid that I will find quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfishness, backstabbing, gossip, conceit, and disorderly behavior."

Can this be the picture of a primitive church? Alas! it is. If we ask, while surveying these tares, who has done this? Our Lord has told us in his parable; "An enemy has done this?" Satan busily sowed his weeds among the wheat at the very formation of the Christian church. Though admitted by baptism into the society of the faithful, they proved by their works whose children they were. And so it is now. Hypocrites, deceivers, false brethren, heretics, and schismatics trouble the church. This condition of the visible church, painful as it is, verifies the words of the apostle, when writing to the church at Corinth, "In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there

are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval." To such faithful souls, Jesus sent a word of comfort by his servant John; "Because you have obeyed my command to persevere, I will protect you from the great time of testing that will come upon the whole world to test those who belong to this world. Look, I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take away your crown." Truly this is a word in season. Oh! that we may be found faithful when the sifting time arrives.

The images employed to describe the unity of the church are beautiful– The harmony which is experienced in the human frame, where, if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; the union which subsists between the foundation and the superstructure of a building; the tender oneness of the marriage state; are all employed by the apostles to set forth the union of believers in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Head, his people are the members of his mystical body. Jesus is the Foundation, his people, the living stones in the spiritual building. Jesus is the Husband, his people, collectively, form the bride, the Lamb’s wife.

Perfection is a plant which bears its fruit in heaven. Here we may and ought to cultivate it with unceasing care, but still the precious fruit can only be enjoyed in the paradise above. While journeying there, "it is absurd to expect perfection; but it is not unreasonable to expect consistency." Did Christians act up to their principles, did they do to others, as they, in reason and justice, would wish others to do to them, we would behold a blessed change in the so-called religious world. Uprightness and sincerity formed the perfection of the Old Testament saints. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."

Maturity in Christian experience, and ripeness in Christian graces, compose the perfection of believers in Jesus. "Brethren," says Paul to the Corinthians, "stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults (perfect, or of a riper age.)" And to the Hebrews he writes, "Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature (perfect), who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."

Blessed Jesus! your nature was perfect, your soul spotless, your whole life without sin, when you condescended to become man, and to die the just for the unjust, to bring us unto God. Grant that I may be renewed in the spirit of my mind; that I may be transformed into your holy image; and walk before you in newness of life. Give me the graces of simplicity and godly sincerity. Cause me to grow up into you in all things. Enable me to forget past attainments, and to reach forth unto those things which are ahead. Deliver me from presumptuous sins. Strengthen me to fight the good fight of faith. Shield me by your grace; and preserve me, as a vessel of mercy, unto your eternal kingdom and glory.

Next to communion with God, there cannot be a more refined felicity than the communion of saints. Everything holy in principle, and exalted in prospect, is associated with the assurance, that the friends whom we love upon earth, shall be our friends in the presence of God our Savior. Worldly attachments resemble the summer showers, which rapidly swell the brooks, but soon pass away; while Christian friendship, the communion of saints, is like a perennial spring. The love of Christ towards his people is the ever-flowing the ever over-flowing fountain of blessedness, whose refreshing streams are the most abundant when most needed.

Oh! that I may daily partake of these waters of salvation! How sweet it is to taste that the Lord is gracious. His consolations are neither few nor small. When we forsake Him, we forsake our own mercies. And yet, alas! how prone we are to forsake the fountain of living waters, and to "hew out to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." This conduct is our folly, as it is made our misery.

Our roses grow on prickly stems. Everything, even our choicest comforts, have some admixture of sorrow, to remind us of the fall. There is, O blessed assurance! a world where all is perfect, where pleasures flow like a river, pure as crystal, from the throne of God; where Christian friends, united here in Christ, shall meet, in perfect holiness, to part no more. Oh! what a resplendent view is opened to us through the gospel. What pure delights those people lose, who have no relish for communion with God, no participation in the communion of saints. The friends of Jesus, are the friends of each other. They love each other for His sake, who is their beloved and their friend. With united voices they can sing,

"Bless’d be the tie that binds

Our hearts in Christian love;

The fellowship of kindred minds

Is like to that above."

There is something magnetical in genuine Christian love. It attracts heart to heart. In such a world as this, how invaluable is a Christian friend; one, on whom we can rely, and into whose bosom we can freely pour those thoughts and feelings which occupy our own. This world, like "a peevish April day, is made up of rain and sunshine." Here, we are called to endure; in heaven, we shall be privileged to enjoy. Brethren in Christ, whose hearts are knit together in love, shall, before long, meet around the throne, united to their glorified Head.

How delightful is the thought of being forever with the Lord. How composing under every trial is the assurance of seeing Him as he is, and being made like Him in the perfection of love. O that my heart were more and more assimilated to my divine Lord. Holiness is the health of the soul. Holiness is happiness. Holiness is heaven begun. Heaven must be a place of unspeakable bliss, where God our Savior manifests his glory; where the holiest affections will be in their highest, perpetual exercise; where all the excellent of the earth shall be assembled; and where, the very element of the place, is Eternal Joy!

Bless’d is the tie which closely binds

In friendship sweet two kindred minds;

This sacred chain is light and free;

The joy of Christian liberty.

Jesus, of all the friends, most dear,

Is ever to his people near;

They feel his presence in their hearts,

He never from their souls departs.

In gloom, and sickness, grief, and care,

Their burden he will kindly bear;

And if their sun shines clear and bright,

Jesus is still their Chief Delight.

How dangerous worldly friendships are,

Of sin and guilt the fatal snare;

While Christian fellowship and love,

Unite us to the saints above.

This grace divine, so freely given,

Cements the Church in earth and heaven;

Oh! may this grace be ever mine!

My Jesus, seal me ever thine!

02.40. Christian Perseverance

40. Christian Perseverance

"Faint, yet pursuing." Jdg 8:4

The journey of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan affords an instructive history to the Christian pilgrim. The opposition, dangers, trials, and temptations, which beset his path; the unbelief, misgivings, fears, and rebellions of his own heart; the love, power, patience, and truth of his covenant God, are all set before him in this faithful record of the ancient church. He can read his history in that of Israel of old, and thus obtain a deeper view of his own corruption, and of God's everlasting love.

We read, that "the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the difficulty of the way." Canaan was indeed before them, but the way was rough and thorny. "We went," said Moses, "through all that great and terrible wilderness." "Do not forget that he led you through the great and terrifying wilderness with poisonous snakes and scorpions, where it was so hot and dry." But God was with them; the pillar of fire gave them light by night; and the cloudy pillar shaded them from the sultry heat of day. When they had passed over Jordan, their victories gave strength to their faith; but there remained yet very much land to be possessed, and their motto might be, "Faint, yet pursuing."

"Faint, yet pursuing," is truly descriptive of the wearied pilgrim anxious to reach his place of rest; and of the Christian warrior who fights, under much weakness, to obtain the crown. Though helpless in himself, he is strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man, and thus is enabled to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil; to persevere in his heavenly course; and to put his enemies to flight. Often does he realize the blessing of Israel to Joseph; "But his bow remained strong, and his arms were strengthened by the Mighty One of Jacob, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel; even by the God of your father, who shall help you." He remembers the divine declaration, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts." He knows that God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, that no flesh should glory in his presence. Hence he renounces his own wisdom and strength, and relies on the power and grace of Jesus.

O! my soul, what is your aim, your great design? Though often faint, through manifold infirmities, are you still striving to enter into that rest which remains to the people of God. Are you fighting the good fight of faith, that you may lay hold on eternal life? Can you say with David, respecting your rebel-sins, "I chased my enemies and caught them; I did not stop until they were conquered. I struck them down so they could not get up; they fell beneath my feet. You have armed me with strength for the battle; you have subdued my enemies under my feet."

Have you experienced the promise of the Savior by his inspired Apostle– "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for you are not under the law, but under grace." "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." "We are more than conquerors, through him who loved us."

Alas! I feel my utter weakness, and total insufficiency even to think a good thought. I am faint by reason of indwelling sin, for when I would do good, evil is present with me. What a corrupt fountain is my heart. Lord cleanse this polluted spring. I long after absolute holiness, unspotted purity. I know that to be like my Savior is to be blessed. Oh! that I may have grace rightly to answer these important questions. "O Jerusalem! will you not be made clean? when shall it be?"

Lord, it is my heart's desire to be cleansed from all sin, through the precious blood of Jesus. "When shall it be?" O let it be now, this very moment, for "now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." I cannot be happy too soon, and if I have You for my portion, if I am transformed into Your image, I must, I shall be happy. "O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved; how long shall your vain thoughts lodge within you?"

Blessed Redeemer! wash me thoroughly from my sin in the fountain of your blood. Let me not be principally anxious about external washing, but may I seek above all things for internal purification. My words may be correct, when my heart is like a cage of unclean birds. My attendance at your house of prayer may be punctual, and yet I be "in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly." The whited sepulcher appears fair and beautiful, though full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. I may outwardly appear righteous before men, while filled with hypocrisy and iniquity. Oh! grant that my heart may be washed from wickedness, and then my outward walk and conversation will be according to godliness.

Preserve me, O Lord, from resting in the externals of religion. Allow me not to trust in ordinances, or any other means of grace, as if some inherent virtue were lodged in them, apart from the state of mind of those who use them. Give me true repentance and faith, that I may rightly receive the blessings which you have promised to impart, through the ordinances of your gospel. Impress upon my mind this truth, that they are only the channels, and not the source of grace. You, and You alone, are the fountain of all grace. From You, all good proceeds. Oh! keep me from the fatal error of the Church of Rome; and from every departure from the truth of the gospel.

Oh! "Lord of peace, give me peace always by all means," and "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Let me not be satisfied with a name to live, with a reputation for piety, while dead in your sight. Impart unto me your Holy Spirit; enable me to tread in your footsteps, while passing through the trials and persecutions of the world. "How long shall vain thoughts lodge within you?" Oh! not for a moment. Too long, alas! has my foolish heart been a lodging-house for vain thoughts! Too long have I entertained these enemies to my peace, these traitors to my Savior. But, let the time past suffice to have wrought such madness. Lord drive out these hated inmates. Let them not remain a moment longer to defile your temple. Fill my soul with Yourself, as you did by your presence, fill the Temple of old with glory.

O! that I were wholly freed from every, the least unhallowed desire! The fullness of this blessedness is reserved for your heavenly kingdom, where nothing can enter that defiles. Yet, blessed Lord, in your strength, may I lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset me, looking unto you continually, until freed from the burden of the flesh.

Here I resemble the troops of Gideon, "faint, yet pursuing." I must wrestle, and fight, and pray, and persevere in the strength of Jesus, the Captain of my Salvation. The enemy of souls has an alarming power, a mysterious access to the mind, imagination, and desires. He can cast his fiery

darts into the citadel of the heart, and set the soul on fire. Oh! what burnings of fleshly lusts, what covetous desires, what hard thoughts of God are created by the powers of darkness. Nothing but the blood of Christ, applied by faith, can quench these raging fires. Lord! undertake for me. Save me, a helpless worm, from the malice of my spiritual foes! Your grace is Sufficient for me. Through your strength I shall prevail.

We cannot prevent the intrusion of vain thoughts. They may be presented to our minds in a moment, at a time when we wish, and are laboring to fix our hearts on God. Then it is, that Satan will try to disturb our peace, to distract our thoughts, to distress our hearts. His aim is to hinder spiritual meditations, to drive us from the mercy-seat. To stop the current of holy aspirations, he will bring old sins to remembrance, or something more recently transacted, to fill the soul with shame, and to suggest the doubt– Am I indeed a child of God? This arch enemy will leave nothing untried, that may check the spirituality of the mind, or draw us back again into his snares. His object is the destruction of the soul. But, oh! my Savior, You who were tempted in the wilderness, and who know what temptations mean, arm me by your power to resist the devil, that he may flee from me.

Oh! what agonizing pains does the believer feel, when an evil thought fastens itself for days and weeks upon his mind. How does he pray, and grieve, and weep, as if he were standing on the brink of despair. But, when darkness covers his soul, light springs up. The Spirit of the Lord lifts up his standard, and sighs are turned into songs of praise.

A truly pious, but poor disciple of the blessed Jesus, rich in experience and Christian love, once said, "what strugglings have I had with evil thoughts. Nobody can tell my griefs on this account. But the Lord has delivered me. Once they were inmates, but now, blessed be God, they are only like people passing by my window; they do not lodge within me." She then spoke of the great help which she got through the Spirit, by setting the Lord always before her; by living, as seeing Him who is invisible; by realizing the presence of God, as Hagar did when she exclaimed, "You God, see me." She said, that whenever any evil thought was suggested to her mind, she betook herself instantly to prayer, and wrestled with her Savior, like Jacob of old, until she obtained the mastery over the temptation. She would often say, "It is good to be a wrestling Jacob." This is truly living a life of faith; it is bringing into action the principles of godliness; and the end of such a life is peace. She died with a triumphant song of victory.

Oh! that like this aged saint, I may never cease to pray, until prayer is turned into praise; the conflict ends in conquest; and the cross is exchanged for the crown. My Savior cheers me onward, for he says, "Do not be afraid, only believe." "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." He who has promised, is the Faithful and True Witness, the Alpha and Omega, the Lamb of God, the King of saints, the Lord of glory. O for faith, a strong and vigorous faith, to lay hold upon the promise, to cleave to the Promiser, whose word shall abide, when every earthly refuge has passed away.

"Blessed is the man that trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." Rejoice, O my soul, in your God and Savior, for he has said, and his word cannot be broken, "Israel shall be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation; you shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end." Rejoice, yes, again rejoice, for Jesus has declared, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of

my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

O! my soul, do you believe this? "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." Increase my faith in your unchanging word. Let me daily hear your voice, and follow you. Though often faint, through the weakness of faith, allow me not to shrink from the cross. May I, like Israel of old, though faint, still pursue, contending with my foes, until I vanquish the hellish legion. Like the mariner, homeward bound, may I pursue my onward course, fearless of storms, until I reach the wished-for port. Yes, like the Christian pilgrim, may I brave the toils and dangers of the road, knowing that heaven is the Christian's home, his Father's house, his Paradise of rest!

The Lord he is good,

My spirits to cheer;

In all my distress,

My Jesus is near;

His love and his promise

Forever shall stand,

Through storms, and through tempests

He'll bring me to land.

Then why should I fear

The wild foaming wave,

When Jesus has promised

His servant to save?

His arm is extended

To give me relief;

His love is proclaimed

To banish my grief.

Though Satan may rage,

And earth may combine

To ruin my soul,

Yet, still I am thine,

Your favor, bless'd Jesus,

My portion shall be;

In death and in danger,

I’ll triumph in thee.

02.41. THE CHARACTER AND THE PROMISE,

41. THE CHARACTER AND THE PROMISE, INSEPARABLY CONNECTED IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

But all will be well for those who are godly. Tell them, "You will receive a wonderful reward!" But say to the wicked, "Your destruction is sure. You, too, will get what you deserve. Your well-earned punishment is on the way." Isa 3:10-11

There is no evil we have more to fear than self-deception. Pride, naturally begets self-sufficiency. Many are ready enough to apply to themselves the cordials of the gospel, who have no right to them; while numbers of contrite believers refuse to be comforted, although the gospel speaks nothing to them but words of peace.

We find in the word of God the most amplified description of the characters, both of the righteous and the wicked; with the promises made to the one, and the threatenings denounced on the other. If we examine closely the book of God, we shall find our exact character depicted there; and to this character we shall find annexed either a blessing or a curse. Surely, then, it must be the duty of every one to examine himself by the word of Truth, that he may know his real character, either for his conviction or consolation.

’Tis a point I long to know,

Often it causes anxious thought,

Do I love the Lord or no?

Am I his, or am I not?

Lord, decide the doubtful case!

You who are your people’s Sun,

Shine upon your work of grace,

If it be indeed begun.

How important is the question; Am I in the Faith? Do I bear the marks of God’s children? Have I the Spirit of Christ, as the Seal, the Pledge, the Witness of my salvation? If this is made clear to my mind and conscience, through the enlightening grace of the Holy Spirit, then I may freely and fully take the promises for my portion.

The Christian professor who neglects this inward search, this looking into the glass of God’s word, that he may see his spiritual character, as a man beholds his natural face in a mirror, will be ready to fancy himself to be something when he is nothing, and thus miserably deceive himself. Such a work of self-examination will be deemed legal, and tending to bondage, though it be the duty enforced upon him by an inspired Apostle; "Examine yourselves whether you are in the faith;

prove your own selves. Know you not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobates." Respecting the Lord's Supper, Paul also says, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that Cup."

Heavenly Father! make me sincere in my self-examinations. May I come to the light, that so, my whole heart being searched by "the candle of the Lord," every lurking evil may be discovered and rooted out, crucified, and destroyed.

Happy are they who can discern, with humility and a thankful heart, their own state, as justified and sanctified believers in Christ Jesus. All the promises scattered throughout the sacred volume, like the stars in the firmament, are theirs. Every thing that is needful for life and godliness, for support and protection, is theirs; for "Jesus gives us in his word, food and medicine, shield and sword."

Oh! my soul, be thankful for such a Savior, who has said, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." "Has he said, and shall he not do it? Has he spoken, and shall he not make it good? He who is the Truth will never disappoint the hopes which he has raised, or the promises which he has made.

"How flow firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,

Is laid for your faith in his excellent word."

For Jesus has said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

The following passages set forth the character of God's people, and the promises annexed to that character. The graces of the Spirit, like the spokes in a wheel, all meet in the heart of the believer. Without the indwelling Spirit, we have no spiritual life. All profession is vain, and religion but an empty sound. Oh! my soul, these precious portions of God's word may well cause you to make diligent search, whether you are indeed in the way of life- whether you possess these features of the new creature in Christ Jesus.

FAITH. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." "Whoever believes on him shall not be ashamed." "He that believes on him shall not be confounded."

REPENTANCE. "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." "Whoever confesses and forsakes his sins shall have mercy." "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Mat 5:4

LOVE. "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." Psa 37:4 "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." John 14:21

OBEDIENCE. "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession." Exo 19:5 "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." John 15:10 "The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever." 1Jn 2:17

TRUST. "Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever." Psa 125:1 "Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord." Pro 16:20 "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe." Pro 29:25

FEAR. "But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall." Mal 4:2

HONOR. "Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained." 1Sa 2:30

PRAYER. "call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me." Psa 50:15 "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Joe 2:32 "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." Mat 21:22

HUMILITY. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Mat 5:3 "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." Jas 4:10 "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time." 1Pe 5:6

MEEKNESS. "He guides the meek in what is right and teaches them his way." Psa 25:9 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Mat 5:5

PURITY. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Mat 5:8

SUFFERING FOR CHRIST’S SAKE. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Mat 5:11-12

PERSEVERANCE, OR STEADFASTNESS IN THE FAITH. "All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." Mat 10:22 "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." Rev 2:10 "He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son." Rev 21:7

These beautiful passages delineate the New Creation of God. However plausible our profession of religion may be, if we bear not these marks of discipleship, we have no right to Christian privileges, Christian promises, or Christian prospects of future glory. Though sprinkled with water at the baptismal font; though regular communicants at the table of the Lord; though zealous assertors of certain opinions, and warm adherents to some favorite minister; we are, in the sight of God, if destitute of love, no better than sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."

Lord! bestow this adorable gift of your divine Spirit, this heavenly love, on me your unworthy servant. Impart it to all those who have it not, and increase it in those who have received it, that your image may be visibly discerned in the hearts and lives of all who call themselves Christians, that they may hold the faith in unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.

If I have received the grace of faith, of repentance, love, obedience, trust, fear, humility, meekness, and purity; if I honor God before men; if I live in a spirit of prayer; if I suffer, for righteousness' sake; if I continue steadfast in the faith; I am a member of Christ's mystical body, and all the promises annexed to these graces are my portion.

As the word of God reveals to us our real state and character, so is it admirably adapted, through the Spirit, to comfort the mourners in Zion, and to pour the oil of gladness into the wounded heart. The sorrowful sighing of the humble and contrite, the longing desires of the loving believer, are answered in so gracious a manner, as would forever banish despondencies and fears, were not unbelief and distrust so deeply rooted in our hearts. Lord, remove from me every root of bitterness, that I may not be faithless, but believing.

The following is a specimen of some of the precious answers to prayer, with which the Holy Scriptures abound, for the refreshing and strengthening of Christian pilgrims–

REQUEST– "Save me, O God, by your name." Psa 54:1. ANSWER– "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household." Acts 16:31. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Rom 10:13

REQUEST– "But you, O Lord, do not be far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me." Psa 22:19. ANSWER– "For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you." Isa 41:13

REQUEST– "Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men." Psa 43:1. "O my God, do not delay." Psa 40:17 ANSWER– "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Jer 29:13

REQUEST– "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me." Psa 51:11. ANSWER– "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." John 6:37

REQUEST– "I am troubled; O Lord, come to my aid!" Isa 38:14. ANSWER– "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Mat 11:28

REQUEST– "Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior." Psa 27:9. ANSWER– "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Heb 13:5

REQUEST– "Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end." Psa 119:33. ANSWER– "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." Psa 32:8

REQUEST– "O Lord, be gracious to us; we long for you. Be our strength every morning, our salvation in time of distress." Isa 33:2. ANSWER– "Then you will know that I am the Lord; those who hope in me will not be disappointed." Isa 49:23. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." John 14:27. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." 2Co 12:9

REQUEST– "Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge."

Psa 16:1. ANSWER– "But now, this is what the Lord says– he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." Isa 43:1-3

These are sweet and precious answers to the prayer of faith. So long as the words, "Ask, seek, mock," remain in the sacred volume, so long we may be assured, that all who seek shall find. Lord, vouchsafe to me a praying spirit, that I may approach You in the simplicity of faith, trusting in nothing but Jesus Christ, and desiring nothing so much as to know, and love, and serve you; whom to know is life eternal, and whom to love and serve, is heaven begun.

02.42. THE DANGER OF EXTREMES IN

42. THE DANGER OF EXTREMES IN MEN’S ESTIMATE OF HUMAN NATURE

"To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no light in them." Isa 8:20

People, in general, are acquainted with almost everything but themselves. The common affairs of life are thoroughly understood; and the various characters of mankind are freely canvassed. They seem to be everywhere at home, but in their own hearts. There, they are strangers. They know all men, but themselves. From this self-ignorance arises a great deal of self-conceit. As "all men think all men mortal but themselves," so do they esteem themselves to be wiser than others. "We are they who ought to speak," is the language of their hearts, if not always of their lips.

Pride and vain-glory are the natural products of the human heart. They grow with luxuriance in nature’s soil. Surely it is most important to observe the state of our own minds. The great things of God, like himself, are unchangeable. The realities of the invisible world are always the same. Death and Judgment, Heaven and Hell, are now as they were when Adam sinned. If we are, at one time, deeply impressed with the view of eternity, and with the relation which every thing in us and around us bears to eternity and if, at another time, these considerations make but slight impressions upon our minds, what inference must we draw? Not that ETERNITY has become less important in itself, or less real in its bearings on our future destiny, but that our hearts have become less sensible of its importance. Should this insensibility continue, its deadening effects would increase, until we would, at length, hear with indifference, those very truths which once awakened all our solicitude, and set in motion all our apprehensions.

I see, therefore, the need for watching against this natural declension of the heart from God; and for praying constantly for the influences of the Holy Spirit, to preserve my mind in a solemn, practical, yet lively, frame.

O God, my inmost soul convert!

And deeply on my thoughtful heart

Eternal things impress;

Give me to feel their solemn weight,

And tremble on the brink of fate,

And wake to righteousness.

Everything around me is calculated to deaden the heart, and everything within me naturally opposes the work of grace. Blessed Lord! all saving, abiding impressions, are from you. Melt my hard heart; and mold it to your will. Enlighten my dark mind; and fill it with your truth. Keep me from the path of error, from proud reasoning; from false and perverted views of my real condition, as a

fallen, ruined creature, lying under your curse, and deserving of everlasting fire. Lead me to the Savior; unite my soul to him; and make me a monument of your everlasting love.

Men are apt to run into extremes, especially in matters of religion. The opinions held by different religionists are as widely separated as the Arctic is from the Antarctic Circle. The ever-varying sentiments of mankind resemble the inhabitants on our globe; they are of different hues, and different dialects; yes, they are often the very antitheses of each other. Hence arise controversies and contentions, strifes and heart-burnings, to the disgrace of religion, and the triumph of scoffing infidels. The Church of Rome, indeed, boasts of her unity, but it is the unity of error, perpetuated by the assumed infallibility of that apostate church. With her, Truth has fallen, and cannot enter within her portals. All who dare to hold the torch of truth, must be either tortured on the rack, or be consumed by the flaming faggots of her spiritual despotism. Such was her conduct in the plenitude of her power. How soon that power may regain its deadly influence is known only to Him who has said, "Repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of his place, except you repent." Oh! that Protestant Britain may listen to the Savior's voice, before the vial be poured out for our abuse of his unspeakable mercies.

There are two extremes into which men are apt to run, when speaking of the present condition of mankind. Some extol the native powers of the human soul to such a degree, that one would imagine they had never heard or read of the Fall; or that they had resided among a race of mortals allied in power and spirit to the angels above. They talk of good hearts, and good intentions, and good dispositions, and good actions, and good everything. They magnify the power of the will, as if it could accomplish all that is great and noble. They eulogize the powers of the mind, as if they were equal to fathom the deepest, or to reach the loftiest subjects, in natural and revealed religion.

Others there are, who, in their zeal to debase human nature, make man no better than a mere machine, acted upon by a dire necessity; so that every sinful action, instead of being the product of his own rebellious will, and thus deserving of eternal punishment, is attributed to some secret impulse, over which the man has no control. He does, what he does, because, as they express it, "He is fated to do it." Such doctrine opens the flood-gate of iniquity. If men can believe that they are not responsible for their conduct, they are prepared for every work which Satan urges them to perform.

These two statements are equally opposed to the Scriptures of Truth. The path of truth lies between the two extremes. To those who unduly extol human nature, I would say- Man is a fallen creature, yet still possessing some relics of his original glory. He is endued with an immortal spirit; with a mind which can soar among the stars, measure their distances, and span their mighty bulk. He is like 'a palace in ruins'. The powers of the human mind are indeed vast, when exercised upon natural things. How wonderfully has Newton discovered the laws which regulate and govern our solar system. With what discriminating judgment has Locke unfolded the various faculties of the understanding. All this proves that man, though fallen, is a being far superior to the rest of animated nature. He can look before and after. He can reason, reflect, and draw conclusions.

Yet, his natural understanding is dark respecting the things of God. His will is averse from the will of God. His affections recoil from the holy law of God. The pride of his reason rises against "the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh." He spurns at the sublimity of those evangelical doctrines which are calculated to humble him in the dust, and to exalt the Redeemer on the throne

of his glory. Hence, it is evident, that "the world by wisdom knows not God;" that mere science, unaided by light from above, will never lead the philosopher to the foot of the Cross, or transform him into a little child, into an humble, docile learner in the school of Christ. Yet, blessed be God, his grace has accomplished even such a wonder as this!

Newton, the prince of philosophers, consecrated his master-mind to the service of religion, which has thrown a halo of glory around his name. He was of a very meek disposition, and a great lover of peace. To his other great qualities, he added a serious and devout reverence for religion. His favorite study was the Bible; the prophecies of which he illustrated by his researches. He conformed to the Church of England, but he lived in friendship with good men of all communions; and he was an enemy to every kind of persecution. It is beautiful to behold philosophy as the handmaid of religion, to see the loftiest scientific mind lowly bending at the foot of the Cross.

If it be asked, can unassisted reason find out God? Can it find out the Almighty to perfection? Paul has answered the question; "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Our spiritual ignorance, then, is so great through the Fall, and the enmity of our will to divine truth so bitter, that nothing can remove the one or destroy the other, but the Spirit of God himself. Whenever this operation takes place in the soul, it is altogether undeserved on the sinner’s part, and consequently an act of sovereign grace on the part of the Almighty. Salvation is of the Lord. Destruction is from ourselves.

To those who represent man as a mere machine, acting from necessity, I would say, It is true man has no power to come to Christ for life and salvation, without the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit; but where arises this inability to come to Christ? Properly to understand this point, would prevent many fatal errors. Man does not labor under a natural incapacity, but under a moral inability in the performance of divine things. He who said, "No man can come to me, unless the Father, who has sent me, draws him," said also, "You will not come to me, that you might have life."

God made man perfect. He endued him with an understanding capable of contemplating the Author of his existence; with a will ready to obey his commandments; with affections to love him and delight in him; with a memory to retain whatever things were pure and lovely; with speech to extol and praise him; and with a body in every way calculated to promote the end and design of his creation.

When Adam fell through willful transgression, these various powers and faculties of soul and body became perverted and corrupt. The blinding, hardening nature of sin, in conjunction with the power which Satan had over him, through yielding to his temptation, was the sole cause of his inability to love and serve his Creator. The image of God, in which he was originally created, departed from him, and the image of the evil one was impressed upon him.

His mind became darkened; his heart, hardened; his will, obstinate; his affections, carnal; his memory, the storehouse of evil things; his tongue, an instrument of mischief; his whole body, polluted and unclean.

Thus man is an object of the divine displeasure, a child of wrath, an heir of hell! His opposition to the will of heaven arises from the deeply-rooted enmity of his will to God and goodness; and

herein principally lies the guilt and turpitude of sin, whereby man renders himself peculiarly obnoxious to eternal holiness and justice. Is it not, then, evident that man does not perish from the want of any natural power or capacity to serve God, but from the determined opposition of his depraved and rebellious will to the rich grace and mercy so freely offered to him in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Describing the state of the heathen world, Paul declares, "Their foolish heart was darkened....God gave them up unto vile affections....God gave them over to a reprobate mind."

Take the most inveterate sinner, and ask him, Have you not an equal power of body to walk into the church, as into the tavern or the theater? Or, does all natural strength fail, as soon as the temple of God is proposed to be visited by you? Have you not as much power to read the Bible, as to read a novel and a newspaper? Or, do your eyes grow naturally dim the moment you open the sacred pages? Have you not as much power to beg of God to help you in time of need, as to seek it from an earthly friend in seasons of distress? Or, does some strange fit seize you at the moment of commencing prayer, and render you incapable of imploring aid?

The answer to these questions is self-evident. No one can say, that any sinner has a natural incapacity to perform these outward duties. Why, then, does he not perform them? Because he WILL NOT. The impediment lies solely in the will. His inability is altogether of a moral nature, and consequently he is without the least shadow of excuse.

It may be said, and scripturally so, that should the sinner perform these duties with ever so much exactness, yet, without the grace of God, ordinances, would be to him as "clouds without water;" as food, without nourishment; that the Bible would be as a sealed book, and prayer no better than an empty sound. This is true, for, by "grace are we saved," and not by any works of our own. Without Christ we can do nothing that is good; nothing that is acceptable, or well-pleasing unto God. But, is not this, I would ask, an additional argument why we should seek this help, and implore this salvation? Ought not this conviction of our helplessness to drive us to him who is almighty to deliver? And is not this salvation freely offered in the gospel to every seeking soul?

Oh! that men would but act in spiritual, as they do in temporal things. If they were as careful of the soul, as they are of the body, we would not be troubled with so many subtle distinctions, and disputations, about the freedom and bondage of the will; such extremes in setting forth the dignity and the debasement of man, such darkening of the plainest and simplest truths of the gospel. How strong are the exhortations of Paul to sleeping sinners; "Awake you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." "Awake to righteousness, and sin not."

Men scruple not to use the ordinary means for preserving the health of the body, and to apply proper medicines to restore it, when disordered. An efficacious remedy is gratefully received and carefully administered. Why are they less solicitous about their immortal souls? God has provided means of grace, and healing medicines, for every spiritual disease. There is balm in Gilead. There is a Physician there. Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered? It is, because the remedy is not sought for, nor applied. And why is it not diligently used? Because men dislike the means which infinite wisdom has ordained for their recovery. They have no relish for them; no faith in them. They would rather remain in their state of natural corruption, and risk its consequences, than come to Christ, through the appointed means, to be saved out of it. Their language is, We love strangers, and after them will we go. We love our darling lusts, and will not part from them.

Throughout the Bible no mention is made of any secret decree of reprobation, sealing a portion of mankind to eternal death, irrespective of their character. Let no one, then, complain of natural incapacity, or of any necessity laid upon man to sin. The cause of human misery lies in man, and so does his destruction. The inveteracy of the will is the grand barrier between the sinner and Christ; and so strong is the current of the sinner's will to evil, that he cannot come to Christ, the Fountain of Holiness, in true faith and love, except the Father draws him by his grace and Spirit.

But yet, notwithstanding this, every man has a natural power to use the outward means and ordinances of the gospel. He can hear the preached word. He can read the Scriptures. He can offer up his daily supplications at a throne of grace, if not in words of his own, yet in suitable forms of prayer provided for him. Let these be duly and constantly performed on the warrant of the following delightful promises and assurances of God's holy word, and in due time a divine power will be communicated from on high. "If you seek the Lord your God, you shall find him, if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul." "Your heart shall live that seeks God." "Seek the Lord, until he comes and rains righteousness upon you." "The Lord is good unto those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him." "The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him."

Let sinners only persist in the use of the appointed means of grace, waiting with patient hope and perseverance for the promised blessing, and "he that shall come will come, and will not tarry," "for the Lord never said unto the seed of Jacob, Seek you me in vain." No! the experience of all ages testifies to this sacred truth, that no one ever trusted in the Lord and was confounded.

Almighty God! who know the vileness of my nature, the stubbornness of my will, the darkness of my understanding, the depravity of my heart, and my proneness to seek for excuses to cover my sins. Stretch forth your mighty arm of salvation; and for your tender mercy's sake in Jesus Christ my Lord, enlighten my mind, rectify my perverse inclinations, regulate my disordered passions, and make me a new creature to the praise and glory of your grace. Impart a seeking spirit, to me your unworthy servant, and to every perishing sinner of mankind. Carry on, O Lord, your work of grace with power, until every soul is filled with gladness, and every mouth with praise; until Christ, the hope of glory, is formed in every heart; until all the world is subject to yours way.

02.43. THE SCRIPTURE VIEW OF THE PRESENT

43. THE SCRIPTURE VIEW OF THE PRESENT STATE OF MAN

"The Lord looks down from heaven on the entire human race; he looks to see if there is even one with real understanding, one who seeks for God. But no, all have turned away from God; all have become corrupt. No one does good, not even one!" Psa 14:2-3

Amid conflicting opinions, and contradictory statements, it is only from the word of God that we can attain to a true knowledge of ourselves. And even this holy book would not instruct us to any saving purpose, without the divine illumination and teaching of the Holy Spirit. Hence, we see the necessity of reading the Scriptures, with prayer for the guidance of the Spirit, whose office it is to guide the followers of Christ into all truth, as well as to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.

We cannot read our Bible with any suitable degree of attention, without being struck with the great stress which is laid upon the inward state of the heart. In the very beginning of divine revelation, when the dreadful effects of the Fall began to deluge the earth with violence, it is recorded, that "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." And again, "The Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth."

By the prophet Jeremiah, "the Spirit of truth gives this humbling description of the inner man, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" Jesus, who needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man, has declared, "It is the thought-life that defiles you. For from within, out of a person’s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, eagerness for lustful pleasure, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you and make you unacceptable to God."

The heart of man, while in a state of nature, is described throughout the Scriptures in a variety of ways, in order to impress the sinner with a deep Sense of his wretched condition, and to convince him of the absolute necessity of an entire and radical change. Oh! that beholding our native deformity, we may be led to loathe and abhor ourselves, and to seek to that gracious Giver of all good things, who alone can prepare us for his kingdom and glory. As holy men of old spoke and wrote under the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit, so what they have recorded respecting the human heart, must be considered as the divine testimony.

Solomon declares, "Deceit is in the heart of those who imagine evil." "The heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live." What can be more decisive than such declarations? Who can look for holy principles and affections, holy motives and purposes, holy conduct and conversation, in, and from, a heart full of evil? Surely, if there were no other testimony, this alone is sufficient to cast down

proud imaginations, and every high thing which exalts itself, against the knowledge of God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden.

Lord give me a humble spirit. May I receive your testimony with self-abasement. O cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that I may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name.

By the prophet Hosea, the Almighty declares of his professing people, that "their heart is divided." This is highly displeasing to God, who has said, "My son, give me your heart." Not a part, but the whole, for the command is, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart." And what can be more reasonable, more delightful, than to love, with supreme affection, the Author of our being, the God of our salvation, the Bestower of all our mercies ? But, foul ingratitude marks the character of our fallen nature. Thus God expostulates with the rebellious house of Israel; an admonition extending to every creature, even to me; for how prone is my deceitful heart to evade the personal application under the wide extensive survey of human corruption- "Even the animals—the donkey and the ox—know their owner and appreciate his care, but not my people Israel. No matter what I do for them, they still do not understand." "The stork in the heaven knows her appointed times; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord." "The stork knows the time of her migration, as do the turtledove, the swallow, and the crane. They all return at the proper time each year. But not my people! They do not know what the Lord requires of them."

We sin, and forget the sin, but God remembers all our wickedness! Awful, awakening thought! Every impure imagination, every unhallowed affection, every wicked purpose, though unripened into action; every secret, and to men, unknown and unseen iniquity, is all remembered by that omniscient God, who will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Yes, who will judge the secrets of men’s hearts by Jesus, and render unto every man according to his works; to those who are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that does evil.

O! what a tremendous day will that be, which tears the mask of hypocrisy from the face of sin; which rolls away the stone from off the white-washed sepulcher; which discloses the chambers of imagery, and discovers the hidden evils of a heart once admired, but now abhorred, by an assembled world.

In that day the wicked will bewail in bitter reproaches their forgetfulness of God, and their love of sin; but this bitterness of soul being utterly destitute of every gracious feeling, will only enhance the sharpness of their torment, and give additional strength to the sting of that worm which never dies. Thus their self-reproach will be co-exist with eternity. Hating God, and hating themselves, and hating the fiends who torment them, they will be wretched beyond all conception. "From everlasting damnation, Good Lord deliver us."

The rebellion of the human heart is most forcibly described by the prophet Jeremiah; "Do you have no respect for me? Why do you not tremble in my presence? I, the Lord, am the one who defines the ocean’s sandy shoreline, an everlasting boundary that the waters cannot cross. The waves may toss and roar, but they can never pass the bounds I set. But my people have stubborn and

rebellious hearts. They have turned against me and have chosen to practice idolatry." What language can more forcibly depict the amazing power and force of human depravity, breaking through every restraint, and passing over every barrier? By the prophet Ezekiel, the unrenewed heart is called a heart of stone, hard and insensible. These are a few of those scriptures which, like a mirror, show us to ourselves. Oh! that the sight of such deformity may humble every proud pretension to moral excellence, and cause us to seek to that divine and gracious Savior, who so lovingly gave himself to redeem us from this lost condition.

Lord, unite me to yourself, that I may show forth your praise, by a life of true humility, purity, and love. Be pleased to give me a new heart and a new spirit; a heart of flesh. Renew my soul in righteousness. Create me anew after your image. Dwell in my heart by faith. Crucify every unholy affection. Mortify every unhallowed inclination. Wean my heart, O God, from earth, and bind my soul to you. Be the center of all my desires. May they all settle on you. Give me clearer views of my real condition as a fallen creature; clearer apprehensions of your grace in Christ Jesus; and clearer manifestations of your purposes and love towards my poor sinful soul, that in the full assurance of faith and hope, I may go on from strength to strength, until I appear before you in Zion.

Every humble student of the Holy Scriptures, that pure fountain of truth, must be convinced that mere head knowledge of the gospel will profit him nothing. However orthodox our opinions may be, they will avail nothing if they merely float on the mind, but never descend into, or influence the heart. However punctual our attendance on the ordinances of religion may be, we shall only resemble the lip-serving Pharisees, who drew near unto God with their mouths, while their hearts were far from him. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." "If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham." "You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do." These are severe words, but they were spoken by Him who is Love, and who knew what was in man.

Paul points out the difference between the outward rite, and the inward grace, which applies as much to Christian baptism, as it does to Jewish circumcision. "He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." With this accords the command of Moses; "Circumcise your heart, and be no more stiff-necked." Also the promise of sanctification; "The Lord your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live."

This distinction between the outward visible sign, and the inward spiritual grace, is made by Stephen when addressing an assembly of circumcised Jews; "You stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you." When all this is brought to the test of facts, we may ask; Was there no difference between the character and spiritual state of John, the beloved disciple, and Judas, the traitor? Yet both were ordained by Christ to the office of the Apostleship. Was there no difference between Barnabas, "a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit," and Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to the Holy Spirit? Yet, they were equally professing members of the Church at Jerusalem? Was there no

difference between the inward state of the baptized Cornelius, to whom was granted repentance unto life; and Simon Magus, who, after baptism, was declared, by the inspired Peter, to be in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity?

If this distinction of character be apparent, even in the primitive Church, should it be deemed an unwarrantable assumption, as some zealous maintainers of baptismal regeneration affirm, to divide baptized people, composing the visible Church of Christ, into the godly and the profane?

Bishop Pearson, in his Exposition on the Holy Catholic Church, (the ninth Article in the Apostle's Creed) did not think so. " We must observe." writes this learned prelate, "that the Church, as it embraces all the professors of the true faith of Christ, contains in it not only such as do truly believe, and are obedient to the word, but those also which are hypocrites and profane. Many profess the faith, who have no true belief; many have some kind of faith, which live with no correspondence to the gospel preached. Within, therefore, the notion of the Church, are comprehended good and bad, being both externally called, and both professing the same faith. This is that ark of Noah, in which were preserved beasts clean and unclean. There are many called of all which the Church consists, but there are few chosen of those which are called, and thereby within the Church."

From this statement of the Bishop, in accordance with the parables of our Lord, and to which he himself alludes, it is evident, that if we are mere nominal Christians, our admittance by baptism into the visible Church, will only aggravate our condemnation. The sin of Hophni and Phineas was augmented by the sacred office which they held. The crime of David was enhanced by the favors which a God of love had heaped upon him. The condemnation of the cities, where our Lord preached and wrought his miracles, was increased by the light vouchsafed to them.

Abused mercies, like the blood of Abel, cry out for vengeance. Sin is deepened in its atrocity, when committed against Light and Love. "What horrors await you, Korazin and Bethsaida! For if the miracles I did in you had been done in wicked Tyre and Sidon, their people would have sat in deep repentance long ago, clothed in sackcloth and throwing ashes on their heads to show their remorse. I assure you, Tyre and Sidon will be better off on the judgment day than you! And you people of Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to the place of the dead. For if the miracles I did for you had been done in Sodom, it would still be here today. I assure you, Sodom will be better off on the judgment day than you."

All are equally responsible for the privileges conferred upon them, but are all equally impressed with the importance of their responsibility? Has not our blessed Lord made a distinction between the man who improved his talent, and the slothful servant who hid it in a napkin? Did he not pronounce an encomium of "Well done" upon the one, and a censure, "You wicked servant" on the other? This distinction was not made from the inward state of the heart only, but from the diligence of the one, and the slothfulness of the other, agreeably to his own revealed rule of judging; "By their fruits you shall know them."

As the Judge of the living and the dead, the Almighty Savior has reserved to himself the work of separation between the sheep and the goats. He knows the secrets of all hearts. He can discern his people in the midst of their frailties; and the hypocrite beneath his specious virtues. This is His prerogative. But, he has even now drawn a line of demarcation between the godly and the

profane. Did not the Lord say to Moses, respecting Korah and his company, "Separate yourselves from this congregation?" And did not Moses command the people "Depart, I beg you, from the tents of these wicked men."

What said the Lord to Jeremiah? "If you take forth the precious from the vile, you shall be as my mouth." What was the complaint of the Almighty to Ezekiel, when speaking of Jerusalem? "Her priests have violated my law; they have made no difference between the holy and profane." Thus is the conduct of those priests condemned, who considered all people, if circumcised, as standing on the same level. When the God of Israel revealed to Ezekiel in vision, the new city and temple, which are thought to be emblematical of the millennial times, he declared the altered conduct of the priests; "They shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane." What can more strikingly show the duty of ministers to take forth the precious from the vile.

If Circumcision was to the Jewish Church, what Baptism is to the Christian, an initiatory rite, abounding with New Covenant blessings, precious privileges, and promises to those who rightly received it; and if the Jewish priests were condemned by the Almighty for making no difference between the holy and profane members of their church; must it not be equally blamable if Christian ministers abstain from dividing the mass of baptized people into those who serve God, and those who serve him not?

After delivering his beautiful sermon on the Mount, our Lord divided his hearers into two classes, by the striking parable of the two builders. Those who heard his word and kept it, built upon a rock. Those who heard and disregarded it, built upon the sand. It is therefore of great importance in preaching the gospel, to discriminate between the different characters to whom the message is delivered, and to separate the precious from the vile. If this is neglected, the wicked will hold fast their delusions, and the righteous continue in bondage to their fears; but, if ministers are faithful in the discharge of this part of their duty, those among whom they minister will be led to a knowledge of their own proper character and condition.

The Church of Rome accounts all those to be her faithful children, who are baptized into the Holy Mother Church; who celebrate the mass; make confession to, and obtain absolution from, the priest; who rigidly observe the fasts; and blindly obey her dictates. To such she extends her soothing power, even in their dying moments, by administering the extreme unction, and promising that prayers shall be offered up for their departed souls! The Church is everything. The Priest is all in all. Is this Christianity?

Oh! that our Protestant Churches may ever guard against the fatal error of thus quieting the conscience, by the mere observance of external rites, crying "peace, peace, when there is no peace." Would not this be opening a by-path into the Church of Rome? Would it not be a descent into the darknesses of Papal superstition? Is there no danger of such a descent? Nothing but sovereign grace can keep us from apostatizing from the truth.

As soon as we leave the plain path of Scripture, we get into the labyrinth of error. It is humbling to think how tenaciously some cleave to error, because it is ’silvered with age’. Our Lord condemned the Jewish rulers, because they taught for doctrines the commandments of men; thus making void the commandments of God by their traditions. It is the arrogant pretensions of the Church of Rome, that her unwritten traditions, and the decrees of her councils, are as binding on the

consciences of her members as the revealed written word of God, even though some of those decrees contradict that word. This she founds on her Infallibility. The Rev. Dr. Milner, the Roman Catholic Bishop, in his Sixth Letter to James Brown, Esq., says, "The Catholic rule of faith is not merely the written word of God, but the whole word of God, both written and unwritten; in other words, Scripture and Tradition, and these propounded and explained by the Catholic Church. This implies that we have a two-fold rule or law, and that we have an interpreter, or judge to explain it, and to decide upon it in all doubtful points." From the Fifth Letter. "Supposing the divine authority of the sacred books themselves to be established; how do you know that the copies of them translated and printed in your Bible are authentic?" "Manifold is the cause of the obscurity of holy writ." The object of the Bishop is summed up in the words of Vincent of Lirens; "The children of the Church must carefully observe the rule laid down by the holy men referred to- they are to interpret the divine text according to the Tradition of the Catholic Church."

By some Protestants it is now received, that Catholic tradition is the only true interpreter of Scripture, even though it is well known that many of the ancient fathers, being uninspired, and therefore fallible men, were dark in some of their views of Gospel truth. Councils and Churches have erred. Where then is infallibility to be found? No where, but in the unerring word of the living God, the Scriptures of truth. Where is light to be obtained? Only from the promised Spirit of truth, who will guide us into all truth, if we implore his teaching through the merits of Christ.

To appreciate the labors of good men, and especially of those who lived nearest to the times of the Apostles, is what every right-minded Christian would do. But to make them his STANDARD for doctrine and practice, is what every enlightened Christian could not do. He will follow them, so long as they follow Christ; but when they deviate from the revealed path, he dare not tread in the steps even of the immediate successors of the Apostles. He calls no man, Master, upon earth. He has one Master, even Christ, whose inspired word is his only RULE and LAW.

Truly we live in sifting times. The mere form of godliness will profit nothing. The true believer must not only dare to be singular in his conduct before the world, by the holiness of his walk, but he must dare to be bold in the confession of his faith, before those who are masters in Israel. Much courage will be required to maintain his ground, much humility to keep him dependent on divine teaching, much love to preserve him from bitterness of spirit, or uncharitable judging of others.

Oh! that the glorious doctrines of grace may be living principles in our hearts, humbling our souls before God under deep views of sin; inspiring us with faith, while beholding the precious Savior; kindling our love towards him, who so marvelously loved us; and creating a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and that renewal of the soul, without which faith is dead, and religion an empty name.

Oh! Almighty and all-quickening Spirit, make me your temple. Take away the love and power of sin. Fill me with gracious and heavenly desires, with holy longings after Christ, my beloved and my friend. I want to feel my soul to be all on fire, the fire of celestial love; my affections to be all in motion, ever on the wing towards Christ; my will to be ever inclined to choose his law, to bear his yoke, and to prefer the most arduous duties, the most self-denying commands, for his sake, rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

But where can I find strength sufficient for these things? Not in myself, for in my flesh dwells no good thing. Not from the best of men, for they cannot communicate grace to others. I will look unto the hills from where my help comes from. Oh! blessed Savior, all my fresh springs are in you. Without you I can do nothing. In you dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily fullness of wisdom, power, and love. Replenish my longing soul out of your fullness. Pour into my heart those living streams which make glad the city of God. Remembering that "God is a Spirit", may I ever worship you in spirit and in truth. Preserve me from the dangerous error of resting in the form, instead of seeking after the power of godliness. Make me sincere in all my intentions, and fruitful in every good word and work, until my vile body shall be made like unto your glorious body, and my soul be perfected in your presence, according to the working of your mighty power, whereby you are able to subdue even all things unto yourself.

02.44. THE BLESSINGS FLOWING FROM

44. THE BLESSINGS FLOWING FROM THE COVENANT OF GRACE

"He will ever he mindful of his covenant." Psa 111:5

In the Covenant of Grace, entered into by the three Divine persons in the one Jehovah, before the world began, is treasured up every blessing. Sinners are "redeemed with the precious blood of Christ who was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world." "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." "He has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." "God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Such are the inspired declarations of Peter, John, and Paul.

The first blessing which the God of all grace bestows upon a ruined world is, the gift of his SON. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The second blessing which flows to us through the Son is, the gift of the HOLY SPIRIT. "I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of Truth."

The third blessing which is imparted to us through the Holy Spirit is, the gift of the SCRIPTURES. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." "When the Spirit of truth has come," said Christ to his Apostles, "he will guide you into all truth." "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said unto you."

The fourth blessing which we receive from the God of mercy is, the gift of a NEW HEART. "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." "I will give them one heart, and one way."

The fifth blessing which believers in Jesus shall finally enjoy is, the gift of ETERNAL LIFE. "The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." "Father glorify your Son that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him." "Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." "These go into life eternal." O Blessed Savior, you have said, "My sheep shall never perish," "I give unto them eternal life."

By death and hell pursued in vain,

To you the ransomed seed shall come;

Shouting, their heavenly Zion gain,

And pass through death triumphant home.

The covenant made with Adam was broken through disobedience, but the covenant of grace in Christ Jesus is an everlasting covenant. All its requirements have been fulfilled through the incarnation, obedience, and death of the Son of God, and therefore cannot be disannulled. It is perfect, comprising every blessing; and eternal, perpetuating those blessings. Nothing can prevent the final salvation of the believer but these two things, either God's turning away from him, or his departing from God. Now infinite love has assured us, that neither of these shall ever happen to his redeemed people.

This assurance is contained in these blessed words; "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Here salvation is secured. God in his sovereign love will not turn away from the objects of his redeeming grace. He has pledged himself by this promise, which shall be accomplished when all his sons are brought, through Christ, by the Spirit, into his kingdom and glory.

The way whereby they are kept from final apostasy, to which the degenerate heart is continually prone, is by the fear of God being put into it as a holy preserving principle. Hence arise those exhortations to fear, which are scattered throughout the sacred volume. This holy fear is the beginning of wisdom; and is sweetly blended with hope and love through the whole of the believer's experience. Many precious promises are annexed to this state of filial fear. It is a new covenant blessing. Thus we find that the eighth chapter to the Romans, which describes the believer's privileges and character, begins with, "No condemnation" and ends with "no separation." "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

How happy, then, ought the believer to be, when he thus views the nature of that covenant, which by faith he embraces, as containing the foundation of hope, and the fountain of felicity; for Christ is the sum and substance, the sun and center, of this covenant. Believing in Jesus, he obtains the Spirit of truth, the Comforter; and finds this blessed Spirit to be the Witness, the Seal, the Pledge of every blessing.

Oh! that I could feel my cold bard heart renewed in righteousness, and filled with faith and love. I seem like a lifeless corpse in the midst of living bodies; like ice in the midst of summer's heat. Oh! that I could feel something like vitality and warmth in religion.

Lord, pity a poor, miserable, wretched worm of the earth. You could crush me in a moment, and send me down quickly into hell. And in so doing you would be infinitely just, and your goodness remain unimpeached. But oh! cast an eye of pity upon my soul. You know my miserable state, and my complete inability to save myself from the power of the least transgression. I am tied and bound with the chain of my sins, let the pitifulness of your great mercy loose me. Pour down your blessed Spirit upon me. Deluge the earth with showers of blessings. Cause the living waters to flow in copious streams through all the desert places of the earth, until every heart be divinely changed, until all acknowledge you to be the Lord.

The need of prayer for the Holy Spirit's influence is allowed by all who hold the truth as it is in Jesus, but the attention of Christians in general, is not sufficiently drawn to this important subject. "Those who honor me I will honor," stands upon record in the word of God. We honor the Father, when we honor the Son. And we honor the Father and the Son, when we honor the Spirit. It would

be daringly presumptuous in a poor worm to talk of honoring the Almighty, if he had not condescended to declare himself honored by our unworthy praises. "Whoever offers praise glorifies me."

We live in a day of great religious exertion. There is a sacred movement in the Christian Church, which bespeaks some important issue. But what are all our labors, if unaccompanied by the divine blessing? Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God only gives the increase. No zeal, however great; no love, however ardent; no eloquence, however persuasive; no sacrifice, however costly, can ever win over a rebellious soul to Christ, if the Holy Spirit withholds his convincing, converting grace. This is a truth which should be engraved on all our religious institutions. The more we cease from man, and trust in God, the more will success appear.

Hence arises the necessity of uniting in humble prayer, that the Great Head of the Church would be graciously pleased to fulfill his own promise; "If I depart, I will send him unto you," and "he shall abide with you forever." Oh! that this divine promise may have its full accomplishment; then the weakest efforts will become powerful in operation, and God shall be glorified throughout the earth.

The reason, perhaps, why so little spirituality exists among professing Christians, is owing to their not honoring the Spirit in his office-relations. He is the Sanctifier, as well as the Comforter. All means are like ’clouds without water’, unless He imparts the holy influence. When He descends in gentle dews upon the soul, then the seed of the word takes root, grows up, and bears much fruit. We should therefore never read the Scriptures, hear the gospel preached, engage in pious conversation, or enter upon meditation or secret prayer, without imploring the gracious influences of the divine Spirit.

The Holy Spirit descended upon our Lord in the semblance of a dove. The ’dove’ is the emblem of purity and love, and is remarkable for its timidity. So all in whom the Spirit dwells are noted for their love and purity. But every deviation from these graces, grieves the Holy Spirit. Like the timid dove, he then retires and withdraws his comforts from the soul which dares to indulge in contrary vices. This is strikingly declared by the Apostle in the fourth chapter to the Ephesians, where the grieving of the Spirit is described as in consequence of hatred, anger, and impurity being allowed to agitate and pollute the soul.

O! how rich in blessing is the covenant of grace! No past sins, however great, will be any obstacle to our obtaining pardoning mercy, if we only have grace to believe on the Son of God. We are commanded, yes invited, to look and be saved; to come unto Christ just as we are, because "the whole need not a physician, but those who are sick. Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

If we tarry until we’re better,

We shall never come at all.

Nothing but unbelief will exclude us from the blessings of the covenant of grace, and from the benefits of Christ’s death. "He who believes shall be saved." "Him that comes to me I will never cast out." All who truly believe, will cordially love and fear God. Love, when first implanted in the heart, does not always produce such violent emotions as the common passion of fear. Fear has been compared to a cannon ball, which at first moves with great speed, but as it proceeds,

gradually loses its force, until at last it falls spent to the ground- while love resembles the needle, which increases in velocity, the nearer it approaches the magnetic attraction.

The unregenerate man cannot love Jesus. He sees no beauty in the Savior. The lovely character of Jesus, as delineated in the Gospel, is to such a person like a beautiful picture hung up in a dark room. Its beauty cannot be discovered, until light is admitted; nor fully seen, until the room is sufficiently filled with its rays. The application is plain and practical.

The regenerate love to contemplate the character of God, revealed to us in Christ Jesus, with all the high mysteries of his grace as unfolded to us in the work of redemption. This view of infinite love, when connected with the knowledge of our own state and character, as perishing sinners, will tend to melt our hearts, inflame our love, excite our obedience, and transform us into the image of Christ. The work being a divine work, we must daily supplicate the gift of the Holy Spirit, who alone can take of the things of Christ and show them unto us.

How lovely does the character of our Redeemer appear in his interview with the woman of Samaria, when sitting on Jacob’s well. How great was his benevolence and condescension, his tenderness and forbearance, his love and gentleness, in leading this benighted woman to a feeling conviction of her sinful state; and then to an acquaintance with those blessings, which he, as the Savior of the world, was ready to bestow. "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, Give me to drink; you would have asked of him, and he would have given you living water." Alas! she neither saw the beauty, nor felt the need, of this precious spiritual blessing, until Jesus probed the wound, and convinced her that he was the Messiah.

Like the divine Redeemer, we should be always ready to seize every opportunity of doing good; for opportunity, well improved, is the golden spot of time. Our Lord knew the character of this Samaritan woman, but he did not reproach her with it. His question and subsequent answer were designed to remove the veil from her mind. With eagerness she made her neighbors acquainted with the joyful news, that she had found the Christ. They heard for themselves, and believed in the Lord. Was not this a blessing flowing from the covenant of grace? "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."

What a striking contrast between wrath and mercy is presented to us in Genesis and Malachi. In Genesis, we read, "The windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died. In Malachi, "Prove me now herewith, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Thus God can, with the same ease, deluge a world either with judgment or mercy. So it is with respect to spiritual blessings; the Almighty can, if he please, enlighten the whole race of mankind in a moment, by the power of his Spirit, with the same facility with which the earth is daily illumined by the beams of the sun; or, as when our sleeping dust shall be "changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye."

As the blessing is from God, we must wait upon him in humble faith and prayer, using the means which he has appointed, and firmly believing that "he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." "He that believes shall not make haste." "Tarry the Lord’s leisure; be strong, and he shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

If we feel our hearts drawn to seek God by secret prayer, let us ever cherish this motion of the Spirit; and, if prevented, then to lift up our souls in silent yet fervent prayers, darting heavenward, as from a heart on fire. This ready following of the Spirit will increase our desires after communion with God, and make us more spiritual in the general habit and frame of our minds.

Blessed Spirit of all grace, You who are the Sanctifier and Comforter of perishing sinners, lead me to Jesus Christ; enable me savingly to believe in Him who is my only atonement for sin, the only Way of access to God. Create me anew, and lead me in the paths of righteousness.

Blessed Trinity in Unity, fill me with peace and joy. How wonderful are the mysteries of your grace! How vast the designs of your infinite love! My mind is lost in the boundless extent of uncreated goodness. Oh! how unspeakably great will my bliss be, when brought by the hand of love into the Temple above. I shall see your face; be glorified with your glory; and enjoy the blessings which flow onwards, through endless ages, from the Covenant of Grace.

02.45. A CHRISTIAN INDEED

45. A CHRISTIAN INDEED

"Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit." John 1:47

We read of some who have a name that they live and are dead. It will profit us nothing to be called Christians, if we are destitute of the Spirit of Christ; if we have not the mind of Christ; if we have never put on Christ; if we are not made conformable to his death; if we know him not in the power of his resurrection. To call ourselves Christians, members of the Universal Church, which Christ purchased for himself, out of all nations, kindreds, people, and tongues, through his precious death upon the cross; and yet, to live in the habitual exercise of unholy tempers, unsanctified dispositions, and evil practices, is the height of hypocrisy and self-delusion!

Christ came into the world to save sinners. He came to purify unto himself, through the Spirit, a peculiar people, zealous for good works. All, then, who are saved by Jesus Christ, are redeemed from the power, as well as from the guilt of sin. They are made New Creatures, abounding in all the peaceable fruits of righteousness to the glory and praise of God. The true Church is not content with external reformation. Her members are not white-washed sepulchers. Christ, her Head, demands the heart, and will accept of nothing less than an internal, spiritual regeneration.

Have we, then, been born again, not merely by the sprinkling of water, which is the work of man, but by the renewing of the Holy Spirit, which is the operation of sovereign grace? Do we evidence our regeneration by bearing the image of Christ? Have we been made partakers of the divine nature? Are we grafted into Christ by faith? Are all our hopes of glory founded on his meritorious cross and passion? Have we received Christ into our hearts as our Prophet, Priest, and King? Do we come unto the Father, only by him? Is he the daily food of our souls? Is he all our joy, our glory, our righteousness, and our strength? These are most important questions. To talk of being living members of Christ without the scriptural marks of spiritual life, is as unreasonable as to grasp at a shadow, and then to maintain that we hold the substance.

Happy is the man who knows from sweet experience that he is a child of God; who feels the inward witness of the Spirit, by an increasing hatred of sin; an increasing enjoyment of peace; a growing love to the Savior; and an abiding assurance of his acceptance with God, through faith in the righteousness of Christ. What prospects of glory are unfolded to such a happy believer in the Holy Scriptures! He can rejoice in the blessed appropriation of the apostle’s words; "All things are yours."

Lord! make me a member of Christ’s mystical body; a branch of the living vine; a living stone in your spiritual building. Then shall I have joy and peace in believing; then shall I overcome my spiritual adversaries; then shall I triumph in death, and be glorified in You through a blissful eternity. Why should I not be such a Christian Indeed? It is your will that I should be such an one; for this is your will, even my sanctification. Oh! make me willing in the day of your power; subdue all my oppositions to your will; then shall mine be the comfort, and yours the everlasting praise.

The name of ’Christian’ (like that of ’friend’) is too often stamped on counterfeit coin. Hence it passes current in the world, until detected by an exposure of its base metal. Hypocrisy, in every age, has assumed a character not its own. "Burning lips," -burning with the professions of love and friendship, "and a wicked heart," -insincere and full of evil designs, are like "a pretty glaze covers a common clay pot." Thus an odium is brought upon Christianity, as if it sanctioned such baseness, while the enemies of the Lord triumph and blaspheme. Woe be to the man by whom the offence comes, "it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

Blessed Lord, deliver your servant, I earnestly beseech you, from hypocrisy and deceit. Your word declares, that "he that covers his sins shall not prosper," that he who tries to conceal them may be sure that his sin will find him out. Give me grace to confess and forsake my sins at the foot of the cross, that I may there find mercy, through the blood of Jesus, which speaks better things than the blood of Abel- the blood of Abel cried for vengeance- the blood of Jesus cries for mercy; "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Oh! save me for Jesus’ sake. Hear his intercession in my behalf. Give me grace to walk as becomes the gospel of Christ, to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing; to walk worthy of him who has called me to his kingdom and glory.

To be a Christian in the Scripture sense of the word, is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." How important, then, is the question; Am I a disciple of the Lord Jesus? Examine yourself again and again. O my soul, that you may determine a point on which your peace and safety so much depend; but examine with prayer for the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit. Nothing is so common, and yet nothing more dangerous, than to deceive ourselves. Hence arises the Apostle’s injunction; "Let no man deceive himself."

"Jesus came to seek and to save that which is lost."

Have I seen my undone state by nature? Have I seen the Holiness of God in the mirror of his divine law? Has the conviction of my guilt and misery laid me in the dust before him? Am I emptied of all self-dependence, self-seeking, and self-righteousness? Under a deep sense of my own helplessness and wretchedness, have I fled to Christ for life and salvation? Can I rejoice that through him there is blood to atone, righteousness to justify, grace to sanctify, strength to support, and consolation to cheer in every time of need?

"Faith purifies the heart."

Have I that faith in Christ which purifies the heart? Do I feel indwelling corruption to be the very grief and burden of my soul? Am I daily striving and warring against it in the strength of my Redeemer? Do I find its power grow weaker, and holy affections become more vigorous and powerful, more constant and natural, more ardent and abiding?

"Faith works by love."

Does my faith work by love? Is Christ the first object of my desire, the very joy and rejoicing of my heart? Do I love God the father, who showed such love to me, in giving his only Son for my redemption? Do I love God the Son, who so willingly became man, that he might bleed and die for me? Do I love God the Holy Spirit, who so graciously applies this great salvation to my soul, and who brings me into the bonds of the everlasting covenant? Does my love to the ever-blessed

Trinity manifest itself by a lively gratitude, a uniform obedience, and an earnest endeavor to promote the glory of God?

Lord, how defective is my obedience, how cold is my love, how feeble are my endeavors! What sin rises in my mind! What idle words pass my lips! What inconsistencies mark my actions! When I come to examine what I ought to be, yes, what I must be, if ever I am saved, and compare this with what I am, Oh! what cause do I find for humiliation and sorrow. What need do I see of a precious Savior, to work in me all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power. When viewed in the sight of my sins, how precious does Jesus appear. He is, indeed, the Unspeakable Gift.

Does my faith work also by love to man? Are my friends the friends of Jesus? Do I love all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, by whatever name they may be called among men, or in whatever country they may dwell? Is my heart so contracted that it can only contain those of my own religious communion; or, can it embrace the 'Christian indeed', though in some non-essentials he may differ from me? Do I love the image of Christ wherever I behold it? Are all the true, living members of Christ's mystical body regarded by me as brethren? Do I, with joy, anticipate the period when, saved by grace, I shall join the ten thousand times ten thousand and the thousand of thousands gathered out of all nations and kindred, and people, and tongues who shall swell the everlasting chorus with, "Worthy is the Lamb!"

Can I now sing in hope of this heavenly blessedness: 'We praise you O God, we acknowledge you to be our Lord. All the earth worships you, the everlasting Father. The holy Church throughout the world acknowledges you, the Father of an infinite Majesty, your honorable, true, and only Son; also the Holy Spirit the Comforter." Can I, from the heart, pray for the good estate of the Universal Church, that it may be so guided and governed by the Holy Spirit; that all who profess and call themselves Christians, may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of Spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life? Is it my heart's desire that the Divine Majesty would inspire continually the Universal Church with the Spirit of truth, unity, and concord, that all those who confess his holy name, may agree in the truth of his holy word, and live in unity and godly love?

If this spirit of brotherly love, which breathes throughout the services of the Church of England, but influence all who call themselves Christians, we would behold a revival of primitive unity in the essentials of Christianity, and a return of that primitive charity which compelled even the persecuting heathens to exclaim; "See how these Christians love one another."

Does my faith work by love, even towards those who may despitefully use me, and say all manner of evil against me falsely for Christ's sake? Do I love them so as to pray for them, and to be at all times ready to do them good? Is sin the only object of my hatred, both in myself and others? Can I pity the sinner while I abhor his sin? Is holiness the object of my wishes, and the subject of my prayers? While I cherish a love of complacency towards all the children of God, do I feel a love of compassion towards his enemies and mine?

"Faith overcomes the world."

Does my faith enable me to overcome the world? Have I learned in the school of Christ, the shortness, the emptiness, the vanity, the insufficiency, the uncertainty of all earthly comforts,

pleasures, honors, riches, and delights? Has this knowledge had a practical effect, by causing me to renounce the world both in heart and affection? While I am in the world, can I, with sincerity, say that I am not of the world? While my hands are engaged in the diligent prosecution of my lawful calling according to the will of God, is my heart totally disengaged, and disentangled from earthly idols, and wholly given up to God, through Christ?

Have I come out from among the carnal part of mankind, which in Scripture is called the world, though nominally Christian, and have I joined myself to that little flock, that part of the true Church who are traveling Zionward, and of whom Christ said; "It is my Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom?"

If faith has produced these blessed effects in any soul, or if these gracious operations of the Spirit are daily ripening and coming to maturity, then is that person a Christian indeed. He is a vessel of mercy afore prepared unto glory. He is an heir of God, and a point heir with Christ.

Oh! Almighty Savior, make me one of your disciples, a Christian indeed. Perfect the good work of your grace in me, and when you have prepared me for yourself, receive me into the place prepared for me. Impress my mind with this truth, that heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people; that all who are redeemed by your blood are made fit for the inheritance of the saints in light; that all who serve you here shall follow you, wherever you go; for with you is heaven, and joy, and love.

Oh! how rich, how extensive are your promises! The Christian parent may well rejoice, while viewing his offspring and your gracious purposes of mercy "I will pour my Spirit upon your seed, and my blessing upon your offspring; and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses." Oh! that the young plants in your vineyard may all become trees of righteousness, bearing abundant fruit to your glory!

You tender youths, whose opening day

Of life, will quickly pass away

Would you rich in virtue be,

Faith, and sweet humility,

Come to Jesus- near his side,

You will find a faithful Guide.

Allured by folly's tempting ways,

Forgetful of a Savior's grace,

Often the young, by promise fair,

Caught in pleasure's fatal snare,

Mourn their choice with bitter tears,

Through a range of following years.

Happy the youth whose first desires,

To Jesus and his grace aspires

Blessed portion shall he find,

Constant pleasures of the mind,

Peace, sweet peace, will Christ bestow,

Peace, which worldlings cannot know.

The Spirit dwelling in his heart,

Will every glorious gift impart,

Heavenly Wisdom he will give,

How to die, and how to live.

Thus shall pure and holy Truth,

Guide and guard the pious youth.

The Savior calls- O hear his voice,

Make him your delightful choice;

Then your soul shall surely know

Where the living waters flow;

From the Mount of Calvary,

Where He bled and died for thee.

02.46. THE TESTIMONY OF CONSCIENCE

46. THE TESTIMONY OF CONSCIENCE

"We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have been honest and sincere in all our dealings. We have depended on God’s grace, not on our own earthly wisdom. That is how we have acted toward everyone, and especially toward you." 2Co 1:12

To have a good conscience is an unspeakable blessing. But what is it that makes the conscience good? Saul of Tarsus thought that he had a good conscience, while he was blindly persecuting the Church of Christ. When enumerating his legal grounds for confidence, he mentions "zeal, persecuting the Church." In his powerful appeal before Agrippa, he declared; " I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." To the Galatians he writes "Beyond measure I persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it." In all this, Saul of Tarsus fulfilled the words of Christ; "The time comes, that whoever kills you will think that he does God service." And where this fiery zeal arise? Our Lord tells us; "And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me." It arose from ignorance of God and of Christ. When the eyes of Saul were enlightened by the Spirit, he saw himself to be a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious; yes, the chief of sinners.

How different were his views and feelings when he became an Apostle of Jesus Christ. While beholding the council, before whom he stood as the prisoner of Jesus Christ, he could say; "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." To Festus he boldly said; "But I admit that I follow the Way, which they call a sect. I worship the God of our ancestors, and I firmly believe the Jewish law and everything written in the books of prophecy. I have hope in God, just as these men do, that he will raise both the righteous and the ungodly. Because of this, I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and everyone else."

A good conscience is the sunshine of the soul. It is the work of grace. When the sinner is awakened to a sense of his guilt and danger; when he is led to see the all-sufficiency of the Atonement of Christ; when he is enabled by faith to receive the atonement; and when the precious blood of Christ is applied to his conscience by the Spirit, then the soul, bowed down under a sense of guilt, obtains rest, and the conscience, goaded by tormenting fears, enjoys peace. The conscience, thus pacified and purified, becomes, in the scriptural sense of the term, a good conscience. Almighty God is no longer dreaded as an enemy, but feared as a father; and sin is no longer cherished as a friend, but resisted as a foe.

Paul describes this happy state when exhorting the Hebrew Christians to steadfastness in the faith; "And so, dear friends, we can boldly enter heaven’s Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. This is the new, life-giving way that Christ has opened up for us through the sacred curtain, by means of his death for us. And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God’s people, let us go right into the presence of God, with true hearts fully trusting him. For our evil consciences have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with

pure water. Without wavering, let us hold tightly to the hope we say we have, for God can be trusted to keep his promise."

To Timothy, the Apostle also writes; "The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." Happy, then, are they who hold "the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience," a conscience purged from dead works to serve the living God.

A good conscience is tender, alive to the approach of evil, and sensible of the subtle workings of indwelling sin. It is the faithful monitor of the soul. It speaks for God, and in accordance with his word. A scrupulous conscience is always inconsistent. It strains at a gnat and swallows a camel. A seared conscience is devoutly to be dreaded; it is the presage of eternal death. "Ephraim is joined to idols let him alone!" The true believer in Jesus can rejoice in the testimony of his conscience, this inward witness to the sincerity of his profession. He can say with Peter; "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." And with Paul; "I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience."

Lord give me an enlightened conscience, sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, jealous of sin, and ever awake to the motions of the enemy. Keep me watchful, and prayerful, and dependent on your grace. Preserve me from all blindness and hardness of heart. Teach me your way, and enable me to walk therein, even that way of holiness, in which all the Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles walked; that way in which all the redeemed are found, as they pass from the earthly to the heavenly Canaan.

Simplicity and godly sincerity are two precious ornaments which adorn the Christian character. Faith is the uniting grace; love is the active principle, which keeps the wheels in motion; hope is the sustaining grace. How wonderful is the work of God in the soul of man. When a divine light irradiates the understanding, directs the will, and spiritualizes the affections, the sinner becomes a new creature. Oh! that this blessedness may be mine.

Lord! pity a poor wanderer from your fold. Without you I must perish. "O save me for your mercies' sake." "Remember me with the favor that you bear unto your people; O visit me with your salvation; that I may see the good of your chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation, that I may glory with your inheritance." I want, O Lord, to love you. I want to feel my heart continually drawn to you. I am miserable when my heart wanders from you, and yet, alas! I am perpetually wandering. Restore my soul; lead me in the paths of righteousness for your name's sake. Lord! unite my heart to fear your name. Uphold my goings in your way. Preserve me, O God, from hypocrisy and vain-glory. Let me ever remember that You are a Spirit; that true religion is altogether of a spiritual nature; and therefore, that you must be worshiped in spirit and in truth.

Guard me from the subtle poison of praise and flattery. Make me deeply sensible of my guilt and wretchedness, and of your righteousness and fullness. May I never seek the praise of men, nor be grieved if I am despised for your sake. But may I rather rejoice, when I am counted worthy to suffer shame for your name. Give me grace to live to you and for you. May I delight in your will.

Keep me from a worldly spirit. I have daily to mourn over the workings of a worldly spirit. O! wean my heart from earth, and fix it upon yourself alone. Enlarge my views of holiness and heaven. Increase my longings after purity and peace. Let me not rest until my desires be abundantly satisfied in your presence where fullness of joy is, and at your right hand where are pleasures for

evermore. Until that happy period arrive, may my rejoicing be this, the testimony of my conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, I live my life in the world.

To set the Lord always before us is the great secret of holy living. This we can only do, by living a life of faith in the Son of God; for faith is the eye, which, by steadily looking unto Jesus, keeps the soul in the narrow path which leads unto life eternal. We must draw an evidence of our real state and character, not so much from our public, as from our private conduct; not so much from our words, as from our thoughts. In the company of truly pious people, where a holy atmosphere surrounds us, we are constrained to assume an air of decorum and sobriety; but, when we are in the midst of worldly people, if we then throw off the garment of restraint, and enter into their spirit and conversation, we have an indisputable evidence that our hearts, whatever our outward profession may be, are not right with God.

When no eye sees us but the omniscient eye of God, are we as circumspect as when surrounded by our fellow-creatures? If we are not, we may surely conclude, that the fear of man, and the love of human estimation, is more operative in our souls than the fear of God; and that our consciences are asleep, or in an unenlightened state.

So also with respect to thoughts, which are unknown to those around us; if we are secretly indulging thoughts which are all intimately known to the heart searching God, while we would not dare to utter those thoughts to friends about us; must we not conclude, that with all our professions of piety, we are practicers of iniquity, and in the utmost peril of everlasting damnation? The pure in heart, shall see God. To keep the heart with all diligence, to set the Lord always before us, to live as seeing Him who is invisible, to act at all times with an eye to his approbation, is the very essence of true religion, the very evidence of the simplicity and sincerity of our motives.

This state of heart is the work of the Spirit; a progressive work. It meets with much opposition from our carnal nature, and the force of indwelling sin; but still it goes on toward perfection. In heaven the work is complete when the law in the members shall no longer war against the law of the mind. Until then we must fight, and wrestle, and struggle by faith and prayer. Jesus is almighty. Through Him we shall overcome. His grace is sufficient for us, and he has promised that it shall prevail.

If we are sincere in our desires after the attainment of the truth; if we have simplicity of intention in our search for it, we shall be savingly anxious to know these four things;

1. The state of our own hearts;

2. The way of salvation by grace, through Jesus Christ;

3. The path of duty as revealed in the Gospel;

4. The means for growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To know these experimentally and practically, will enable us to glorify God by a life of holy obedience. We shall then daily realize the presence of God; have an eye continually to the providence of God; and draw comfort and strength from the promises of God. In prosperity we shall be humble, in adversity resigned, in all conditions thankful and dependent.

Oh! blessed Lord, impart unto your poor unworthy child these spiritual blessings. Give me an insight into myself. Preserve me from self-delusion and hypocrisy. Let me never aim at mere appearances before others, but labor after simplicity and godly sincerity. Make me ever an humble suppliant at your mercy-seat, a thankful recipient of your bounties. Watch over me, O Lord, for good. Guard me from the snares and wiles of the devil. Keep me from a covetous mind. Wean my affections from this vain world, and cause me to set them on things above. May you be my portion. Make me more spiritually-minded, more alive to you, more solicitous about the good of others. May it be my daily intention to please you, my daily endeavor to glorify your name. Give me the blessing of a good conscience, a conscience sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, a conscience enlightened by the Spirit of truth. Shine on me with beams of love, until, through your grace, I shine in the heavenly temple with beams of glory.

02.47. THE CHRISTIAN'S REST

47. THE CHRISTIAN’S REST

"We who have believed enter into rest." Heb 4:3

As there is a heaven in going to heaven, so there is a rest, before we enter into the rest of Paradise. The soul which loves Christ supremely, which abides in him by faith, and in which Christ abides by his Spirit, enjoys while here a heavenly rest. Jesus is the believer’s resting-place, his place of refuge. It is the believer’s delightful privilege to hold communion with the Savior, to taste his love, to possess his peace. Oh! how sweet is true religion when felt in all its regenerating power! Lord grant that I may thus experience the joys of your salvation.

This world is indeed but a wilderness of worries; the region of sin and sorrow. Troubles, like thorns and thistles, spring up around us, and alas! too frequently they spring up within us. Unbelief, slavish fear of God, distrust of his providence, indulged lustings of the flesh, pride, and such like poisonous weeds, corrupt the soul and fill it with vexation.

Where, then, can true rest and peace be found in the midst of such anxieties? Surely no where but in Jesus. How true is his declaration; "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows." How unspeakably refreshing is his promise; "In me you shall have peace." Here, under all circumstances, we must expect to meet with trials. It is therefore our wisdom to fortify ourselves against them, by flying to the Strong for strength, and to the Comforter for Consolation.

What we need is faith, that faith which is of the operation of the Spirit, that faith which is called "the faith of God’s elect." Without this faith it is impossible to please God; because, whatever springs not from this true faith in Christ, is sin. The indwelling of this holy principle is known by its fruits. It transforms the whole inner man, through the power of the Holy Spirit, into a likeness to Jesus Christ. It purifies the soul through the cleansing efficacy of the blood of Jesus. It works by love through the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. It enables the believer to renounce the vanities of a world at enmity with God. It opens to his view eternal glories, and gives him a foretaste of that rest which remains to the people of God. What a blessing then is faith, and yet how rare a gift to man; and why? because he desires it not; he asks not for it; he refuses to return.

Awful, indeed, are the words of Jesus; "When the Son of Man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?" We seem to be approaching a time of trial. At this moment there is a restlessness, a desire for change, not alas! from sin to holiness. The minds of men are anxious to throw off ancient restraints and to breathe what they term the air of freedom. Delusive expectation! so long as the heart is enchained by sin. The political freeman is too often Satan’s bondman. While he throws off the salutary bonds of social order, he puts on the galling yoke of unbridled passions, and wild licentiousness. Infidelity revels in the storm, and tracks its path with blood!

The Church of Rome has long held the world in spiritual bondage. She has studiously withheld the light of truth from her members, and thus has fostered infidelity in her bosom. To elevate her

traditions, and enforce her decrees, she lowers the book of God. She raises doubts and mistrusts respecting the blessed Scriptures. She starts difficulties of interpretation, and obscurities without number, that her members may blindly follow the Church, hear the Church, and believe nothing but what the Church teaches. By this means she raises her priesthood above the oracles of God, for to deny the decretals of her Popes, Cardinals, and Councils, is the way into the dungeons of the Inquisition, to the fires of the Auto de fe. (The following are extracts from a Defense of Roman Catholic Principles, in a Letter to a Protestant Minister, by Gallitzin.)

"We believe that Jesus Christ has established the holy Catholic Church as the supreme tribunal to regulate our faith, or, in other words, to keep the precious deposit of Revelation unaltered, to explain to us (without any possibility of error the meaning of every part of holy writ necessary for salvation, and likewise to preserve and transmit to posterity undefiled, all that part of Christ's divine doctrine which was only delivered by word of mouth either by Christ or his Apostles."

"We believe that the unwritten word of God, transmitted to us by tradition, is entitled to the very same respect as the written word."

"When the Church has pronounced, the controversy is settled, doubts vanish, and we are as certain as if Jesus Christ himself had spoken!!"

"Holy writ (although certainly God's word) was not intended to be our Supreme Judge in matters of faith."

"We believe that the Catholic Church is this living, visible, and supreme Authority."

"We believe this authority resides in the body of Christ's Ministers, the pastors of the Catholic Church, and the lawful successors of those pastors whom Jesus Christ appointed and invested with full authority to discharge the functions of his ministry. To that body of pastors we look for heavenly instructions, in them we see the successors of Jesus Christ, invested by him with the same authority which he himself had received from his heavenly Father."

"The Spirit of truth never has, and never will depart from the pastors of Christ's Churches."

Such are the dogmas of the Church of Rome, founded on her infallibility. And woe be to those who (when she has power) dare to resist her authority. The venerable Bishop Hall by a familiar simile strikingly shows the folly of these Popish tenets, which would substitute the decisions of fallible men for the infallible wisdom of God– "The Scripture is the sun; the Church is the clock, whose hand points to, and whose sound tells us, the hour of the day. The sun we know to be sure, and regularly constant in his motion; the clock, as it may fall out, may go too fast or too slow. We are used to look at, and listen to the clock, to know the time of the day; but where we find the variation sensible, to believe the sun against the clock, not the clock against the sun. As, then, we should condemn him of much folly that should profess to trust the clock rather than the sun, so we cannot but justly tax the miscredulity of those who will rather trust to the church than to the scriptures."

If this conclusion, which the pious Bishop of Norwich draws from his simile is correct, it cannot be consistent with sound Protestantism, with the doctrines of the Reformation, or with the Articles of the Church of England, to assert that there is an infallible interpreter of Scripture, the Holy Catholic Church, since Churches and Councils have erred and do err to this day. Witness the Church of Rome, the Greek Church, and other Christian Communions.

When a ray of light darts into this region of darkness from the torch of human reason or philosophy, by which her members are led to see the craft of her priestly domination, and the mummery of her services; then a spirit of emancipation is created, and being ignorant of the truth as it is in Jesus, they fly from superstition to infidelity, from the despotism of Popery to the anarchy of atheism. Witness France and all her revolutionary horrors, the offspring of an infidel philosophy, bursting the barriers of Papal despotism, and plunging into a sea of blood. The Church of Rome, it has been said, may perhaps, die from the sting of infidelity, that viper which she has nurtured in her own bosom. Such is often the retributive justice of God. How remarkably was her power weakened, for a season, by the reign of infidelity in France.

Nothing but heavenly truth can guide men aright through this tempestuous world. If once we leave our divine Compass, the Word of God, we are at the mercy of every wind of doctrine, we are carried here and there, as the tide or storm may drive us, and at length are dashed against the rocks and perish. Lord! graciously preserve your true Church amid every tempest. Increase the light of Truth, and bring all nations to the obedience of faith. Preserve our Protestant nation from the dangers which threaten it; from the united efforts of Popery, infidelity, and anarchy, which are now assuming an attitude of fearful aspect, resembling the three unclean spirits, like frogs, which John saw in vision to come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the month of the false prophet. Oh! that your warning voice may be effectual in awakening our slumbering churches– "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."

It seems evident, both from prophecy and the signs of the times, that the millennial glory will be preceded by awful convulsions. The dragon that old serpent, who is the devil, will not be chained, without a desperate, permitted, struggle. But this conflict with the Church of Christ will end in his confusion, and the Church’s triumph. "And the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who did mighty miracles on behalf of the beast—miracles that deceived all who had accepted the mark of the beast and who worshiped his statue. Both the beast and his false prophet were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. Their entire army was killed by the sharp sword that came out of the mouth of the one riding the white horse. And all the vultures of the sky gorged themselves on the dead bodies. Then I saw an angel come down from heaven with the key to the bottomless pit and a heavy chain in his hand. He seized the dragon—that old serpent, the Devil, Satan—and bound him in chains for a thousand years. The angel threw him into the bottomless pit, which he then shut and locked so Satan could not deceive the nations anymore until the thousand years were finished. Afterward he would be released again for a little while."

The glorious predicted period will then dawn upon the world, like the sun shining without an intervening cloud. All will be holiness, happiness, and security. Yes, holiness will be universal, and true piety enter into all the minutia of life. "On that day even the harness bells of the horses will be inscribed with these words: ’Set apart as Holy to the Lord.’ And the cooking pots in the Temple of the Lord will be as sacred as the basins used beside the altar. In fact, every cooking pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be set apart as holy to the Lord Almighty." Thus all the Lord’s people, with all their powers an possessions, shall be consecrated to the glory of God. True religion will not be confined within the precincts of the temple, but extend itself through every habitation, and sanctify every occurrence and occupation.

This glory will be preceded by a wonderful outpouring of the Holy Spirit. For this we must constantly pray, in accordance with the written word of God. While seeking after this blessing, saying, "Lord Jesus, come quickly; hasten your work of glory," we must seek after personal holiness, that we may be ready to meet the Lord at his coming.

Great revivals in religion, and an extensive increase of it, have generally been a period of outward trouble. At such a time how often may it be said, "A man's foes are they of his own house." Then, not infrequently, have "the rulers set themselves against the Lord, and against his anointed." So long as the sun shines, and the waters flow smoothly, the human mind is naturally satisfied with present things. It is when the sky darkens, and the waves swell, that men's fears begin to operate, and to make them feel the uncertain nature of earthly things. Times of great trouble are frequently employed as means for awakening men out of their death-like slumbers, and causing them to cry out with the trembling Jailor, during the earthquake, "What must I do to be saved?"

Happy, indeed, when this is the case. We seem to be drawing near to some portentous crisis. The period seems to be fast approaching which will try men's principles, of what sort they are. It will be a touchstone to try the faith of many, who now wear the garb of sanctity. The Lord is about to put His church into the furnace, and when it is tried, it shall come out as gold. We have had a long season of outward ease. Profession has grown profusely , but true piety, is still, as it ever was, a rare plant. It grows not in nature's soil. It is an exotic. Our defiling, chilling world, is little congenial to its growth; but He, who plants it in the prepared ground of the heart is Almighty; He waters it by his Spirit, casts upon it the warm beams of His love, and renders it fruitful to His glory.

Oh! how soothing are the words of Christ "Come unto me and I will give you rest. Come unto me and you shall find rest unto your souls." The believer only can tell the blessedness of this invitation, and of the rest to which he is invited. It is a rest from guilty fears, from sinful desires, from vain pursuits. It is a rest in the love, faithfulness, and truth of Christ. It is a rest in his Atonement, Righteousness, and Intercession. It is a rest in his sovereignty, power, and willingness to save. It is a rest which yields to his soul comfort and peace. It is the foretaste of that Rest which remains for the people of God.

How comforting also are the words of Christ– "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me." Oh! that I had a heart to believe in Jesus, with the full assurance of faith. Then, like the Apostles of old, I might take up serpents, and they shall not hurt me. The keenest stings of slander, the most poisonous rancor of malice, endured for Christ's sake, shall no more harm me, than the viper did Paul, when it fastened on is hand at Melita.

"Let not your heart be troubled." Blessed words! On that memorable night, when the winds and the waves seemed ready to consign the infant Church of Christ to a watery grave, the disciples were filled with fear, and awoke their Master, exclaiming, "Don't you care that we are perishing?" How majestic, how godlike, was the conduct of Jesus. He calmly arose, rebuked the wind and the sea, saying– "Peace, be still." And then, turning to his disciples, gently reproved them; "Why are you so fearful? how is it that you have no faith?"

The winds of disorder are now beginning to soar; the waves of discord are now beginning to swell. The Church of Christ, like the ark of Noah, and the little vessel of the disciples, may be tossed on the tumultuous waters, but He who is with his Church is Almighty! But with Christ in the vessel, we

smile at the storm.

A heart under the influence of pride and passion, envy and jealousy, can never enjoy rest. Such a heart resembles the troubled sea, which casts up mire and dirt. How different is the heavenly rest. An angel's bosom is a stranger to conflicting passions. In that holy residence, dwells nothing that opposes the purposes of Jehovah, or disturbs the celestial harmony. There, all is obedience, purity, peace, and love. It is only in the breast of fallen man that rebellion is found, in conjunction with his tempters, the apostate spirits of darkness. The new creature in Christ Jesus is a restoration to pristine excellence. Much, indeed, still remains to be purged away; yet notwithstanding these remnants of corruption, the true believer is renewed in righteousness and true holiness.

O! happy change. Oh! blessed transformation. The work is inward and unseen, but its effects are visible; just as the sap which, rising unobserved by man, diffuses itself throughout the tree, producing leaves, and flowers, and fruit. How wonderful are the operations of the Holy Spirit on our hearts. Have I experienced their efficacy and blessedness? Has the Lord drawn me to himself by the cords of love? Has he manifested himself to me, as he does not unto the world? Am I a follower of them who, through faith and patience, are inheriting the promises; dwelling in the smiles of the Redeemer, and enjoying a Sabbath of eternal rest?

Jesus, the ever-adorable Jesus, is the fountain of this felicity. His precious blood is the purchase price of our redemption. The claims of justice are satisfied, and mercy encompasses the believer as with a shield. Streams of undeserved blessings are continually descending upon him from the throne of God and of the Lamb, filling his heart with joy and peace.

Whatever holiness we possess, whatever peace we enjoy, all must be traced to Jesus, the purchaser and bestower of every good and perfect gift. All the spices of Arabia cannot equal in sweetness the fragrance of his sacred name. It is as ointment poured forth. It is a balm for every wound. All that we can conceive of excellence and beauty, of glory and perfection, is to be found in Jesus, who is the chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely One. He is the Believer's Rest.

Dear Friend of friendless sinners hear,

And magnify your grace divine;

Pardon a worm that would draw near,

That would his heart to you resign

A worm, by self and sin oppressed,

That pants to reach the premised Rest.

With holy fear, and reverend love,

I long to be beneath your throne;

I long in You to live and move,

And entrust myself on You alone.

Teach me to lean upon your breast,
To find in You, the premised Rest.
You say, you will your servants keep
In perfect peace, whose minds shall be
Like newborn babes, or helpless sheep,
Completely stayed, dear Lord, on thee.
How calm their state, how truly blessed,
Who trust on You, the promised Rest.
Take me, my Savior, as your own,
And vindicate my righteous cause;
O be my portion, Lord, alone,
And bend me to obey your laws;
In your dear arms of love caressed,
Give me to find your premised Rest.
Bid the tempestuous rage of sin,
With all its wrathful fury die
Let the Redeemer dwell within;
And turn my sorrow into joy.
Oh! may my heart, by You possessed,
Know You to be my promised Rest.

02.48. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

48. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

"My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." Isa 46:10

Nothing is so calming and comforting to the Christian pilgrim, as the assurance of Divine Guidance in every, even the most minute circumstances which befall him. Without this perception of his heavenly Father's care, a thousand intricacies must beset his path. He must be staggered at almost every step. But when he beholds, by faith, the unerring hand of infinite wisdom, wielding the stupendous machine of human events, and causing everything to promote the spiritual good of his people; then he quiets himself as a little child, and can say with cheerful resignation; "Father, not my will, but yours be done." Like the cabin-boy during the storm, he is kept in peace, while all is terror around him; and if asked why? his reply is that of the artless boy, "Because my father is at the helm."

In such a world of change and trial, how inestimable is a calm reliance on the wisdom, power, and love of God. It fully compensates for the lack of temporal ease and wealth. While destitute of this holy frame, riches is poverty, and honor an empty sound. That man is poor indeed, though surrounded with affluence, whose heart is a stranger to the blessings of true religion.

Lord be pleased to impart unto me, your unworthy servant, this spirit of confidence in you. May I see your hand in all the events of life; ordering the bounds of my habitation, and the duration of my earthly pilgrimage. May I recognize your hand in the minor as well as in the greater movements of your Providence. This watching and waiting for the manifestations of your guardian care, will fill me with thankfulness for all my mercies, and make me patient under all my trials. Oh! for more faith, humility, and hope. Pour out of your fullness these heavenly blessings, that my soul may daily ripen for the enjoyment of the Paradise above.

If, without our heavenly Father not even a sparrow can fall to the ground; if the very hairs of our head are all numbered, how composed should we be. We have nothing to fear but sin. While acting faith upon the promises, we have everything to hope for; yes, every thing to enjoy. The reins of universal nature are in the hands of Infinite Love. This vast complex machine is guided by Infinite Wisdom and Power. The Almighty Ruler of the sky cannot be taken by surprise. Nothing unforeseen can happen to cross his purposes or thwart his designs. All worlds are open to his view. All hearts he naked before him. All the busy thoughts of men, with all their multiplied perplexities, ever in restless motion, are to him distinctly known. He knows every motive, the cause of every action. Thoughts deeply buried in the heart, are clearly recognized by his all-searching eye. By him actions are weighed. He tests the spirits. He searches the imaginations, and the heart, that, as the Righteous Judge of all, he may render unto every man according to his work. Nothing is too great for his power, nothing too secret for his omniscience. Hence he could declare, that "Every imagination of the thoughts," remarkable expression; every outline, or sketch, or first formation of the thoughts, is "only evil continually."

And again; "The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? But I know! I, the Lord, search all hearts and examine secret motives." If this Great and Glorious Being be our Father and our Friend, through his own sovereign grace, enabling us to believe in his beloved Son; then our privilege is to rejoice at all times, and in everything to give thanks.

Are we tried? We may be sure that there is a needs-be for it, that it is sent in love, and that the whole process of affliction is under the direction of a loving Father. This assurance, if truly felt in the heart, will cause the soul to fall with childlike acquiescence, into the hand of God. This David felt when he said, under a perplexing choice, "Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, (for his mercies are great,) and let me not fall into the hand of man." It will still the rising murmurs of impatient nature, and mold our will into a conformity to the will of God. Oh! blessed Lord, how much, how very much, do I need this simple, humble, submission of the heart to You.

While journeying heavenward, we are called to the exercise of faith and patience. The children of Israel had much of this lesson to learn in the wilderness. Their history is indeed instructive. "In this way, they traveled at the Lord’s command and stopped wherever he told them to. Then they remained where they were as long as the cloud stayed over the Tabernacle. If the cloud remained over the Tabernacle for a long time, the Israelites stayed for a long time, just as the Lord commanded. Sometimes the cloud would stay over the Tabernacle for only a few days, so the people would stay for only a few days. Then at the Lord’s command they would break camp. Sometimes the cloud stayed only overnight and moved on the next morning. But day or night, when the cloud lifted, the people broke camp and followed. Whether the cloud stayed above the Tabernacle for two days, a month, or a year, the people of Israel stayed in camp and did not move on. But as soon as it lifted, they broke camp and moved on. So they camped or traveled at the Lord’s command, and they did whatever the Lord told them through Moses."

Thus, it is evident that the Israelites were not to exercise their own will. They were to wait for, and to follow the will of God, as manifested to them by the resting and moving of the cloud. This subjugation of our will to the will of God is contrary to our natural independence and hastiness of spirit. We want to be moving, when God would have us rest; and we wish to remain, when he bids us to depart. Truly our heavenly Father has to bear with wayward children.

Though we have not, like the Israelites, a visible token of the divine will respecting our earthly movements; yet we must watch the movements of his Providence, and pray to be directed by his Sovereign Will. How many precious promises are scattered throughout his word to encourage our faith and hope, our patience and reliance, on the divine guidance and care! "I will instruct you, and teach you in the way which you shah go; I will guide you with my eye." "This God is our God forever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death." "Cast your burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain you." "Casting all your care upon him; for he cares for you." "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths."

"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," were the words of Christ to his Apostles, before he ascended to the throne of his glory. How consoling and encouraging is the assurance that the blessed Redeemer of my soul is the Great Sovereign of the Universe. Without his permission nothing can happen in the vast dominion over which he sways his scepter. To his will every creature must bow, either in willing obedience or in just and endless punishment.

When I survey the earth on which I live, and contemplate the millions of human beings which cover its surface, what an imposing scene presents itself before me. Each, among these millions, is occupied with his own individual concerns, while the Lord of creation watches over the concerns of all his creatures. Each is planning schemes of future happiness, while the Lord may be preparing events for future trials. Each is losing the present opportunity in the future prospect; building for tomorrow, and depriving himself of the benefit of today, when the sentence may have gone forth; "You fool! this night your soul shall be required of you."

Felix thus put off the favored period for seeking repentance; trembling under the terrors of a judgment to come, he said to his intrepid prisoner "Go your way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for you." This convenient season never returned- a season for breaking off his sins by repentance.

It is dangerous to resist the motions of the Spirit. What we feel today, if slighted, may never revisit us more. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." "Because I have called, and you refused, I will mock when your fear comes." The Sovereign Jehovah speaks as a sovereign; "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." He "works all things after the counsel of His Own Will!"

Among the busy tribes of men, a thousand arts are employed to gain their purpose, either for ambition, gain, or pleasure. Hence all the corrupt affections and passions of the depraved heart are brought into continual exercise; spreading misery and confusion, bloodshed and distress, over every part of the habitable globe.

In the midst of all these schemes for aggrandizement, or pleasure, the Almighty Sovereign is forgotten; his will is neglected, his laws are broken, his threatenings are slighted, his mercy is despised, his power is dared by open rebellion, and infidels attack his Majesty and Glory.

In the midst of this universal degeneracy, the Great Sovereign displays his dreadful judgments, by deluging a world of rebels; burning up wicked and polluted cities; pouring plagues of desolating varieties upon a persecuting kingdom; destroying entire nations of vile and abominable offenders; punishing his own professing people with multiplied and varied judgments; chastising individuals in their bodies, properties, and families; permitting wars to devastate, and pestilences to desolate, the regions of the earth. And all this on account of SIN.

These, and a thousand other evils receive their commission from that Almighty Ruler of heaven and earth, whose Power none can withstand, whose Counsel none can defeat, whose Will none can thwart. And yet, rebellious man dares to lift his puny arm against Omnipotence, as if he could command events, and make the future to crown his wishes.

Those who have perused with attention the pages of history, or studied the page of their own experience, must have learned how little human wisdom can depend upon its own foresight, or human power upon its own achievement. The fairest plans are often blasted, when nearest their accomplishment. And many, who, with laboring steps have reached the summit of their expectations, have been hurled from their eminence, just when stretching out the hand to grasp the golden prize. Well may we exclaim with Solomon; "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Haman, in the Book of Esther, affords a striking instance. He erected a gallows– for himself!

"Be still, and know that I am God" is the soothing accent of mercy to the believers in Jesus. If we know God in all his adorable perfections, in the greatness of his power, and in the fullness of his love, as manifested in the gift of his Son, we shall be still, calm, and composed, amid the agitations of a restless world. "For only when you come to judge the earth will people turn from wickedness and do what is right."

Oh! my soul, look now unto your God. Dark, indeed, is the cloud which covers our political horizon, and fearful the storm which is ready to burst upon our favored island. Popery, Infidelity, and Anarchy are forming a bomb-mine which may involve thousands in ruin. Our national sins are great, and so are our national mercies. This aggravates our ingratitude and increases our guilt. The divine bow of wrath is bent, the arrow is on the string, ready to fly in vengeance, and what withholds it? the arm of mercy, the intercession of Jesus.

Oh! my soul, do not forget that your sins form a part of the nation’s guilt; sins, as numerous as the stars of heaven. How inconceivable, then, must be the sum of human guilt, when multiplied by millions of men in succeeding generations, all born in sin, all living in iniquity, until renewed by the Spirit of grace? Surely nothing can so strikingly display the forbearance of God. This David felt when he sang- "God is a judge who is perfectly fair. He is angry with the wicked every day."

Lord impart unto me, your very sinful creature, the grace of true repentance. Give me an genuine abhorrence of all sin, and an entire cleaving of my heart to you. Oh! do mercifully withhold our deserved judgments, and pour out upon us a flood of undeserved mercy. For the sake of your beloved Son, hear the supplications of your people, who would now approach your mercy-seat with deep humiliation. Be, O Lord, entreated for our land, and pity your people. We are, indeed, O Lord, a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children who are corrupters. But, oh! pour out upon us a spirit of true repentance, faith, and love. Give not your heritage to reproach. You are righteous, and we are wicked. Your rod is the rod of judgment; but Oh! let it become a scepter of mercy, ruling our hearts by love. Draw all hearts to yourself, subdue every rebellious will. Great, indeed, and frightful is the iniquity which abounds. Your holy word is blasphemed; your Gospel is rejected; your beloved Son is disowned; and what will the end be? I hear you say; "Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

Lord! may I and mine be safe under your feathers; shielded by your power; and comforted by your love. Whatever storms may blow upon our land, be you to us "as a little sanctuary," a place of refuge, a tower of strength. Spread your wing over us, until the storm is past. But should it be your will, that any of us should fall under the devouring sword, still may we be safely lodged in your arms; and, like Elijah, be carried from the discords of earth to the harmonies of heaven!

How soothing in this world of woe,

Where tempests rage, and wild winds blow,

To know that He who guides the storm

Is God In Christ- in human form;

All power to Jesus Christ is given,

O’er all on earth, and all in heaven

He can create a storm at will;

Or speak the word- and all is still!

The rolling orbs obey his law

As round the sun their paths they draw;

The little insect of an hour,

Obeys the same Almighty Power.

The stony heart his word can break;

His grace support the poor and meek;

Ah! who can all his wonders tell?

Our Jesus, He does all things well.

My soul! repose beneath the wing

Of Israel’s Shepherd, Lord, and King,

No harm can reach you, sheltered there,

While safe beneath the Shepherd’s care.

But, should you see th’ uplifted rod,

Be still and know that Christ is God

The cloud which guilty sinners dread,

Shall break in blessings on your head.

Yet, should you feel his chastening hand,

Which sweeps across a sinful land,

Still all is sanctified to thee,

If you the friend of Jesus be.

Soon will the mighty Judge descend,

The trumpet sound- and time shall end.

His Wrath, each foe, shall then destroy;

His Love, each saint, receive with joy.

02.49. ON THE SOVEREIGNTY OF DIVINE GRACE

49. ON THE SOVEREIGNTY OF DIVINE GRACE

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." Deu 29:29

"For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God." Acts 20:27

Humility, faith, and prayer, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, are essential to the right reception of divine Truth. A peculiar state of heart, rather than much strength of intellect, is required in order to comprehend the gospel. Its sublime truths, though hidden from the wise and prudent, are revealed unto babes; "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way." "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him; and he will show them his covenant." "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God."

The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. Thousands have been led astray by "philosophy and vain deceit," by "science, falsely so called." The pride of human reason has always opposed the humiliating revelations of the Spirit. The fall of man and its direful consequences on the human race; the redemption of sinners, through the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ the Son of God; the regeneration of the soul, through the power of the Holy Spirit; the sovereignty of God in the bestowment of his gifts, having mercy on whom he will have mercy; the utter inability of man to save himself; and his everlasting obligations to the free grace of God, through the merits and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, are subjects which fill heaven with praise; and the volumes of the philosophical skeptic with doubts and ridicule!

The unhumbled heart, continually rises against the doctrine of the Sovereignty of Divine Grace. Man is naturally self-righteous. He seeks to find in himself the meritorious cause of his future hoped-for felicity. Heaven is an object of his desire, because it is a place of rest; not because it is a state of holiness. The man of the world understands neither the nature of heavenly bliss, nor the way to attain it. If he is a professing member of the Christian Church, he observes her ceremonies, and practices some moral duties. On these he rests his hopes of heaven. As pain and hell are united together, he naturally shrinks from the idea of torment; and yet, he lives in sin, the sure road which leads into the fiery gulf! So blind, so inconsistent is fallen man!

In treating on the great doctrine of Election, one of the fruits of sovereign grace, much controversy and angry disputes have been carried on between different sections of the Christian Church; some almost excommunicating and anathematizing those who differ from them. But "wisdom is justified of all her children." The true believer, who is "clothed with humility;" whose heart is as a weaned child; weaned from the pride of intellect, from the shackles of human systems, from a vainglorious display of theological attainments, will receive with meekness all that the Lord reveals.

He may, indeed, when contemplating the mysteries of grace, be led to exclaim with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" Or with Paul, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and

knowledge of God!" but the declaration; "Thus says the Lord," ever satisfies his mind. This sacred seal, placed upon the most abstruse revelations of the mind of God, is quite sufficient. He needs no more. And what is the result? He enjoys the peace of God; the sweet assurance of his love; the hope of glory, through the atoning blood of Christ.

It is then at our peril, if we add unto, or diminish anything from, the word of God. As there were "Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life;" so, lest the unhallowed hands of reasoning pride should mutilate or encumber the Scriptures of Truth, they are guarded, both by a command and a threatening, "You shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall you diminish anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." "If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

"Dangerous it is for the feeble brain of man to wade far into the doings of the Most High; whom although to know is life, and joy to make mention of his name; yet our soundest knowledge is, to know that we know him not as indeed he is, neither can know him; and our safest eloquence concerning him, is our silence, when we confess without confession, that his glory is inexplicable, his greatness above our capacity and reach. He is above, and we upon earth; therefore it behooves our words to be wary and few." (Thomas Hooker)

The humble believer, who is taught of God, will receive the mysteries of the kingdom, as the Spirit has been pleased to reveal them; and instead of endeavoring to explain them by his finite capacity, will rest satisfied with the divine assurance; "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." This composed the mind of the inspired Paul; "Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now."

We should never meditate upon the doctrine of Election, but with the profoundest reverence, humility, and child-like dependence on the teaching of the Holy Spirit. We know nothing of this mysterious truth but by the Scriptures. It is therefore the safest way to receive it, just as it is recorded, without endeavoring to supply, by our shallow comprehension, what Infinite Wisdom has thought fit to conceal.

From all eternity, God saw the end from the beginning. There is no ’before’ or ’after’ to the divine mind; it is one ’eternal present’. Nothing new, nothing unforeseen, or unknown, can happen to that Omniscient Jehovah, who made all things, and who holds all creation together. "Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world." To this fundamental truth, declared by James, every orthodox Christian must subscribe. He, who inhabits eternity; He, who fills heaven and earth with his presence; He, in whom we live, and move, and have our being; He, who knows all the secrets of the heart, and beholds all the ways of men, cannot be taken by surprise, or thwarted in his purposes and plans.

If this fundamental truth be granted, then it must necessarily follow, that God foresaw the fall of our first parents, and fore-ordained his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, as God manifest in the flesh, to become the Savior of our fallen race. The sin of Adam was his own. It sprang from a willful

disobedience to the divine command. JUSTICE pronounced the sentence of death on the guilty pair; but MERCY proclaimed pardon through the seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent’s head. How inconceivably great are the riches of sovereign grace. This was a redemption as unexpected, as it was unsought. Truly, mercy rejoiced against judgment. The Almighty declared himself to be a just God, and yet a Savior. His own arm brought salvation.

From Genesis to the Revelation, salvation is revealed as the free unmerited work of God. The Fountain of Grace is in God Himself. The copious streams flow down to us through Jesus Christ, and all our services ascend with acceptance only by, and through Him. We "are not redeemed with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot; who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world." And true believers are said to have their names "written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

Paul broke out into an anthem of praise on this account; "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes." He told the Roman converts that, whom God "did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren." And to the Thessalonians he said; "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." To Timothy, his beloved son in the faith, Paul thus writes; "So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

To Titus, his "own son after the common faith," the Apostle expresses his view of the divine sovereignty; "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness-- a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior." Peter also addressed the strangers scattered abroad by the rude hand of persecution, as "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

If we receive these inspired declarations, which contain the will of God respecting his redeemed people, in their plain grammatical meaning, apart from prejudice, and unwarped by human philosophical systems, surely we cannot fail to acknowledge the sovereignty of God in his acts of grace.

But alas! the pride of fallen reason rises against the sovereignty of Jehovah. The natural heart cannot stoop so low, as to accept of salvation through the righteousness of another, and irrespective of any foreseen goodness in the recipient. But, however wretched man may oppose the freeness of divine grace, the Apostles declare, in unequivocal language– that God is the Author of Salvation; that his gifts are sovereign, flowing from everlasting to everlasting; that he will

have mercy on whom he will have mercy, to the praise of the glory of his grace. He is debtor to none, "for all have sinned, and come short of his glory;" all, therefore, deserve to perish. If any are saved, it is not through any righteousness of their own, "for there is none righteous, no, not one," but through the unspeakable love of God. None can claim salvation as a right; all may, and must petition for it, as an unmerited gift. None who seek for it through the merits of Christ, with earnest prayer, and by humble faith, shall be rejected. The promise is full and clear; "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Humility will embrace this great salvation; when pride expires at the foot of the Cross.

Our destruction is altogether from ourselves. The Omniscient Jehovah foresaw the issue of Satan's temptation, and in his inscrutable wisdom permitted man to fall, but in doing so, he remained the same holy and good Being, and can be in no way chargeable with his creature's transgression. To believe otherwise would be blasphemy in the extreme. Man was created a rational being, a free agent. When he ate of the forbidden fruit he did it with the consent of his own will. Satan could not force our first parents to eat. The act was their own. He presented the alluring bait; he proposed specious arguments; he threw in doubtful insinuations respecting the divine prohibition; the poison operated, the temptation succeeded, and they fell through yielding to Satan's infidel suggestions. They disbelieved the words of their Creator, and fell from the heights of holiness and happiness, into the depths of sin and woe!

As a child partakes of the nature of the parent, so, when Adam fell, all his posterity fell in him. He became the head of a fallen race. Original sin having tainted the fountain, it embittered and polluted all the streams. "In Adam all die." Human pride revolts at this humiliating truth, though it forms the basis upon which redemption rests. The glorious doctrines of grace, like the rainbow, shine the brightest in the darkest cloud.

All, then, are sinners without exception. The violated Law of God condemns the whole human race. Hence it follows, that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified. Where, then, is salvation to be found? Only in and through the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word. As we are lost under the covenant of works, so we can only be saved under the covenant of grace.

Will, then, the whole human race be saved? The Scriptures tell us, that none, to whom the gospel is preached, will be saved, but those who truly believe in Jesus; who receive him into their heart by faith and love; who mourn over and forsake their sins; and who bring forth the fruits of the Spirit in all goodness, righteousness, and truth. With respect to the Heathen, who have never heard the gospel, nor enjoyed the means of hearing of a Savior's love, the Judge of all the earth will do right.

The carnal mind is enmity against God. With a darkened understanding, a rebellious will, and corrupt affections, the natural man, like Naaman, turns away in a rage from the simple, but efficacious remedy of God's providing. Every man, woman, and child, in every age, would thus reject Christ and his great salvation, if God did not, in his rich mercy, incline the hearts of some to embrace Jesus as their only Savior. If left to ourselves, we would never come to Christ. And so powerful is this corrupt bent of the will to evil, that we never could come to Him, if God did not make us willing in the day of his power, if he did not draw us by the secret but constraining influences of his Holy Spirit.

The God of all grace does not force us to come to Christ against our will; but he sets before us our lost condition by nature, the hatefulness of sin, and all its direful consequences; the suitableness of Christ to all our needs; his loveliness and preciousness in all his offices and characters; the beauty of holiness, and the bliss of heaven; and then, by an all-illuminating and attractive energy, he convinces and captivates our minds to embrace freely and fully, Jesus Christ, as all our salvation, and all our desire. "By grace are you saved," was the delightful theme of Paul.

Such a soul, thus choosing Christ as its portion, is a vessel of mercy, "sanctified, and made fit for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." Such a soul is declared in Scripture to be "chosen in" Christ "before the foundation of the world;" for wherever the doctrine of election is mentioned, it is invariably connected with holiness. These holy souls, transformed by divine grace into the image of Christ, form, collectively, the true Church, the body of Christ, of which he is the head; the spouse to whom he is the husband. They are called the people of God; the children of God; the heirs of God. They are admitted to a delightful fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. They are the temples of the Holy Spirit; the habitation of God through the Spirit. They are the wheat among the tares; the good fish among the bad; the wise among the foolish virgins; the fruitful among the unfruitful branches, as declared by our Lord in his parabolical descriptions of the visible Church, in which the good and the evil mingle together until the day of final separation, when the people prepared by the Lord, shall forever inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

How monstrous, then, are the objections made by some people to this doctrine of grace, who assert that if any one is elected he will be saved, however unholy his life may be.

As the Bible is designed for the instruction of all mankind, so all may read their character in that sacred volume. The whole human race is divided into two great classes, believers and unbelievers, saints and sinners, the righteous and the wicked; those who serve God, and those who serve him not. In one or other of these distinctive classes will all be ranged at the judgment day, when Christ will separate the righteous from the wicked, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. To each of these two broadly defined characters, the blessing and the curse; the promise and the threatening, is made. Hence it is said; "He that believes, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believes not, shall be damned." The wicked "shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal."

Should any one, through divine grace, become a believer in Jesus, he changes his state before God, he becomes entitled, through the merits of Christ, to the blessing and the promise; is made a member of Christ's mystical body; and thus, by the work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope, evidences his election of God.

The way and means for the salvation of sinners, was fore-ordained; even the incarnation, sufferings, death, and glorification of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; as also our sanctification through the gift and power of the Holy Spirit.

Faith is likewise the divinely-appointed instrument, by which the sinner is enabled to lay hold on Christ as his Savior and Advocate with the Father; and the moment any one is empowered through grace to believe from the heart in the Lord Jesus Christ, as revealed and set forth in the Scriptures, he passes from death unto life, is adopted into the family of God, becomes a member

of the Church militant, reads his title to glory in the work of Christ, and, through the sanctifying grace of the Spirit, progressively advancing in his soul, makes his calling and election sure.

In Scripture this exalted blessing is not offered to a few; no! blessed be God, the offers of salvation are made alike to all; the invitation is general, the command to preach the gospel is unlimited; "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." None are excluded, but such as through unbelief exclude themselves. The destruction of sinners is the fruit of their own voluntary choice; the free act of their own rebellious wills, in opposition to the sweetest calls of mercy, the gracious strivings of the Spirit, the powerful checks of conscience, the solemn alarms of Providence, and the recorded threatenings of Scripture. Thus man is the author of his own misery, and willfully judges himself unworthy of eternal life.

Whatever excuses men may now make for their sins, a day is coming, a day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, when he will render to every man according to his deeds. Then will every unbeliever, every unconverted sinner, like the man without the wedding garment, stand speechless and self-condemned before the Judge of the living and the dead; while all the happy members of Christ's family, his Church redeemed from the earth, shall appear before him without "spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing," giving to God the glory of their salvation, and praising and adoring the Lamb that was slain; who washed them from their sins in his own blood, and made them kings and priests unto God.

The Scriptures of truth, and the preaching of the Gospel, are the two great instruments in the hands of the Spirit for enlightening the world and turning sinners from the power of Satan unto God. It is, therefore, our duty, as it is our privilege, to sit under a faithful ministry, and to read the word of God with earnest prayer, that the promised blessing may accompany the means.

The Spirit always addresses us by the word, and treats us as rational creatures; therefore, we are proper subjects for invitations, warnings, cautions, directions, etc. To enter into the niceties of controversy tends to confuse the mind, not to edify it. The way of salvation is plain and clear. The mode of effecting it is far beyond our conception. The incarnation of the Eternal Word, and the secret operations of the Holy Spirit on the human soul, are subjects which will forever occupy the meditations of the spirits of just men made perfect in heaven. Here "we see through a glass darkly," and yet, quite clear enough to condemn us, if we miss the heavenly road.

What we need is a humble, childlike spirit, to receive the great truths of the Gospel as Practical Truths, which are revealed, not to make us disputers, but disciples of Jesus Christ, to restore us to the love and favor of God through faith in his blood; and to a holy conformity to that divine image which we lost by the Fall. This is the new birth, the new creation, that transformation which passes upon every soul before it can be admitted into the Paradise above.

It is of great spiritual importance that we consider all the doctrines of the Gospel in this practical view. They were not given us as subjects for speculation, but as most precious truths, on the right embracing of which our everlasting salvation depends. What will it avail that I fancy myself to be one of the elect of God, if I am destitute of their character as portrayed in the Holy Scriptures? We are told, an painful experience teaches us, that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." This heart must be changed by divine grace, before we can have any scriptural hope of enjoying heaven; and if our hearts are changed, it will be effected by the grace

and power of Christ, who is the author and finisher of our faith, the giver of true repentance, and the fountain of all spiritual blessings, which he sheds abundantly on every contrite heart.

The doctrine of Election, as revealed in the word of God, is very sweet to humble holy souls, in an hour of darkness or affliction; whereby they are enabled to trust in the Lord, and to rest themselves upon their God. But it is dangerous for carnal people, lacking the Spirit of God; for they convert the children’s bread into poison, and thus, to them, the word of life becomes the savor of death unto death.

Let us, then, seek for those graces which are the undeniable evidences of saving faith, and the indisputable marks of the elect of God. These the Apostle mentions; "Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. You must make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony."

Happy, indeed, are they who can read their own character, in some humble measure, in this concise description of true believers. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they, (and they only), are the Sons of God;" for, "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him."

Oh! all-gracious Father, whose love and power are infinite, enable me, while a sojourner on mercy’s ground, to seek you where alone you can be found, in Christ my Savior. Stretch forth your arm, and save me from sinking beneath the waves of destruction. Draw me to your mercy-seat. Speak peace to my soul. Destroy all evil in my heart. Fill me with light and love, and with all the fruits of the Spirit. Unite me to the Savior by a living faith. Make me a member of your true Church, that, being chosen in Christ through your sovereign grace, I may glorify you here, by a life of holiness, and then at death enjoy a life of happiness in your blissful presence, where is fullness of joy; and at your right hand, where are pleasures for evermore.

How can the world true bliss bestow,

Where thorny cares and sorrows grow?

On Christ alone, my hope is laid,

Whose love the great Atonement made.

His blood can peace and joy procure,

His faithful word is ever sure.

If Satan comes in evil hour,

Jesus helps me by his Power;

He, by his Cross, the foe subdues,

While faith, the bleeding Savior views.

Through Him, my soul each foe defies,

And happy in his grace relies.

If I forsake the living way,

And careless from my Savior stray;

An awful gloom is soon o’erspread,

For Jesus to my heart has said

"Did I expire upon the tree

That you the friend of sin should be?"

A pilgrim here, I often sigh,

Overwhelmed with grief and misery;

I then exclaim; "no light I see,

My Jesus has forgotten me."

But still my Lord does pity take,

Though earthly parents should forsake.

To this dear Friend I will repair,

Whose love can all my burdens bear;

His grace can cheer affliction’s hour,

His Spirit give the strengthening power,

Oh! until he come from heaven above,

May I abide in Jesus’ love.

02.50. THE UNSATISFYING NATURE OF EARTHLY

50. THE UNSATISFYING NATURE OF EARTHLY THINGS, AND THE BENEFIT OF SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION

"But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless. It was like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere." Ecc 2:11

"No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it is painful! But afterward there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way." Heb 12:11

Paul was in a happy frame when he could say "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." Wealth breeds cares. One staff is a help to the weary traveler; a hundred would press him down. There is much wisdom as well as mercy in the precept; "Let your moderation be known unto all men. Don’t worry about anything." Excess often creates engorgement. The man who lives continually in the midst of splendor, views with indifference those costly objects which attract the admiration of strangers. Solomon withheld his heart from no joy, but the fruit of all his toil was, "vanity and vexation of spirit."

The blessings of Providence are more evenly dealt out than is supposed. There are temptations and trials peculiar to every condition of life. James calls our attention to his important question "Hearken, my beloved brethren, Has not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him? And Paul, in like manner, addresses the Corinthians; "Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world’s eyes, or powerful, or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God deliberately chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose those who are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important, so that no one can ever boast in the presence of God. " For, this is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise man gloat in his wisdom, or the mighty man in his might, or the rich man in his riches. Let them boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the Lord who is just and righteous, whose love is unfailing, and that I delight in these things. I, the Lord, have spoken!"

O! my soul, earth and heaven are spread before you. Each are inviting you to closer union. God and Mammon are demanding your service; but both you can not serve. Choose this day whom you will serve, God or the world. You have seen that, when the world has poured its envied greatness upon any individual, he is still every moment liable to the sorrows of the heart, to the diseases of the body, to the stroke of death; and, if unregenerate, to the worm that does not die, and to the fire that never shall be quenched. Your powers are vast, though weakened and corrupted through the Fall. Allied to angels by your spiritual nature, you are ever soaring beyond the boundaries of time, and longing for a something yet unpossessed, a happiness which earth can never give. This restless search for happiness shows you, O my soul, that He who formed you, made you for a

holier, happier state than this. When the world has lavished on you all its bliss, the aching void still remains. God alone can satisfy those enlarged desires which stretch themselves into immortality.

Be wise, then, O my soul, look unto that glorious Being who inhabits eternity, who is the fountain of all blessedness, the only source of true, unmixed felicity. Behold him in the person of Jesus Christ; behold, believe, and love! This gracious Emmanuel left the mansions of glory to save you from the abodes of misery. He became poor, that you, through his poverty, might be rich. Oh! tear your affections from these transient scenes, and fix them upon Him who loved you even unto death. Make him your choice; your portion; your everlasting all. He can make poverty, abundance; and abundance, satisfying; for with him you shall have all things and abound. With him is treasured up all bliss and glory; all happiness and felicity; all joy and peace; every delight, and every precious thing.

Come, blessed Redeemer, Savior of sinners, Friend of the lost and wretched, be my present and eternal portion. Oh! make me willing to choose you, and to love you, and to serve you with all my powers. Take full possession of my heart. Enter, heavenly guest, and take up your abode within me. Wash me from all my sins in your cleansing blood. Clothe me with the spotless garment of your Righteousness. Fill me with the grace of your Spirit; and enable me to live to you alone; to seek my all in you; to devote my every power to you; to commit myself, body, soul, and spirit, into your hands, to be sanctified, governed, and preserved through your grace, to the glory of your holy name.

Nothing is more common than to approve of what is good, and yet to follow that which is evil. Few, comparatively, are faithful to their convictions. None can deny the uncertainty of life, and yet all live as if life were at their command. Schemes of future bliss are devised with as much security, as if the fond projectors were building their fabric on a rock. But soon the illusion vanishes like the mirage of the desert, which leaves the disappointed traveler, when advancing as he hoped towards some refreshing waters, with nothing but the burning sand.

Everything here below is fleeting and transitory. While journeying through this wilderness of troubles, few verdant spots are to be found, on which the weary traveler can repose. The earth lies under the curse. Thorns and thistles cover the ground. Storms and tempests agitate the air. Disease and death dissolve the dearest ties. Yet, in the midst of all this fluctuation, the heart of fallen man would never seek its rest in an Unchangeable Savior, did not the sovereignty of grace reveal the blessing, and make the sinner willing to repose under the shadow of his wing.

Everything around me bespeaks the Fall, and testifies that this is not my rest. Why, then, should my foolish heart repose itself on any creature comfort? Have I still to learn that all of this world, is less than nothing, and vanity? How greatly should I prize the blessed Bible, which reveals the way of reconciliation, and points to the Lamb of God, who alone can take away the sin of the world. Here is rest and peace for the troubled soul. Jesus has brought in an everlasting Righteousness, which is freely imputed to every humble believer. It is gratuitously offered in the Gospel "unto all," and is then placed "upon all those who believe;" so that the vilest sinner, thus receiving Christ by faith, is "accepted in the Beloved," and through the Almighty power of the Holy Spirit, is made a new creature in Christ Jesus.

This is the Gospel. It brings "Glory to God in the highest." All the divine perfections harmonize and shed their united splendor around the Cross! It proclaims "Good-will toward men." Through the preaching of the gospel, through the holding up of Christ crucified, sinners are entreated to come; yes, are powerfully drawn to God, being assured, from this manifestation of his grace, that he wills not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. It diffuses "Peace on earth." The contending sinner lays down his hostile weapons, and through faith in the blood of Christ, obtains peace with God. The stormy conscience is hushed; the rough disposition is softened; and these blessed effects of the peaceful reign of Jesus will never cease to operate, until nations shall war no more.

Oh! that this happy period, this antepast of heaven, may be hastened on the earth. Lord grant that this millennial blessedness may now be felt and enjoyed in my own soul. Oh! blessed Jesus, Prince of Peace, reveal yourself to my heart; soften, melt, and renew it. Consume all the dross which it contains, and transform it, wholly, after your image; that, while surrounded by evils of every name, and sorrows of every kind, which abound in this rebellious, dying world, I may enjoy the light of your countenance, and the purifying influence of your love.

These, O divine Redeemer, are indeed great blessings which I am now asking for; but am I not encouraged to enlarge my desires, to expand my heart, to stretch forth the hand of faith, that I may receive out of your fullness, and grace for grace?

You, who are the fountain of living waters, have said; "Whoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." Fill me with your love; satiate my soul with your goodness; and make me an everlasting trophy of your grace.

Blessed Savior! I am quite unable to love and serve you, by any natural will or power of my own. At your command, I would work out my own salvation, by the diligent use of appointed means; and yet, with fear and trembling, from a consciousness of my own depravity, and the deceits of Satan. But you must work in me to will and to do of your good pleasure, for without You I can do nothing. As you condescended to visit the humble dwelling of Lazarus, be pleased to look down upon a family of sinful worms, who now entreat the favor that you bear unto your people. Oh! visit us with your salvation, that we may daily rejoice in you.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous; afflictions peculiar to themselves. They partake, indeed, of bodily and temporal trials, in common with their brethren of mankind; but they are often called to endure tribulations from which the worldly are exempt. They suffer for righteousness’ sake. They take up the cross and follow Christ, through evil report and good report. They submit to have their name cast out as evil; to be accounted as the off-scouring of all things. Their inward trials are known only to themselves, and to Him who searches the heart. They have to struggle against indwelling sin; against the law in the members, which wars against the law of the mind. They have to contend against the suggestions of unbelief, the workings of pride, the lustings of the flesh, and the love of the world. There are seasons when darkness seems to overspread their souls, and hope to suffer an eclipse.

At such a period, Satan casts into the citadel of the heart, his fiery darts, and opens all his dread artillery to dismay and overcome the afflicted believers in Jesus. But all-prayer in the name of Christ prevails; for "when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a

standard against him." The foe is foiled– the darkness is dissipated; and light and joy once more fill the souls of the conquering saints.

If it be asked, Why is this? It is because the Lord, whose wisdom and love are infinite, is pleased to overrule these trials to humble and purify his people. By these afflictions, their faith is strengthened; the spirit of prayer is quickened; their humility is increased; their love inflamed; and their dependence rendered more simple and entire.

The dearest children of God have been deeply afflicted by family trials, as well as by inward conflicts. Adam, had his Cain. Noah, his Ham. Abraham, his Ishmael. Jacob, his ten unnatural sons and erring daughter. Aaron, his Nadab and Abihu. Eli, his Hophni and Phineas. Samuel, his Joel and Abijah. David, his Amnon and Absalom. Jehoshaphat, his Jehoram. Jotham, his Ahaz. Hezekiah, his Manasseh. Josiah, his Jehoiakim.

A pious parent cannot produce a pious offspring. The taint of original sin pollutes the streams which flow downwards from fallen Adam. Grace alone can effect the change. These fatherly chastenings are all sanctified to the people of God. For the present, they are not joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward they yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised thereby. God does not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men. He corrects us like a wise and loving parent, for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness.

Blessed Lord! enable me to be calm and passive under your chastening hand. I know that you do all things well; and that it shall be well with those who love and fear you. Keep me as the apple of your eye. Hide me under the shadow of your wing. Wean my heart from all earthly vanities, and cause me to wing my way towards You. You can embitter every comfort; and sweeten every cross. Preserve me from all idolatrous attachments to the things of this world. Reveal Yourself to me in the fullness of your love, through a believing view of the truth as it is in Jesus. I know, O Lord, that in very faithfulness, you cause me to be afflicted. But oh! how gentle is the stroke of your rod; how loving are your corrections. I might justly experience the weight of your wrath; instead of this, I am only called to bear the easy yoke of parental discipline. And shall I murmur or complain? O that songs of praise, and feelings of joy, and expressions of gratitude, may ever manifest the state of my heart. You, O Lord, are worthy to be praised. Your loving-kindness is great. Your mercy is infinite. Your grace is unbounded. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name; for his name only is excellent, and his praise above heaven and earth.

How great, O worldling, is your dread mistake,

How fatal sin’s inebriating power;

Are you content, for wealth, for honor’s sake,

To bear the anguish of a dying hour?

Its pain, your treacherous heart will quickly feel;

Soon must you leave the fairest scene below;

Your peace will bleed, as on the pointed steel,

When death shall hurl you to the world of woe.

In flaming fire, with majesty arrayed,

The Lord will call you to his awful throne;

Then earth, with all its dazzling joys, will fade

Beneath the terrors of Jehovah’s frown.

Worldling! be wise; awake, awake from sin!

Ah! think how vain the pleasures of an hour;

The voice of mercy calls- it speaks within,

And bids you trust in Jesus’ Grace and Power.

Fly to the Cross- the Savior you invites;

A gracious Father calls you to his Son;

Believe the Message, which his love indites,

Reject the Mercy-and you are undone.

02.51. GOD THE REFUGE FOR HIS PEOPLE

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"I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge, and my fortress; my God; in him will I trust." Psa 91:2

What a marvelous truth, that God, against whom man has sinned, should himself become the sinner's Refuge from the guilt and punishment of sin. Here, you behold, O my soul, the length and breadth, the depth and height, of infinite, everlasting love! The way in which God can receive sinners into his favor, consistently with his holiness and justice, could never have been discovered by the highest archangel, much less by the reason of man. The Scriptures of truth alone reveal this amazing mystery. There we learn, that God in Christ reconciles the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; that through his incarnation and death, he can now be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly; having fulfilled the righteousness of the law for man, and paid the penalty due to eternal justice, by shedding his own most precious blood upon the Cross.

He is now revealed as a just God, and yet a Savior. His law is magnified and made honorable, and all his perfections encompass the believing sinner, as with a shield. Oh! what a refuge for the oppressed; what a refuge in time of trouble! Yes! every poor sinner, who flies to a covenant God in Christ, has now a strong-hold, a tower of strength, into which he runs, and is safe. To him, Christ is "as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Those, to whom Isaiah wrote, knew well the preciousness of this description of the "King that shall reign in righteousness;" of the "Man," thus prefigured by the Spirit of prophecy. They knew how to value a hiding-place from the death-spreading whirlwind; a covert from the wild tornado; springs of water in the sandy desert; and the shadow of a great rock, to screen them from the burning rays of a tropical sun.

Have you, O my soul, fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you in the gospel? Have you made God your Rock and Support at all times, and on all occasions? Are your comforts drawn from earthly sources, and your hopes built on earthly dependencies; or, are they derived from God in Christ, the Fountain of true felicity; and founded on Him, the Rock of Ages? Oh! happy is the man whose hope the Lord is, and whose fresh springs, blessed Jesus, are in You!

While vessels, on a tempestuous ocean, are every moment in danger of being swallowed up by the yawning waves; the man, whose house is built upon the rocky shore, can view the storm, fearless and undismayed. So the Christian, whose refuge is the mighty God, can calmly contemplate the tumultuous sea of life, and smile amid the wildest uproar of the maddening multitude. This is the portion of the true believer. "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you." David enjoyed this peace, when he sang; "God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear, even if earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!" And what caused the Psalmist thus to feel peaceful in the midst of conflicting elements, and a warring world? He tells us; "The Lord reigns; he is clothed with majesty." "The

Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice." "The Lord reigns; let the people tremble."

The believer in Jesus, opening the book of God, is quieted from fear of evil. He reposes on the promises of Him, who is the Amen; whose word is eternal Truth; whose counsel shall stand; and of whose government and peace there shall be no end. He knows that God is the Ruler of the universe, the wise Disposer of all events; that nothing can happen without his order or permission; therefore, he is cheerful and happy under all the dark dispensations of providence, remembering that the Lord God Omnipotent reigns; that the Judge of all the earth will do right, though clouds and darkness are round about him, and veil his bright designs.

He knows that God, who is rich in mercy, desires not the death of a sinner; that he is waiting to be gracious that his arms are ever open to welcome the returning prodigal, and to become a city of refuge to all who flee unto him through his dear Son Jesus Christ.

He knows that God has power as well as will to save him; that his willingness was manifested at Bethlehem, at Gethsemane, at Golgotha; that his power is daily displayed in the conversion of sinners, and the preservation of his saints.

He knows, from daily experience, that God is indeed a refuge, a place of defense against his spiritual enemies; he finds Jesus to be a near refuge to flee unto; for thus says the Lord; "Am I not a God at hand?" "He is not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being." Yes! the believer finds the Lord Jesus to be, not only "as a little sanctuary," while on earth, but also his Eternal Refuge.

Moses animated the journeying Israelites by this delightful view of the God of their fathers; "The eternal God is your refuge, and his everlasting arms are under you." In life, in death, in trouble, and in joy, the true believer finds a sure, a strong, a near refuge in Jesus Christ. "But to the poor, O Lord, you are a refuge from the storm. To the needy in distress, you are a shelter from the rain and the heat. For the oppressive acts of ruthless people are like a storm beating against a wall, or like the relentless heat of the desert."

Oh! blissful truth– Jesus is the believer’s refuge, when the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised. At that awful hour, when the wicked shall call in vain upon the rocks and hills to cover them, and to hide them from the face of him that sits upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; the joyful saint shall lift up his head, knowing that his redemption, his complete glorification, draws near.

Washed from his sins, through faith in the blood of Christ; clothed with the garment of salvation, the robe of the Redeemer’s righteousness; purified and made fit for glory, through the power of the Holy Spirit; the now perfected believer is admitted through the gates into the city, and amid the hallelujahs of saints and angels, receives the crown of glory. Then will "the voice of harpers harping with their harps," fill the heavenly temple with celestial harmony; then will the mighty chorus, from "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" of ransomed spirits, swell the anthem of praise unto him who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever!

O! my soul, delay not a moment to seek an interest in Jesus Christ. Fly to this friend of sinners. Go unto God the Father by him. Plead before the throne of grace the merits of your Savior. Cease not day and night to pray and cry unto the Lord, that you may be lodged in the ark of the everlasting

covenant; be safely concealed in the cleft of the Rock, in the covenanted mercies of God in Christ.

How good, how gracious is the Lord. Infinite love directs the vast machine of providence, and makes all things work together for his people's good. If present dispensations be dark, they soon shall be clothed with light; and if his people are now sad, they shall before long be filled with joy. The designs of God, with respect to his Church, are full of mercy and truth. None of his purposes can fail of their accomplishment. He can make even the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of wrath he will restrain. The mighty conqueror is but as a rod in his hand, the staff of his indignation, which he can wield or break at his pleasure. Satan may plot, and his agents execute their schemes; but in every age the Lord reigns. He can still the madness of the people, or open the flood-gates of national judgments. He will do all his pleasure. Infidelity may pour forth its poisonous waters; Popery may forge its despotic chains; and Anarchy light up the torch of discord; yet, in the midst of all these enemies to truth and righteousness, Jesus is the King of Zion; he shall reign, until he has put all enemies under his feet, and God be all in all.

O! my soul, cleave then unto the Lord your God. Make him your refuge, your hiding-place, until the indignation be overpast. Yet, alas! what cause have I to mourn over a cold, unfeeling heart. How strangely do I feel. I want to be all life, all love, all energy for Christ, and yet I seem more like a statue than a living creature. Why am I thus? Oh! what a depth of evil there is in the heart. Satan knows this well, and fails not to work upon it. But, of this I am persuaded, that the word of promise can never be reversed; "Say to the righteous, that it shall be well with him." Believers, if need be, are now in heaviness through manifold temptations; but this is their happiness, that God is with them; this is their security, that they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. As the sheep of Christ, they are lodged in his fold, they are safe under his protection, and shall never perish.

In myself, I have no spiritual strength. Of myself, I can do nothing. I cannot stand upright a single moment, I am not able to move a single step towards heaven. By nature I am full of guilt and misery, far from God, from happiness, from heaven. But how precious is the Gospel of the grace of God. There I behold Jesus, in the character of the good Samaritan, hastening to my relief; pouring into my heart the wine and balm of the covenant of grace, and saying to my soul; "Be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you. I am your salvation. I have paid your debt. I will give you greater riches than the world can bestow, or Satan offer, as a lure to bind you to their service."

O! Spirit of all grace, enable me to open the arms of faith to embrace this loving Savior. Give me a heart of love to cleave to this compassionate Redeemer. Make me decided in my attachment, firm to my choice, and unshaken in my allegiance to my Almighty Sovereign.

My soul, upon the Savior build,

Then will you bear the rudest shock;

The powers of hell no more can harm,

Than dashing waves, the solid rock.

How feeble, Lord, my best desires,

How weak my frail, inconstant heart;

If left by you, the strongest saint,

From you that moment would depart.

Oh! let me, with untiring zeal,

In my dear Savior’s footsteps go;

Take up his cross, and firmly leave,

All fading glories here below.

Jesus can make my burden light;

To his dear bosom I would flee.

Oh! blessed retreat! removed from fear;

There, would I tranquil live to thee.

Perfect, O Lord, my peace in thee,

Oh Rock of Ages- God of might;

In every storm my haven be,

My Refuge in death’s dreary night.

02.52. THE RELIGION OF THE HEART

52. THE RELIGION OF THE HEART

"For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Rom 14:17

If we are faithful, we shall be tried. Every true Christian must carry his cross; he must endure tribulation for Christ's sake. Let all them who would follow the Savior, "sit down, and count the cost." We must prepare for the conflict with Satan and the world. Our blessed Lord has told us what we must expect if we are his faithful followers; "When the world hates you, remember it hated me before it hated you. The world would love you if you belonged to it, but you don't. I chose you to come out of the world, and so it hates you. Do you remember what I told you? 'A servant is not greater than the master.' Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you! The people of the world will hate you because you belong to me, for they don't know God who sent me."

Shall we, then, shrink from the cross? Shall we be ashamed to confess Christ crucified? Alas! We would both shrink and be ashamed, if left to ourselves. Nothing but the Spirit of Christ can make us dauntless in our Master's cause. How encouraging are the words of Peter– "Be happy if you are insulted for being a Christian, for then the glorious Spirit of God will come upon you." "So if you are suffering according to God's will, keep on doing what is right, and trust yourself to the God who made you, for he will never fail you."

Faith without root will wither away. "The rocky soil represents those who hear the message with joy. But like young plants in such soil, their roots don't go very deep. They believe for a while, but they wilt when the hot winds of testing blow." Mere animal excitement cannot withstand the storm and tempest. It has been quaintly remarked that many will follow religion while she walks in silken slippers; who will forsake her, when she is compelled to walk in iron shoes. When the venerable Cranmer was spreading his hospitable table at Lambeth Palace, he was surrounded by admiring guests; but when enclosed between the dreary walls of a Papal dungeon, few cared to visit him there. Thus it was with Cranmer's Lord and ours. In the hour of his extremity, the disciples forsook him, and fled!

Head knowledge, and zeal for ceremonies, can survive in the sunshine; but they cannot endure the faggot or the rack. No, they shrink beneath the lash of ridicule, and the pointed finger of scorn. Grace alone can render us triumphant over every enemy, and strengthen us in the hour of death and danger. Let us, then, seek for the religion of the heart; that internal principle which will raise us above the agitations of the world, and prepare us for the enjoyment of Christ in glory. "Be faithful unto death," said the glorified Redeemer, "and I will give you a crown of life."

The visible Church abounds with thousands of religious professors, but with comparatively few possessors of real godliness. It is much easier to observe an outward form than to crucify a beloved lust. The Church of Rome, though loaded with ceremonials, is proverbially corrupt. God

requires truth in the inward parts. He looks at the heart, and will be worshiped in spirit and in truth. No ordinance can, of itself, confer a benefit apart from the grace of God, and the state of heart of the worshiper. To suppose otherwise, is to return from Protestantism to Popery. The graces of repentance and faith are declared in Scripture to be essential to the right and saving reception of the Gospel. The impenitent and unbelieving cannot partake of the salvation which God has provided. Would it not, therefore, be dangerous to urge men to approach the Lord's Table, without a due preparation of heart; or, to lead them to suppose that they are privileged to come, because they were regenerated in baptism, and consequently are to be regarded as saints, though they give not the least evidence of spiritual regeneration?

True religion is seated in the heart. A man may have very clear notions of the doctrines of grace, but if the grace of those doctrines does not influence his heart, and shine forth in a holy life, all his knowledge will profit him nothing. A person may speak well and fluently upon religion, and yet be quite dead to the power of that Gospel, on which he speaks so well. Something more is requisite to form the true Christian than head-knowledge and religious conversation. And yet, how many, alas! content themselves with these attainments, and imagine themselves to be saved, when in God's estimation they are no better than sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal. Being vainly puffed up, they assume the character of teachers, before they know themselves, or the very first elements of Christianity, even their own ignorance, helplessness, and corruption.

Blessed Savior, deliver me, I humbly beseech you, from spiritual pride and self-confidence. Lead me by the footsteps of your chosen flock, which has ever followed You the Chief Shepherd, through the valley of humiliation, where alone are to be found the still waters of comfort, and the rich pastures of your promised grace.

It is plainly revealed in Scripture, that "the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God." Two things are required, which God alone, by his Holy Spirit, can bestow, and which, through the merits of Christ, he is willing to impart to all who sincerely seek for them, through faith in his beloved Son.

The first is- The divine illumination of the understanding.

The second is- A relish for, and delight in, spiritual things.

Without the first, an awful darkness respecting the things of God, would envelope the mind. And, without the second, no pleasure could be found in them, even if the eyes of the understanding were enlightened to perceive their value. The visible Church contains within itself, many painful instances of those, to whom it may be said; "Well then, if you teach others, why don't you teach yourself?" Others there are who resemble the stationary guide-post. They only point out the road. How blessed are they who with Paul can say; "Be followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." And with Moses, "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it to you; come you with us, and we will do you good."

Through a spiritual discernment we perceive the excellencies of the gospel; and by a spiritual taste we enjoy them. Faith is the appropriating grace, that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen; that faith which is ever looking unto Jesus; that faith which receives him as revealed in the gospel; that faith which lives upon him, and is continually tasting that the Lord is gracious. The baptized worldling, the orthodox formalist, knows nothing of this

saving grace. It is wrought in the heart, solely through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lord increase my faith. If I have it not, delay not in mercy to bestow it, before the night of death overtakes me. If I have in any measure received the precious gift, make it more evident to myself and others by its holy fruits. Pardon my importunity, for you have said; "Ask, and it shall be given to you." "Men ought always to pray and not to faint."

Two things I would daily seek- to love Christ above every other object; and, to obey his will above every other law. Love and obedience form the brightest evidence of discipleship. Without these fruits of righteousness, faith is dead; a mere notion of the head; the mere utterance of the tongue. Many who now shine in their circle of religious friends, will, at last, be found no better than potsherds of earth covered with silver dross.

Oh! that I may seek after the religion of the heart. Lord make me humble and sincere. Grant to me the faith of your elect. Give me that spiritual perception, and that spiritual relish of heavenly truths, which is the blessed portion of your children here, and the foretaste of their future glory.

How solemn are these words of the blessed Jesus "Some who are despised now will be greatly honored then; and some who are greatly honored now will be despised then." Our Lord also declares, that "that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God." How should professors of the gospel look well to themselves.

These declarations, O my soul, speak forcibly to you. I profess to be a Christian, attend the ordinances of the Gospel, associate with pious people, have family worship, abstain from places of worldly amusement; so far is well. But all this may be done, while the heart remains unchanged. The Pharisees went farther than this, in their austerities; but He, who knew the heart, said to them, "I know you, that you have not the love of God in you." And to his listening disciples; "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

A person, living in a round of outward duties, may be esteemed first by many who look only at the outward appearance, while he is viewed as last by the Searcher of hearts. A talking, forward professor, may attract attention, and gain admirers; but it is the humble, meek, self-denying believer, who studiously avoids all public notice, while he is laboring with all his might to advance the interests of the Gospel, that will be owned by Jesus in that great day, when true faith will be made manifest by its genuine fruits. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

HUMILITY is the peculiar characteristic of the people of God. The converted sinner is so deeply humbled on account of his former transgressions, that he is completely stripped of all self-righteousness and self-dependence; and so charmed with the love and grace of the Redeemer, that he is willing to spend and be spent in his service. He acknowledges himself, and feels himself to be the chief of sinners, and less than the least of all saints. Hence he gives God all the glory for his salvation; trusts in nothing but the finished and complete righteousness of Jehovah Jesus; and declares with the fullest conviction of his own insufficiency and vileness, and of that Savior’s unspeakably glorious merits and power, "by the grace of God I am what I am."

He desires to be nothing in his own esteem, and the esteem of others, that Christ may be glorified. All his aims are directed to promote the exaltation of the Savior, and to debase the idol 'self', more and more. He daily mourns over those remainders of corruption in his heart, which are continually lusting against the Spirit; and rejoices in Christ Jesus, as his Atonement, Righteousness, and Hope of glory.

Hence, while this view of himself keeps him humble, the view of the Savior animates him to the conflict, and makes him finally more than conqueror over all his spiritual enemies. Feeling his own helplessness, he leans on the strength of Jesus; and knowing his own blindness, he prays without ceasing, for the illuminating influences of the Holy Spirit. He believes, and is not confounded. The Spirit of Christ dwells in his heart, witnessing with his Spirit that he is a child of God, and filling him with heavenly affections, holy desires, and spiritual joy. He thus bears the image of Christ, and evidences his election of God. His salvation being all of grace, he, with his whole soul, gives God the glory.

Such is the true believer, who is born from above; born of the Spirit. In this world he is often esteemed last; is branded by the formalist, as an enthusiast; and by the worldly, as a madman. But he shall be first in that day, when Christ shall make up his jewels, when he shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in all those who believe.

True religion will always influence the whole inner man. All the powers and faculties of the soul are brought under its sway. Forms and ceremonies are unavailing without this principle of grace, for "circumcision avails nothing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which works by love." "For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." "Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

In the present day much is being done, and still more devised, for the spiritual good of mankind. Christians are invited, on Gospel principles, to aid in these labors of love. But while the principles may be warmly enforced, yet the Gospel motive in the heart can only be imparted from above. The love of Christ to us should indeed constrain us to every act of self-denying obedience; yet, how few comparatively feel that love to the Savior which urges onward in the career of usefulness.

It is painful to think how much exertion may be made, and how much money expended, without one single motive which can render the service and sacrifice well-pleasing unto God. If called to labor in the field of benevolence, how needful it is to watch over the heart, to examine the principles, to scrutinize the motives of our actions. There is so much selfishness in our fallen nature, such a desire of pre-eminence, such a secret delight in human applause, such a high opinion of one's own powers, talents, however weak and inefficient, that there is daily need for that blessed grace which alone can make us humble, and keep us so.

Lord, root out of my heart that deadly weed of pride, which is so hateful to you, and so destructive to my soul. Give me, blessed Savior, that humble, lowly mind which dwelt in you. O let me tread in your steps. Clothe me with humility.

It is a serious truth, that a person may spend his whole life in feeding others, while he starves himself. The soul cannot thrive without spiritual meditation, retirement, secret prayer, and a devout study of the Holy Scriptures. The neglect of these things is the cause why so many cry out; "My

leanness, my leanness, woe unto me." "They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept."

God has closely connected the means with the end, as he has also the precept with the promise; but still a certain state of heart is needed, to attain the blessing. The understanding may be well furnished with Gospel truth, and yet the heart remain destitute of Gospel grace. We ought, and it is our privilege, and should be our desire, to lay out our time and talents, however small, for Christ and the good of souls; but in doing this, we must look well to the spring, the motive, the principle of action. This cannot be too deeply or too frequently impressed upon the mind. All must flow from faith in the Savior. All must be the genuine expression of ardent love to him. All must be directed simply to his glory. Self must be annihilated. Pride must be crucified. The praise of men must be disregarded; and Christ, and Christ alone must be seated on the throne of the affections. Then will a cup of cold water, given in his name be accepted. Then will the widow’s mite be esteemed precious. Then will the smallest effort done in faith to glorify Christ among men, be well-pleasing unto God.

Lord! give me simplicity and sincerity, humility and love. Let all my doings be the fruit of faith. O let me think, and speak, and act, and live for you. Two things I would wish to attain– to say little, and do much. Lord, set a watch before the door of my mouth. Give me wisdom to know when to speak, and when to be silent. Let my speech be always with grace. Let me ever be willing to help forward the cause of truth in the earth, yet always desirous to take the lowest place among the laborers in your vineyard.

However blind the world may be to its own faults, it is quick sighted enough in discovering the failings of religious professors. The men of the world readily perceive their inconsistencies, and charge them upon the religion which they profess. Thus a vainglorious professor of godliness often spoils much good, and produces much evil. Christian prudence is therefore necessary, and, when springing from a knowledge of the human heart, from self-distrust, from genuine humility, from a real desire to advance the cause of God in simple dependence on divine aid, it is the means of effecting great things. In such a world as this, how greatly do we need the wisdom of the serpent combined with the harmlessness of the dove. When the blessed Gospel renews and governs the heart, through the Almighty energy of the Holy Spirit, then every excellence appears in its proper place and due proportion. The symmetry and beauty of the structure manifest a divine architect, whose prerogative alone it is to "make all things new."

The religion of the heart is simply Faith Working by Love. Jesus is the object of faith. Faith looks to him as the all-atoning sacrifice for sin. It comes to him as the helper and hope of the soul. It receives him as the Prophet, Priest, and King of his Church, the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Faith feeds upon him, as the bread of life; walks in his light, who is the light of the world; and, uniting the soul to him, as the branch is to the vine, it draws from him that grace and strength which causes the fruits righteousness to appear and abound.

Oh! what a precious gift is faith, wrought in the heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. "Without faith it is impossible to please God; for he who comes unto God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him." By faith, we stand in the liberty with which Christ has made us free. By faith, we walk steadily and perseveringly in the narrow way of holy obedience. By faith, we overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. By faith, we substantiate

things hoped for, and realize things not seen.

Is faith thus precious? Then surely it must be the solicitude of all to obtain it. Alas! no. Thousands of Christians who profess to believe, have it not. Where true faith dwells, its effects become visible. "Faith without works is dead." Does faith work by love to Christ to his people, his word, his ministers, his cause, his Sabbaths? Then, where true faith is, there love will be in active operation. Do we perceive this energy of love in all who call themselves Christians? Ah! no! Few, comparatively few, show their faith by an ardent, self-denying, and constant love. Faith purifies the heart. Is sin hated by all Christian professors? Is holiness the element in which they live? Alas! the reverse is too often the case.

Faith overcomes the world. Do all who profess to follow the meek and lowly Savior, renounce those pomps and vanities from which he came to deliver them? How many thousands practically deny the doctrine of their baptismal regeneration, by living in direct opposition to the vows and promises made in their names at their baptism! Are all baptized people bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit? Facts prove that they do not. The world maintains an awful power in the visible Church. It forms the crying sin of the age. That love of money, that thirst for power, that fondness for vain show, that quest of pleasure which pervades all grades of society, evidences our fallen state as a professing Christian people. We forget the solemn warning; "Repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of his place, unless you repent."

Lord, give me that deep conviction of sin which David felt, when he said unto Nathan; "I have sinned;" that heartfelt repentance which Job experienced, when he declared; "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes;" that brokenness of heart which Peter manifested, when "he went out and wept bitterly," that faith which upheld the blessed Paul, when he said; "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

O! Almighty Savior! fill me with faith, hope, and love; until faith is lost in vision, hope in enjoyment, and love is forever perfected in the region of peace and joy, through your own everlasting grace.

Father of Mercies, You alone I bless,

Oh Source divine of comfort and of peace;

When sorrow o’er my heart its mantle throws,

And all my days are marked by tears and woes;

Your gracious hand extends the kind relief,

Your smile paternal calms the poignant grief.

Yes! dearest Lord, I know your powerful word

In wildest storms can tranquil peace afford;

When death expands its cold and darksome shade,

And dire forebodings make the soul dismayed,

Your voice, blessed Savior, can dispel the gloom,

And light with joy my passage to the tomb.

How vain, how fleeting is the life of man!

How soon we traverse over its narrow span!

Without You, Lord, ah! what has life to boast,

A sinking vessel near a dangerous coast.

Death follows soon. Yet, through its darkened veil,

The dying saint can beams of glory hail!

As weary pilgrims wait their last remove,

My longing soul desires the joys above;

Eternal day will soon appear in view,

Then heaven possessed will prove the promise true.

A stranger here, I would abide a while,

Then hasten homeward to my Savior’s smile.

02.53. REALIZING THE DIVINE PRESENCE

53. REALIZING THE DIVINE PRESENCE

And he said, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest." Exo 33:14

Happy is the man who daily lives under the guardian care of the Almighty, who can say; "My beloved is mine, and I am his." "This God is our God forever and ever; be will be our guide even unto death." "You shall guide me with your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." "My flesh and my heart fails; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."

O! what a mercy it is, to have such a gracious God to look to. Lord, be pleased to draw my heart wholly to yourself, and enable me to place my trust under the shadow of your wings; to realize your presence at all times. Cause the light of your countenance to shine upon me, then will sorrow flee away at your presence, and joy spring up in my heart.

We live in a world which abounds with sin and grief; the latter ever growing out of the former, as its natural fruit. But, the blood of Christ can remove the one, and the Spirit of Christ can alleviate the other, so that all things shall work together for good. Oh! for a living faith, which can appropriate to itself the Savior’s merits, and extract sweetness from the bitterness of affliction.

Soon, very soon, must this frail tenement be laid in the silent tomb; shut out from the eye of man, and all the changes of this passing scene. Oh! that my soul may then be shut in with Christ, where sin and sorrow can never enter. My happiness will then commence; my bliss will be completed, when my raised body, spiritualized and refined, shall be reunited to my redeemed spirit on the morning of the resurrection of the just. Oh! blissful and glorious period! How every earthly thing fades before it, as shadows before the rising sun.

"How vain are all things here below,

How false, and yet how fair;

Each pleasure has its poison too,

And every sweet a snare."

Our most endeared enjoyments are transitory, and mixed up with many cares. If we cultivate the rose and admire its blushing leaves, and sweet perfume, the prickly thorn protects it; if we would possess the honeyed hive, it is guarded by a thousand stings. Truly our comforts are entwined with crosses. This world is not our rest.

The child of God can see wisdom and love in all this dispensation. Before Adam fell, there was no annoyance. In Paradise all was delight. But now the earth is covered with thorns and thistles, emblems of the Fall. We are daily taught, that it is through much tribulation we enter into the kingdom. This world is a school of discipline to the children of God, and afflictions are sent as medicine to heal the diseases of the mind, through the power and skill of the heavenly Physician.

This world is a place of trial; but thanks be to redeeming love, "There remains a rest to the people of God;" a purchased inheritance, a kingdom reserved, for them.

In Scripture, we find that promises are in general made to characters. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." If we ask, who shall see God? the promise replies; "the pure in heart." There are some broad and indefinite invitations which include within them the greatest blessings, as "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth." "Him who comes to me I will never cast out." And yet, even here, faith is included; for who will look to Christ, or come to Christ, but those who are led to feel their need of him through the secret grace of the Holy Spirit on their hearts; and who, like the bitten Israelites in the wilderness, cast their dying eyes upon the remedy provided for them?

It would be presumptuous to expect the glory of beholding Christ, and the felicity of dwelling forever with him, if we continue in a state of unbelief and impurity. Antinomianism is one of the depths of Satan; a most deadly poison to the soul. Salvation by grace, through faith in the blood of Christ, includes three great blessings–

I. A deliverance from the guilt, condemnation, and punishment of sin, through the death and righteousness of the Son of God.

II. A deliverance from the love, power, and pollution of sin, through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

III. A restoration to the divine image, which was lost through the Fall; and a realization of the divine presence in the soul, as the foretaste and pledge of future glory.

This is the nature of Christ’s salvation, which, while it cuts up the roots of self-righteousness, makes the believer righteous before God; and while it humbles him in the dust, makes him an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ. Oh! what a glorious salvation is that which destroys the image of Satan, and renews us after the image of Christ.

There is much information in the nominally Christian world; many go to and fro, and knowledge is increased; but does genuine piety, heart religion, true humility, keep pace with the growing expansion of our intellectual powers? Knowledge is power. It is a weapon which cuts two ways. If sanctified, it becomes a blessing; but if it is knowledge without piety; if it be knowledge drawn only from human science, to the neglect of the Book of God, it only sharpens the mind, and fits the agent for deeper works of darkness. Unsanctified knowledge is closely allied to Infidelity, as mental blindness is to Popery.

Nothing but the light of God’s word, through the illuminating influence of the Holy Spirit on the understanding and heart, can preserve us from being carried away by the sophistries of the infidel, the superstitions of the Papist, or the solicitations of the worldly and profane. Our hearts are naturally prone to evil. Our minds are naturally dark. Hence arises the necessity of reading diligently the Scriptures of truth with humble prayer for divine teaching, that we may know God, and his dear Son Jesus Christ, which is life eternal; that we may know ourselves, and the world around us; that we may know the way of life, and realize the presence of God while journeying to his courts above.

Oh! that I could daily realize the presence and providence of God. This would make me watchful and submissive. Did I continually feel the truth of Hagar’s declaration; "You God see me," what a

holy fear would fill my heart. To realize the divine presence, to live as seeing him who is invisible through the medium of his word and works is to walk as Enoch, Noah, and Abraham walked. It is to walk by faith. It is to walk so as to please God.

How sublime are the words of Jehovah; "Am I a God who is only in one place?" asks the Lord. "Do they think I cannot see what they are doing? Can anyone hide from me? Am I not everywhere in all the heavens and earth?" David lived under the sanctifying influence of this truth; "I can never escape from your spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me. I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night—but even in darkness I cannot hide from you. To you the night shines as bright as day."

"If I take," says David, "the wings of the morning;" If I could even fly upon the wings or rays of the morning light, which diffuses itself with such velocity over the globe from east to west, instead of being beyond Your reach, or by this sudden transition be able to escape Your notice, Your arm could still at pleasure prevent or arrest my progress, and I should still be encircled with the immensity of Your essence.

Oh! my soul, seek for grace thus to walk day by day as in the presence of your God and Savior. Are you washed from your sins through the blood of Christ? Then do not fear. He, who fills all space with his presence is your Friend. His arm encircles you. His power protects you. His eye is ever upon you. His ear is ever open to your cry. Nothing can harm you without his permission; nothing shall harm you by his command; for, if, you are united to Christ by a living faith, He will make all things work together for your good; he will supply all your needs, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Do you love God? Then rejoice in the sweet assurance, that nothing shall be able to separate you from his love. He is engaged in Covenant to keep you in all your ways; to keep you unto life eternal.

As the Head of the Church militant is now in glory, so shall all the members of Christ’s mystical body be united with their Head, as the Church triumphant, in the kingdom of heaven. Nothing is so sure as the glorification of the persevering believer. "He that endures to the end shall be saved." "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life!" The Word of Truth has said it, and it cannot be changed; "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

Oh! how safe, how happy is the true believer in Jesus. He may have trials, temptations, afflictions, griefs, and sorrows. This is the lot of God’s saints in every age, whom he calls his jewels, his peculiar treasure. They are chosen in Christ "before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy, and without blame before him in love." They are "from the beginning chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." They are "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit;" therefore they continue faithful even unto the end, being "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

According to the word of Christ, "My sheep shall never perish." They are called in time by the Gospel. They obey the calling, and suffer willingly the hatred of men, and the malice of devils.

They confess Christ boldly, and have to endure the contradiction of sinners, the rage of persecution, and sometimes a painful death. But still they are safe in the Ark of the Covenant; they are happy in the love of God. Christ and heaven are theirs. A glorious immortality awaits them. Soon they will be in the presence of the Savior whom they love; translated into that world of bliss, where the Lamb is the light thereof, and God its glory.

O! my soul, cease not to pray for an increase of faith, and love, and holy obedience; an increase of patience, resignation, and hope; an increase of peace, and joy, and gratitude; an increase of every grace, by which God may be glorified, the Savior honored, and yourself fitted for the participation of those blessings which abound in the Paradise above.

The excellent Henry observed; "He who eyes providences, shall never lack providences to eye." This was David’s experience. He was an accurate observer both of Providence and Grace; therefore he never lacked motives either for humiliation, confidence, gratitude, or praise. The fifty-first Psalm is expressive of the deepest self-abasement, and of humble hope in the divine mercy, after the message of God to him by Nathan the Prophet. The sixty-second Psalm declares his trust in God at all times, as the God of his salvation, the rock of his strength, and his refuge. The one hundred and third Psalm is a song of thanksgivings for mercies, countless as the sands. The one hundred and seventh Psalm is a beautiful survey of the Providence of God, with a call on all men to praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men. Indeed all the songs of the sweet Psalmist of Israel, have cheered and comforted the Church of God in every age. Like David, in our humble measure, may we glorify God, and solace the Christian pilgrim on his way to Zion.

Are we the children of God? Then we may rest calmly under all providences, whether of a comforting or bereaving nature. How precious are the words of Christ; "What is the price of five sparrows? A couple of pennies? Yet God does not forget a single one of them. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to him than a whole flock of sparrows." As if our Lord had said; If your heavenly Father remembers the little birds of the air, to protect and feed them, will he forget you, for whom he gave his only begotten Son?

Paul answers this question by the Holy Spirit; "What can we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since God did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won’t God, who gave us Christ, also give us everything else?"

Blessed Lord, "you will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you." Oh! may I ever feel a confidential reliance on your power and grace, through faith in your promises in Christ Jesus. You will never forsake those who make your word their trust. Give me a strong faith to glorify you under all circumstances, whether of trouble or of joy. Let not the things of time obscure the views of eternity. Wean my heart from earth. Fix my affections on Yourself. Be my Center and my Crown. May all my fresh springs of happiness be in You; all my hopes of glory flow from You. Prepare me for Your kingdom, and oh! make me there an everlasting monument of Your love.

Happy the man, who, in this world of woe,

Where troubles spring, and bitter waters flow,

Enjoys the presence of his pardoning God,

And lies submissive ’neath his chastening rod.

While journeying homeward through a desert land,

He trusts the guidance of a Father’s hand

Though darkness often overspread his earthly scene,

His soul is ever peaceful and serene.

Midst swelling waves, and on a boisterous sea,

From fearful doubts and sad forebodings free

With joy, at length, he lands upon the shore,

Where sin and sorrow shall be known no more.

Oh! blessed Lord! your people’s Guide and Guard,

Their present Portion, and their great Reward,

O be my Hope, my Help, my Joy, my Crown,

O keep me- save me- seal me for Your own.

02.54. EARNEST DESIRES FOR PARDONING

54. EARNEST DESIRES FOR PARDONING AND SANCTIFYING GRACE

"For your name’s sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity; for it is great." Psa 25:11

"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." Psa 51:10

David’s plea must be mine; "O Lord pardon my iniquity for it is great." Also the publican’s prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner." And Peter’s cry, "Lord, save me! or I perish."

With shame and confusion of face I look up unto you, Oh! bleeding Lamb, for having slighted your goodness, and loving-kindness towards me. Take away this earthliness from my mind; this coldness from my heart; this insensibility to the things of God. Preserve me from a secret alienation of heart; from a growing lukewarmness. Do not allow the enemy to triumph over me. Allow me not to fall from you. Adorable Jesus! I acknowledge my vileness, my worthlessness, my ingratitude. But, oh! let me still hope in your mercy; still plead the merit of your blood; still expect your renewing strength; still long, and look, for the visits of your grace. I am a sinner, and you died to save sinners.

You are the Rock of Ages, the everlasting Strength. Endue me with power from on high to overcome all my indwelling corruptions, which, like a thick cloud, intervene between my soul and you, the Sun of Righteousness, and thus prevent the rays of your consolation from gladdening my heart, and making me to abound in the fruits of righteousness. To whom can I look- to whom can I go, but unto You, O Friend of sinners. Lord, I come invited by your word. I come at your sweet call, for pardon, peace, and holiness. You delight to save. O make me willing to be saved in your way, and on your terms. May I have grace to receive salvation as the gift of grace, and to plead for mercy as a lost sinner, through your all-prevailing name and merits.

You, O Jesus, are exalted "to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins;" and shall I not praise you for such infinite love, such abounding grace to the chief of sinners? O give me a heart to praise you. Stir up my languid desires. Inflame my cold affections. Set my whole soul on fire with holy love. Lord! I am sorely grieved, that I love you so little; that my affections move so slowly towards you. But, you give more grace. O bestow it upon me in richer abundance, that so I may live more to your glory, and to the comfort of my own soul, until joy shall be complete, and love perfected, in your presence and glory.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." What reason I have continually to complain of a barren heart. Did I say barren? Is it not full of evil? And, yet, it is a barren heart still, destitute of that love and humility, and those heavenly affections, which dwell in every child of God. Oh! how I long to be a real, sincere disciple of Jesus Christ. It is easy to make a profession of religion; that may be done by fallen nature; but to possess the Spirit of Christ, can only be enjoyed by those whom Sovereign Grace endues with so great a benefit.

Oh! that I knew how to estimate the blessings of salvation. Lord, enlighten my mind to see more clearly the riches of your grace, the wonders of your love, and the greatness of your mercy, as manifested to perishing sinners, in Christ Jesus. O allow me to taste your goodness, and relish those sublime truths, which are revealed in your holy word. How painful, that I should be so little affected by the agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion, of my suffering Redeemer. Why is not my soul all on fire, when I think of your love? Why is it not melted into tears, when I think of my dying Savior? Am I harder than the rock in Horeb? Colder than the northern ice? Lord! smite my rocky heart with the rod of your loving-kindness; dissolve my frozen affections, by the melting beams of your grace.

Ah! "When shall I be made clean? when shall it once be." Lord grant that it may be Now. This night I may be in eternity. O! blessed Jesus, hasten your glorious work of sanctification in my soul. Alas! what cause have I to complain of that dead sea which lies within. Oh! that the living waters from the sanctuary may flow into my corrupted heart; that pure streams may constantly issue from it into my life and conversation.

How distressing are evil thoughts. How dreadful is the perception of such subtle wickedness, insinuating itself into the mind, and fixing its abode for days, in opposition to strivings, prayers, and tears! Lord lift up your arm. "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered." Bid the powers of darkness to depart from me; or, if these thoughts arise from the corruption of my fallen nature, O! remove this dreadful cause, by plunging me into the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness; by sitting as a refiner’s fire; and by consuming, throng your grace, the dross of sin. Then shall I be holy and happy, peaceful and full of joy.

Your name, blessed Jesus, is SAVIOR, and your work SALVATION. Your office is to save sinners, and your delight is with the sons of men. O then, encouraged by your grace, by your precious promises, and everlasting love; yes, emboldened by the sweetest calls and invitations of your word, I come, blessed Friend of sinners, beseeching you to pardon all my sins; to give me a new heart; to fill me with your heavenly Spirit; and when I shall have served you here on earth, to translate me to your kingdom of glory.

Time is hastening on the wing. Every moment cuts off a portion of my life, and leaves me less time to work out my salvation. I cannot tell how soon I may be called into eternity- an Unchangeable Eternity. My day of grace may speedily draw to its close. Oh! then, be diligent, my soul, be diligent. Work while it is day. Delay not to seek the Savior of sinners. Defer not that work, in comparison of which, all the boasted works of mortals are like painted bubbles, floating on the air. Soon they will burst and vanish away, but the great work of salvation will be commensurate with eternity. If thus to seek for pardoning grace, with ever-longing desire, be esteemed "vile," oh! that with David I may say; "I will yet be more vile."

Blessed Jesus, behold me in mercy, in pity, and in love. Oh! let my wretchedness move your compassion. Was there ever a more miserable object than I?

I am BLIND. Lord open my eyes to behold wondrous things out of your law. Open my understanding to understand the Scriptures. Give me eye-salve that I may see your beauty, and my deformity; your perfection, and my pollution; your preciousness, fitness, fullness, love, and glory, and my own helplessness and nothingness.

I am MUTE. Lord unloose the string which guilt has tied. Enable me to speak your praise; to tell of all your wondrous works; to tell of your everlasting love; your groans, and tears, and blood, shed for the vilest of the vile, even, amazing grace, for me!

I am A HELPLESS CRIPPLE. Oh! heal those bruises which sin has made; heal the bones which sin has broken. Restore me to the joys of your salvation; then shall I walk in the path of your commandments, and not be weary; then shall I run the heavenly race, and not faint; then shall I mount up in heart and affection to you, my adorable Jesus, as on eagle's wings.

I am FULL OF DEADLY DISEASES. Sin has poisoned all the springs of life; polluted all the powers of my soul; and filled me with a dire disease. Oh! great Physician, apply the healing balm of your precious blood; cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit; and make me a new man, through the healthful Spirit of your grace.

I have LOST THE SENSE OF FEELING. Sin has paralyzed my soul; blunted the edge of my conscience; and hardened my heart. Oh! give me a quick perception of evil, a dread of its approach. May the very breath of sin be nauseous to my soul. May I never rest until the foul corruption be removed; until the inner man be wholly renewed by You.

I am SPIRITUALLY DEAD. This is my state by nature. Though alive and active to evil, I am dead to God and goodness. Though my mind can devise mischief, I am not sufficient of myself, to think a good thought. Oh! You, who are the Resurrection and the Life, bid me come forth from the grave of nature's corruption; bid me live, live to you now, by faith and love; and with you when time shall be no more, in your kingdom of glory.

I am EVERYTHING THAT IS VILE AND WORTHLESS. This I must be, if, by nature I am spiritually blind, and dumb, and helpless, and diseased, and paralyzed, and dead! Oh! divine Emmanuel! You who are the Way, the Truth, and the Life, unite me to Yourself. Then, as viewed in You, I shall be beautiful and lovely in the eyes of my heavenly Father. In you, and clothed with your righteousness, I shall be complete, without spot and blameless. In you I shall be adorned with celestial graces, through the indwelling Spirit of Holiness. Oh! blessed Savior, wash me through your precious blood, that every guilty stain may disappear; then, when presented before the Eternal Father as your ransomed one, and beheld by Him who cannot look upon iniquity, I shall be accepted in You, as my Righteousness, Atonement, and Intercessor, with complacency and favor, and be admitted through You to endless joy and glory.

While a sojourner and pilgrim upon earth, I want to be steadfast in faith, fervent in love, joyful in hope, low in my own eyes, meek in spirit, and pure in heart. These are the graces which constitute and adorn the Christian character. These are the old, the silver, and the precious stones which I would build upon the true and only foundation– Jesus Christ the Righteous. To Him I would look, as the Author and Finisher of every good and perfect gift, bestowed upon perishing sinners by the Spirit of his grace.

Without your WISDOM I would wander into the mazes of error and heresies; be carried about by every wind of doctrine, and at last make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience.

Without your STRENGTH I would never hold on my way, or hold out to the end, amid the oppositions of the world, the flesh, and the devil. I would shrink from the cross. I would betray my

Savior. I would ruin my soul.

Without your RIGHTEOUSNESS, I would forever remain under the curse. I may toil and labor by legal obedience, by ceremonial observances, by fastings and prayers, by mortifications and austerities, but I would still remain unsaved and unblessed. If I seek for justification through these works of the law, I would never find the favor of God. Jesus is the Lord our Righteousness. He alone can present me perfect and complete, clothed in his merits alone. United to Him, all is changed. My works are works of love, not grounds of merit. They are accepted of the Father, through the Son, as fruits of faith and evidences of my adoption into his family.

O! then, None but Christ, none but Christ! He alone, by his Spirit, can enable me to vanquish the powers of darkness, to overcome the corruptions of my heart, to crucify the lustings of the flesh. The worst enemy I have is MYSELF, strange to tell; yet, no less strange than true! I may escape from other enemies, but from this I cannot flee. Wherever I go, SELF still is there. The inbred evil travels with me. I may cross mighty oceans, traverse extensive deserts, plunge into the deepest recesses of the tangled forest, or the caverned earth, yet, in the profoundest solitude, SELF is there. The records of the ancient ascetics fully prove that Satan and inbred sin, are as powerful in the mountain cell as in the crowded city.

None but the harassed, tempest-tossed believer knows the dreadful conflicts between the flesh and the Spirit, between the law in his members and the law of his mind. His cry is; "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I flee away and be at rest!" But soon he feels the vanity of this wish; for even if could he fly on eagle’s wings to the earth’s remotest bounds, he would carry with him all the evil he deplores. He therefore prays for present grace and strength, for present power to conquer sin, and glorify his Savior in the place and station divine wisdom has appointed for him.

It would not be expedient or fit, that the internal conflict should be minutely described. Those thoughts which, like lightning, dart into the mind, and set the passions on fire, are known only to the tempted believer and the heart-searching God. When hated and resisted, they are temptations, and not sins.

The shield of faith alone can quench these fiery darts of Satan. Happy is the tried believer who can say from the heart, at these distressing seasons; Lord, these vile imaginations are my grief, my burden, yes, the very anguish of my soul. My will rejects them, my heart detests them. You know that I long for deliverance from them. Oh! come blessed Spirit of Holiness, drive these fiends away! Wash me afresh in the Redeemer’s blood. Breathe on my dying graces. Make me more vigorous, more alive to You, more actively employed in all good things; then shall Satan find no room for his hellish injections, but heavenly peace and holy joy will reign triumphant in my soul.

O! that this may be the prayer of my heart, in seasons of conflict with indwelling sin. What continual need do I find for the grace of God. Alas when I would do good, evil is present with me. I find it most difficult to keep my thoughts in subjection to the law of Christ, and to prevent my imagination from roving to the ends of the earth, and building ten thousand visionary schemes. How painful to feel the divine principle so weak, and the corrupt principle so strong.

"Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." We are saved, not by presumption, but by a holy fear. Thus says the Lord, "I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Lord implant your fear in my heart,

entwined with hope in your love, that, through a living faith in Jesus, I may stand in the evil day, obtain the victory, and receive the crown of life, to the praise of the glory of your grace.

My soul, blessed Savior, pants after thee,

To find You, forms the summit of desire

Your smile can set my mourning spirit free,

Your peace my heart with holy joy inspire.

A wretched wanderer on forbidden ground,

Your Name and Will was long to me unknown;

But mercy sought me in this night profound,

And kindly drew me to Yourself alone.

Your voice of love, in accents sweet and mild,

Revealed Salvation in that favored hour;

Your Spirit formed me to a little child,

The seal and witness of your grace and power.

But ah! your patience since that joyful day,

Has borne my languors with a Father’s love;

You have I left- ungrateful have I strayed,

Though still my mercies ever faithful prove.

Why do I feel such weakness in my heart?

Such cold affections to my heavenly Friend?

It is not You, blessed Savior- I depart

From You, whose love nor measure knows nor end.

Take pity Lord- Dispel my guilty fear;

Subdue my heart- its hardness now remove.

My soul on Golgotha to You was dear,

I rest, O God, on your Eternal Love.

02.57. EXPERIMENTAL RELIGION

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57. EXPERIMENTAL RELIGION

"I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return." 2Ti 1:12

To talk about Christian Experience is, by some people considered little short of enthusiasm. To try to enlist the affections on the side of Christianity is by others deemed extravagance. In their view, the sober-minded Christian is one who attends to the duties of his station, is a strict observer of religious ordinances, and distributes of his substance to the poor and needy. To speak to them about the corruption of the heart, the inward conflict, the power of faith, the energy of love, the work of the Spirit, the grace of the Savior, is like talking about an unknown region.

It was not so with the blessed Paul. He could say, "I know the one in whom I trust." He was taught of God to know, by sweet experience, the efficacy of Christ’s atonement, the sufficiency of his grace, and the prevalency of his intercession. His ardent desire was "to know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

John also, being taught of God, was well acquainted with spiritual knowledge and religious experience. His first epistle abounds with the most delightful proofs of this. He seems to rise, as he writes, on the wings of an assured faith and hope; "You have an unction from the Holy One, and you know all things." "We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." "You know that he was manifested to take away our sins." "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." "We know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us." "Every one that loves, is born of God, and know God." "Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit." "We have known and believed the love that God has to us." "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments." "If we know that he hear us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." "We know that whoever is born of God sins not." "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness." "We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."

O! what a blessed knowledge is this. How deeply it enters into the experience and feelings of true believers. Here is nothing cold and calculating, nothing frozen or formal, all is warmth and energy. Happy are they who can say with Peter; "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." With John; "We love him, because he first loved us." And with Paul; "The love of Christ constrains us."

With such declarations of the Apostles, recorded in the Sacred Scriptures for our encouragement and pursuit after holiness, we need not be ashamed of Experimental Religion. The world’s shame

is the Christian’s glory. Such was Paul’s triumph. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believes." "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

They know little of the religion of Jesus Christ, who cannot follow him through evil report as well as good report; who cannot deny themselves or take up their cross, bearing his reproach. "If we deny him, he also will deny us." The fear of man, and the love of the world, are the bane of our profession, and the ruin of thousands. The words of our Lord should be impressed on the hearts of all his followers; "This is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." So deeply did the Apostles enter into the intercessory prayer of their divine Master, that their hearts’ desire was, that the knowledge of Christ crucified should become universal.

Paul prays for the Ephesian converts, that the blessings of spiritual illumination, spiritual strength, and faith and love, might be imparted in rich abundance. "I have never stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the wonderful future he has promised to those he called. I want you to realize what a rich and glorious inheritance he has given to his people. I pray that you will begin to understand the incredible greatness of his power for us who believe him." If this do not be experimental godliness, where is it to be found?

But the tender-hearted Apostle does not rest here. He still prays, on his bended knees, for an increased outpouring of the Spirit upon his beloved children in the faith; "When I think of the wisdom and scope of God’s plan, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit. And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God’s marvelous love. And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love really is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God."

For the Philippians, he prays in the sweetest spirit of ministerial affection; "God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus. I pray that your love for each other will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in your knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until Christ returns. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—those good things that are produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God."

For the Colossians, he has the same overflowing tenderness of desire; "So we have continued praying for you ever since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you a complete understanding of what he wants to do in your lives, and we ask him to make you wise with spiritual wisdom. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and you will continually do good, kind things for others. All the while, you will learn to know God better and better. We also

pray that you will be strengthened with his glorious power so that you will have all the patience and endurance you need. May you be filled with joy, always thanking the Father, who has enabled you to share the inheritance that belongs to God’s holy people, who live in the light. For he has rescued us from the one who rules in the kingdom of darkness, and he has brought us into the Kingdom of his dear Son. God has purchased our freedom with his blood and has forgiven all our sins."

For the Thessalonians, he also pours out his heart before God; "And may the Lord make your love grow and overflow to each other and to everyone else, just as our love overflows toward you. As a result, Christ will make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy when you stand before God our Father on that day when our Lord Jesus comes with all those who belong to him."

Let a minister of the gospel pray and preach in this fervent, exalted, spiritual, heavenly strain, and he would be branded by many, yes, it is to be feared even by some who call themselves "the successors of the Apostles," as an enthusiast. Would holy Paul have escaped such a censure, had he lived in these days? Is there no danger, lest spiritual religion is not to be once more buried beneath the superincumbent weight of those errors and idle ceremonies, from which we were happily delivered by our martyred Reformers?

There is in all men, naturally, a thirst for power. Every age has its "Diotrephes, who loves to have the pre-eminence, prating against us," says John, "with malicious words; and not content therewith, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and forbids those who would, and casts them out of the church." What is the advice of the Apostle to such holy, yet excommunicated believers? "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that does good is of God; but he that does evil has not seen God."

The Christian’s path then is plainly marked out. He is to take up his cross daily. He is to count the cost. If he is faithful to his Savior, he must be a partaker of his Savior’s sufferings; so said our Lord; "If the have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." It is a painful truth, but one which cannot be concealed, because it is emblazoned in colors of blood on the page of Scripture, and on the page of the Church’s history, that the greatest persecutors of Christ, and of his true believing members, have been those who have sat in the seat of Moses (Jews), and in the chair of Peter (Catholics)! Who were so clamorous for the crucifixion of our Lord, as the chief priests, the scribes, and elders of the Jewish Church? Who, in after ages, were so bitter against the sheep of Christ, as those very ministers of the Christian Church who styled themselves Shepherds, but who were ravening wolves. Jesus cautioned his people against such people, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves; you shall know them by their fruits."

Paul foresaw, by the spirit of prophecy, the approaching apostasy; "Take heed," said he, addressing the elders of the Ephesian church at Miletus, "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch."

Yes! we have need to "watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation;" lest we forsake the standard of the cross, through the influence or the fear of man. The times are indeed fearful, when those, who once stood foremost in the cause of Christ, who were valiant for the truth on the earth, now desert his standard; when those, who once preached, in all its simplicity and purity, the gospel of the grace of God, are now drawn into the vortex of a system, which will disfigure our Reformed Churches by Papal ceremonies, and darken them by Papal doctrines. Is it not a presage of evil days, when sacraments are virtually put in the place of Christ? When the doctrine of the atonement is to be sparingly exhibited to the perishing sinner? When the rights of conscience are made to succumb at the feet of an assumed infallibility? When the foundations are thus destroyed, what must the righteous do?

Truly this was not the preaching of the Apostles. Paul "determined not to know anything except Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Peter gloried in the Lamb, who redeemed us by his blood. John gives us the song of the church triumphant in heaven; "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

Neither was this the conduct of the Apostles. Paul says to the Corinthian Christians, "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy; for by faith you stand." Peter exhorts the elders to diligence and humility; "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock." John asserts the right of private judgment "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

And by what touchstone must they be tried? Isaiah informs us, "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." While we have the light, may we have grace to walk in the light, and with the noble Bereans, to search the Scriptures daily, whether these things are so.

An awful delusion, a spiritual darkness, is rapidly over-spreading the Reformed Churches. Is there not a cause, when apostate Rome is viewed as an "erring sister, as "the Savior’s holy home," instead of the mystical Babylon doomed to destruction.

The judgments of God are evidently lowering over our land. The dark clouds are gathering around us. We have long been blessed with the light of the Gospel, but if we do not repent, the candlestick will be removed from us, and carried to other lands. Our God is the same unchangeable Jehovah. In his word, he has taught us to dread declension from his ways. How awakening are his warnings. "If you will not be reformed by me but will walk contrary unto me; then will I also walk contrary unto you." "I will come unto you quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." "I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searches the reins and hearts; and I will give unto everyone of you according to your works." "Remember how you have received and heard; and hold fast, and repent. If therefore you shall not watch, I will come on you as a thief, and you shall not know what hour I will come upon you."

The signs of the times indicate the coming storm. Have we not reason to say with Peter, "For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin first among God’s own children. And if even we Christians must be judged, what terrible fate awaits those who have never believed God’s Good

News? And 'If the righteous are barely saved, what chance will the godless and sinners have?' So if you are suffering according to God's will, keep on doing what is right, and trust yourself to the God who made you, for he will never fail you." The storm, which overwhelms the wicked, will purify the saints of God.

Oh! solemn warnings of most just judgment! Lord awaken our slumbering souls; enlighten our darkened understandings; preserve your Church from heresy and error; do not allow the champions for your truth to become, "as when a standard-bearer faints."

The deliverance and journeyings of the children of Israel, form a striking counterpart to the Christian's redemption and pilgrimage to the heavenly Canaan. They were held in bondage by the Egyptian tyrant, and though they groaned under their oppression, yet were loath to leave the iron furnace. Likewise, sinners are kept in awful slavery to Satan and their lusts; and though often wretched to the last degree, still they hug their chains.

The Almighty, by an act of grace, undertook to rescue his people from the power of Pharaoh, by signs, and wonders, and with a stretched-out arm. Likewise, sinners are redeemed from the tyranny of Satan, from the evil of sin, the curse of the law, and the damnation of hell, by the omnipotent Jehovah Jesus, God manifest in the flesh.

As the Israelites sang the praises of God, when, having passed through the Red Sea in safety, they saw their enemies dead on the shore; so believers rejoice with joy unspeakable, when they experience a mighty deliverance from all their enemies, whom the Lord subdues before them. In heaven they will sing the conqueror's song; the song of Moses and of the Lamb.

The Israelites, before they could enter into the promised rest, had to traverse a long howling wilderness, that their faith and patience might be exercised, and the power, love, and faithfulness of God, exhibited in their preservation and protection. So, believers in Jesus, after their conversion to God, and regeneration through the Spirit, have to journey through the valley of life, amid numberless trials and difficulties, snares and temptations, before they enter the heavenly rest, to prove the reality of their faith, and to manifest the grace of their crucified Lord.

The history of the Israelites in the wilderness, is the history of the human heart. We see in them a faithful picture of ourselves. When all is shining and pleasant, our hearts can feel elated and joyous. When the purse is heavy, the heart is light; but when the purse is light, the heart is heavy. Thus it was with the children of Israel. So long as their outward comforts continued, they were thankful; but when their bread and water began to fail, they murmured against Moses, and rebelled against God.

Is it not thus with us? When our sun is overcast, when storms arise, when comforts fail, when earthly sources of delight are dried up; then sadness seizes upon our spirits; doubts and fears prevail; murmurs escape our lips. In these trying seasons, the faith, even of believers, falters; while the faith of the stony ground hearers, having no root, withers! How destructive is unbelief! How deceiving is the confidence of nominal Christians. "Every branch in me," said our Lord, "that bears not fruit he takes away." It is a fearful truth, one which should make us tremble, that out of the many thousands of Israelites who came out of Egypt, only two were found faithful, and permitted to enter the promised land; all the rest were excluded through unbelief."

Paul applies this fact most forcibly to the Christian Church; "Be careful then, dear friends. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. You must warn each other every day, as long as it is called "today," so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ." Then, referring to the rebellious Israelites, he adds, "And who made God angry for forty years? Wasn't it the people who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom was God speaking when he vowed that they would never enter his place of rest? He was speaking to those who disobeyed him. So we see that they were not allowed to enter his rest because of their unbelief."

The practical conclusion is then drawn from these solemn premises, "God's promise of entering his place of rest still stands, so we ought to tremble with fear that some of you might fail to get there. For this Good News—that God has prepared a place of rest—has been announced to us just as it was to them. But it did them no good because they didn't believe what God told them."

The visible Church of Christ, like the Church in the wilderness, is composed of a mixed multitude. All men have not faith. Many have the form of godliness, who deny the power. Many say, "The temple of the Lord are we", in whose hearts the Savior never dwelt; and who shall never enter into the temple above. Self-deception is no less common, than it is fatal.

The Jewish priests prided themselves on being the children of Abraham; when our Lord plainly told those who they were the seed of the old serpent! Is not the same delusion still practiced? Do not the priests of the Romish Church boast themselves on being the successors of Peter, though they would persecute, even unto deaths, those who faithfully adhere to the doctrines, and live in the spirit, of the holy Apostles? The history of their Church is written in letters of blood. Romanism lacks the power, and not the will, to root out the heretical tares, to gather them in bundles, as in the days of the Marian persecution, and to burn them!

O! that this leaven of self-deception may never work fatally in our Reformed Churches. The subtle enemy of mankind is ever seeking to darken, if he cannot destroy, the TRUTH. He can transform himself into an angel of light, as well as assume the character of a roaring lion. No, he often combines both, in his warfare against the Church of Christ. Popery is the masterpiece of Satan, which can adapt itself to every state of society. It is the religion of the natural heart. Lord! save me from unbelief; self-deceptions; Satan's delusions; and the fear of man.

I am now a pilgrim journeying through the wilderness. The manna is daily descending; and the water of life continually flowing to sustain and refresh me. Jesus, the true bread from heaven, is freely given; the Holy Spirit, as a living stream, is graciously supplied from the fountain of eternal love. Oh! how great is the goodness, truth, and mercy, of my covenant God, Father, Son, and Spirit, to an unworthy worm of the earth. Lord, make me grateful. Give me a believing and a loving heart. Preserve me from self-will and self-seeking; from self-sufficiency and self-pleasing. Mold my will into yours; and enable me in all things to seek your glory.

Guide me, O great Jehovah, in safety through this desert-land. Shield me by your power. Cheer me with your presence. Uphold my goings in your way. Let me not turn aside into crooked paths; nor dread any danger, while in the path of duty. Keep me as the apple of your eye. Hide me under the shadow of your wings. Impart that spiritual illumination which will direct me aright; that spiritual

strength, which will enable me to endure unto the end; that assurance of faith, which will animate me to the conflict; and that experience of your love, which will support me under every trial, and cause me to die, rather than deny you before men. O grant these inestimable blessings, for your own mercy and truth's sake; for you, O Lord, alone are the God of my salvation.

Holy Father! hear my prayer,

As, through Jesus, it ascends;

On You I cast my every care,

Now the day of labor ends.

Soon will sleep my eyelids close,

In Your love may I repose.

All my days are known to thee,

All my times are in Your hand;

Life is like the rolling sea;

Ebbs and flows at Your command

As a plant does bloom and die,

Man is only vanity.

Thus today is swiftly gone,

Solemn witness to appear

At Jehovah's holy throne,

How shall I the judgment bear?

Lord! I shrink with shame and awe,

'Midst the thunders of Your law.

Jesus! clothe my naked soul,

With Your Righteousness divine,

You can make the wounded whole,

Let Your Spirit seal me thine.

Pour Your comfort in my heart,

Never from my soul depart.

Hide me, O Almighty Friend,

Under Your paternal wing,

From the ills which life attend,

Then will I Your goodness sing.

Lord! renew my wasted powers,

Consecrate my waking hours.

02.58. THE UNPROFITABLE NATURE OF

58. THE UNPROFITABLE NATURE OF EXTERNAL RELIGION, WHEN MADE A SUBSTITUTE FOR GODLINESS

"Having a form of godliness but denying its power." 2Ti 3:5

Gracious God! impress this truth upon every heart, that all who call themselves Christians may live under its saving influence– that externals of religion profit little. We may regularly attend the house of God; be stated communicants at the Lord's Table; observe with rigor the appointed fasts of the Church; use various austerities to mortify the flesh; be conscientiously strict in private devotion, and in family worship; be zealous for the Church in all its rites and ceremonies; be actively engaged in the management of religious and benevolent institutions; and yet, with all this External Religion, remain mere Formalists. Nothing is pleasing to God, nothing is vital in religion, but what springs from faith in Christ. Without love, all our doings are nothing worth.

O! then, what need we have to watch and pray, lest we should be deceiving ourselves, having only the form of godliness while denying its power. We may deceive ourselves and others, but the all-seeing God cannot be deceived. He looks at the heart. He weighs the spirits. Blessed Lord! show me my true state and character. Deliver me from a deceived heart, from formality and hypocrisy. Give me a single eye, make me upright and sincere before you.

Man is naturally legal and self-righteous. He is ever ready to substitute External Religion for godliness. The ancient Jews were continually reproved by their prophets on this very account. "I am sick of your sacrifices," says the Lord. "Don't bring me any more burnt offerings! I don't want the fat from your rams or other animals. I don't want to see the blood from your offerings of bulls and rams and goats. Why do you keep parading through my courts with your worthless sacrifices? The incense you bring me is a stench in my nostrils! Your celebrations of the new moon and the Sabbath day, and your special days for fasting—even your most pious meetings—are all sinful and false. I want nothing more to do with them. I hate all your festivals and sacrifices. I cannot stand the sight of them!"

True devotion cannot live in a sinful atmosphere, but formality can. This truth is verified in every age of the Church. Godliness has the promise of the life that now is. What a sweet assurance to the people of God. They shall have everything that can render this life truly happy; for, being the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, he will withhold nothing from those who is really for their good. Their sins are all forgiven through the blood of Christ. They are justified freely by his grace, and have peace with God. They are adopted into his family, and become heirs of his kingdom. They are made the temples of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in them, to enlighten, guide, sanctify, and comfort them on their way to Zion.

They may be hated and persecuted by the world; they may be often in heaviness through manifold temptations; they may often groan, being burdened; they may be frequently harassed by the enemy of souls, and by the rebellious lustings of indwelling sin; but they still have the promise of

the life that now is. They shall have sweet seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; they shall enjoy a pleasure to which the world is a stranger, a pleasure flowing from a close and abiding union to Christ their living Head, in whom dwells all the fullness of the godhead bodily, and out of whose fullness they shall receive continual supplies of grace and strength. They may be poor in temporal things, but Jesus will sweeten their little portion, while the rich have often gall and wormwood poured into their golden cup

O! my soul, are you looking unto Jesus? Are you longing to obtain an interest in his blood? Ah! what avail the gilded pomp and grandeur of the world? Do I want to be rich? Let me look at the end of the rich worldling who fared sumptuously every day, but when called into eternity, was cast into the lake of fire! Do I seek the praise of men and the honors of the world , Let me remember, that "whoever will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God;" that all who love the world, shall perish with the world when Christ shall come in flaming fire to take vengeance on all who will not have him to reign over them.

Do I pant after the pleasures of the world? Let me not forget, that all who now place their happiness in sinful gratifications shall feel the gnawing of the worm that never dies, and the torment of the fire which never shall be quenched. "Seek," then, O my soul, "those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Labor to possess that godliness which has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

Blessed truth; the promise of the life to come, is included in godliness. Oh! what a treasure, surpassing all the riches of ten thousand worlds. Could I call the stars my own, this vast possession would dwindle to a pinpoint, when compared with the inconceivably glorious portion of the humblest believer. He is an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ. Death alone can reveal the fullness of this blessedness. Here we must live by faith. So did John– "Yes, dear friends, we are already God’s children, and we can’t even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns. But we do know that when he comes we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. And all who believe this will keep themselves pure, just as Christ is pure."

O! eternal Spirit of all grace, renew my soul in righteousness, and fill me with light and love. Preserve me from formality. Guard me against self-deception. Deliver me from false views of religion, and false marks of grace. Enable me to walk in the narrow way, and strengthen me to withstand the world, the flesh, and the devil; to confess you before men, to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. O give me a new heart, that in simplicity and godly sincerity I may live a life of faith on earth, abound in the fruits of righteousness, and live a life of glory with you in heaven.

Though external religion, apart from godliness, profits little; yet, when connected with, and resulting from true piety, it profits much. Thus Paul declared to the Corinthians; "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." His life, from the period of his conversion, was dedicated to the service of his Savior. He deemed no labor too great, no toil too severe, no privation too painful, if only he could extend the Redeemer’s kingdom, and be made instrumental in bringing sinners to Christ. He exhorted the Roman Christians to active service "As you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity, unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness, unto holiness."

The Corinthians he also admonished; "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

His epistles abound with exhortations to activity in the cause of Christ, which may be summed up in the one addressed to the Hebrews; "For God is not unfair. He will not forget how hard you have worked for him and how you have shown your love to him by caring for other Christians, as you still do. Our great desire is that you will keep right on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true. Then you will not become spiritually dull and indifferent. Instead, you will follow the example of those who are going to inherit God’s promises because of their faith and patience."

True believers are consecrated to the Lord. "Or don’t you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body."

Surely this is one of the unsearchable riches of Christ. What an inconceivable honor for a poor worthless sinner to be made an habitation of God through the Spirit. For, "thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Every true believer is therefore humble and contrite, because with such the high and lofty One condescends to dwell. "To this man," says the Lord, "will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word." Oh! how gracious is our God. He "is near unto those who are of a broken heart; and saves such as be of a contrite spirit." "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise," was the prayer of David, when he supplicated for mercy.

The true believer is clothed with humility. Being filled with self-abasing views, he cries out with Job; "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." And with Jacob; "I am not worthy of the least of all your mercies." Yes, with Paul he esteems himself to be "less than the least of all saints," the chief of sinners.

Oh! my soul, are these your feelings and views? Are you panting after Christ? Are you hungering and thirsting after righteousness? Is sin your burden? Is purity your delight?

The true believer in Jesus experiences more pleasure in crucifying a lust, than the sensualist does in gratifying it; which proves that the gospel, even in its most painful exercises, far exceeds the fleeting pleasures of sin. The pleasures of the wicked, if such they can be called, are like the transient meteor; while the enjoyments of the righteous resemble the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day. The gratifications of the wicked, in the end, bite like a serpent and sting like an adder; but the felicities of the godly, flowing from faith in Christ, and communion with the Father through him, yield their sweetness in a dying hour. Truly, then, may we say with David; "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace." And with Solomon, "Wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

Happy, indeed, is the man who can say, in humility and sincerity, I desire above all things to love Jesus, and to repose my soul fully and entirely upon him. Where can I expect comfort, but from Him who is the fountain of felicity? Where can I find wisdom, but in Him in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge? Where can I obtain pardon and justification, but in and

through Him who paid the price for my redemption, even his own most precious blood; and who obeyed that holy law, which demands a sinless obedience to all its requirements?

How beautiful, how glorious, is the plan of human redemption, which amply provides for the honor of God and the happiness of man. Well may angels desire to look into this mystery of grace. Surely nothing can more clearly prove the blinding, hardening, and rebellious nature of sin, than the manner in which this dispensation of mercy is received by a world of sinners. Jesus, the compassionate Jesus, daily knocks at the door of our hearts, and sweetly says, "If any man hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." A promise this, of delightful communion and enjoyment of his love. But what reception does he meet with? Do we hail his approach with gladness? Do we throw wide open the doors of a willing mind? Do we say, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.

Alas! no. We ungratefully bar the doors against him, by unbelief, and pride, and the love of sin, as if he were coming to destroy our comfort, and to rob us of our peace. Oh! blind infatuation. Awful delusion! Jesus comes indeed to destroy our false comforts, and to remove our false peace. He comes to dislodge the strong man armed, and to save us from indwelling sin. He comes to dispel the darkness from our minds, to show us our true state and character, and to deliver us from that fatal security, by which we are bound. He comes to take away that self-love which conceals us from ourselves; which makes us fancy that all is safe and well, though there be but a step, and that a very short one too, between this destructive repose and everlasting torment.

Oh! how we should love this kind and heavenly Visitor, who comes to us on such an errand of love. Blessed Jesus! put forth your hand and touch my sin-sick soul. Speak the word only, and your servant shall be healed. Oh! all-gracious Redeemer, now that you are in heaven, your love and pity are the same; and my needs and weaknesses, my guilt and corruption, my helplessness and wretchedness, are so many pleaders with You to have mercy upon me! You have said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." Lord, I am sick, heal me. You have said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Lord, I am a sinner; the chief of sinners. O save me! Grant unto me repentance unto life, that I may turn from every evil way to You, the only true and living God. Lord, the work is all your own, and the whole glory shall be yours. I will lay the crown at your feet, and ascribe salvation unto You, who redeemed me through your blood, when made a vessel of mercy; a pillar in your temple, to go out no more.

02.61. ON THE APPROACH OF DEATH

61. ON THE APPROACH OF DEATH

"Behold, your days approach that you must die." Deu 31:14

The longest life, and the most useful one too, must draw to its close, for "death passed upon all men, for all have sinned." Though Moses was forbidden to enter into the earthly, he was not excluded from the heavenly rest. The time drew near when he must die. This event did not take him by surprise. The Lord said unto Moses, "Behold, the days approach that you must die." We cannot expect such a divine intimation. Yet still, enough is revealed in the word of God, and sufficient evidence is afforded to teach us, that "there is but a step between us and death." "For what is our life? It is even a vapor, which appears for a little time, and then vanishes away?"

Nothing discovers our fallen state more than insensibility to eternal things, a neglect of the gospel, an unwearied search for happiness among the creatures, instead of from God, the Fountain of Living Water. While thousands of professing Christians are busying themselves for futurity, Death levels his dart, and lays the worldling in the dust. How solemn was the message to Hezekiah "Thus says the Lord, Set your house in order; for you shall die, and not live." How happy was its effect upon his mind. "Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord." His prayer was heard, and fifteen years were added to his life. "This year you shall die," said Jeremiah to the false Prophet Hananiah, "because you have taught rebellion against the Lord. So Hananiah the prophet died the same year, in the seventh month."

The Scriptures abound with warnings and encouragements. "This year you shall die." Then let me feel and act as if I knew it were so ordered by him, in whose hands my breath is, and who has appointed my time upon earth after the good pleasure of his will. My stay upon earth cannot be long. My sand is running quickly down. My shadow is lengthening apace, which proves that the sun is fast declining. Soon will the evening shades overspread me, and the night of death hide me from the eye of man.

How important, oh! how all-important is the question- Am I prepared to die? Have I fled for refuge to Jesus, the sinner’s friend? Do I believe with the heart unto righteousness? Have I the witness in myself that I am born of God? Is my heart renewed after the divine image, in righteousness and true holiness? Have I received the Spirit of adoption– a loving, filial, obedient, thankful, humble spirit, enabling me to cry, Abba, Father, through a lively faith in Christ my Savior? For thus says Paul; "you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." If I truly believe in Christ, I have the Spirit of Christ, and I am a child of God. Then all the promises of God in Christ Jesus, to me are yes, and amen, sure and certain, and shall all have their blessed fulfillment in my salvation, and the display of the divine glory. Then I may exercise the assurance of faith, and hope; yes, the full assurance of these graces of the Spirit, if I have only a true and lively faith in the Son of God, a faith, working by love, purifying the heart, overcoming the world, and bringing the invisible glories of heaven, as realities before the mind; for "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence

of things not seen."

O! what a glorious and glorifying grace is faith in a crucified Redeemer. With these gospel views and with the inward experience of the grace of God, who would not welcome the words; "Behold, the days approach that you must die." It is as if our heavenly Father should say, "my beloved child, you have wandered long enough in this desert land. I have fed you with the true Bread from heaven, and refreshed you with water from the smitten Rock, Christ Jesus. I have given you my ordinances and statutes. I have proved you by manifold trials, that you might know what was in your heart. In the midst of all your wanderings and rebellions, your haltings and complainings, I did not forsake you. I chastised you with the rod of affliction. I brought you low by deep repentance. I led you into the valley of humiliation. I hid my face from you for a little moment. I caused you to loathe yourself, to cry for mercy, to seek my face. And then, when your heart was broken and contrite, looking unto Jesus, and pleading, by earnest faith, the merit of his blood; I caused the beams of my grace to shine into your soul. I gave you a token of reconciliation, a Spirit of adoption. I enabled you to sing for joy, and to go on with increasing vigor in the ways of truth and righteousness. Now, your journey is nearly ended; my messenger is sent to convey you home, to bring you to your Father's house, where are many mansions, where your Savior has prepared a place for you, and where you shall be eternally blessed in his presence. Come, for all things are ready. Prepare to meet your God. Enter into the joy of your Lord. Doubt not my love. Fear not the enemy, for Christ and heaven are yours!

Oh! blessed Lord! grant that this sweet call may be impressed on my heart. May I live under the daily influence of your love, and when I hear you say, "Surely I come quickly; Amen;" may my joyful heart respond, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

How solemn, how awakening should be the voice which speaks to me through the Scriptures of truth;

"PREPARE TO MEET YOUR GOD."

Oh! that I may not only listen to, but obey, through grace, this voice of the Spirit, speaking to my heart and conscience; for thus says the Lord, "Hear the rod, and who has appointed it." The dispensations of God have a voice; they speak either in mercy or in judgment. Lord make me conversant with death. Let me not shrink from looking into the grave, sanctified as it is, through the body of Jesus. If my body rests in the hope of rising to a joyful resurrection, the grave will indeed be a place of repose from sins and sorrows, and the storms of life. But this cannot be, unless I am a believer of Jesus; for it is only those who sleep in Jesus that God will bring with him.

This glorious rising cannot take place except my body be now the temple of the Holy Spirit; for God will quicken our mortal bodies by his Spirit which dwells in us. Oh, that Christ may dwell in my heart by faith; that the Spirit of Truth, the Comforter, may take up his abode within me. Then I shall have light, and love, and peace, and joy, and all the other blessings flowing from the Covenant of Grace.

"The sting of death is sin." It is sin which arms death with terrors. How dreadful is death to a soul, awakened to its consequences, at the period of dissolution. Agonies, inconceivably great, rend the soul, while writhing under the serpent's sting– unpardoned sin!

How sweetly serene is the penitent believer in Jesus, while standing on the brink of Jordan, in the hope of a joyful admission into the celestial Canaan. He dreads not the cold stream which rolls between him and the abodes of bliss. The hope of glory sustains him. Death comes as a messenger of mercy, divested of every evil, to conduct him out of time into eternity, to bring him into the presence of God his Savior.

Oh! the blessedness of faith in the Atonement of Christ. It affords a firm foundation on which the soul can repose, amid the swellings of Jordan. Lord enable me truly to believe. Faith is your gift. To You do I look, and on You would I wait, for this precious gift of grace.

"PREPARE TO MEET YOUR GOD."

Almighty Savior, do in mercy prepare my soul for a joyful meeting. Wash me from all may sins through your cleansing blood. Clothe me with your righteousness. Make me pure within. Give me the victory over sin, Satan, and the world. Enable me daily to come to You; to draw fresh supplies out of your fullness, until I reach the Fountain-head of blessedness, even your own self in your everlasting kingdom.

"PREPARE TO MEET YOUR GOD."

Oh! may the solemn sound ever vibrate in my ears, and reach my inmost soul. The call is from above. It is God himself who speaks. O may I listen to his voice; bow in deep humiliation before the Cross, and, looking by faith to Him who hung upon it, receive a free and full forgiveness. "God is a consuming fire." The wicked, like stubble, shall be consumed, as in a moment, by the wrath of incensed justice.

"God is a consuming fire." The redeemed sinner is as gold. He loses nothing in the flame but the dross. Lord convert my soul. Make me as the precious gold, which becomes the purer by being in the furnace. Oh! may every affliction, every tribulation, endured in the body, tend, through your love, to the purification of my soul; that when I hasten to meet you at your call in the eternal world, I may be found a new creature, a vessel of mercy, fitted, by the Spirit, for the Master’s use.

"PREPARE TO MEET YOUR GOD."

Lord! may I joyfully accept your gracious invitation. May I come in the fullness of faith and hope, looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of the day of God. Why should I linger here? Why should I wish to remain a pilgrim in a world of woe? O my soul! stretch out your wings. Prepare for your flight. Fix your eyes upon the Sun of Righteousness; and, like the eagle, soar aloft beyond the shadows of this lower world. Angels beckon you away. Dear departed friends invite you to join their blessed company before the throne. A world of glory opens to your view. Fullness of joy, and pleasures for evermore, are at God’s right hand.

Eternity is impressed upon the bliss of heaven. It is the royal signature, which cannot be effaced. Oh! then, why so backward to enter into the joy of your Lord? Why so unwilling to drop your chains, and enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God? Does it not arise from the workings of unbelief? a latent love for earthly things? Lord remove this evil leaven from my heart. Complete your work of mercy on my soul. Seal me by your Spirit. Unite me to Yourself; and then, with the joy of faith, and with a heart of love, I shall hear Your blessed call; "PREPARE TO MEET YOUR GOD."

Gently, my Savior, let me down,

To slumber in the arms of death;

I rest my soul on You alone,

E’en until my last expiring breath.

Death’s dreadful sting has lost its power;

A ransomed sinner, saved by grace,

Lives but to die, and die no more,

Unveiled to see Your blissful face.

O Soon will the storm of life be o’er,

And I shall enter endless rest;

There, shall I live, to sin no more,

And bless Your name, forever blessed.

Dear Savior! let Your will be done;

Like yielding clay, I humbly lie;

May every murmuring thought be gone,

Most peacefully resigned to die.

Bid me possess sweet peace within,

Let child-like patience keep my heart;

Then shall I feel my heaven begin,

Before my spirit hence depart.

Yes! and a brighter heaven still,

Awaits my soul, through His rich grace,

Who shall His word of Truth reveal,

Until called to sing His endless praise.

Hasten your chariot, God of Love,

And fetch me from this world of woe;

I long to reach those joys above,

And bid farewell to all below.

There shall my raptured spirit raise,

Still louder notes than angels sing;

High glories to Immanuel’s grace,

My God, my Savior, and my King.

02.62. PROPHETIC VIEWS OF THE GLORY

62. PROPHETIC VIEWS OF THE GLORY OF THE MESSIAH’S KINGDOM

"Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end." Isa 9:7

As the astronomer, through his powerful telescope, discovers worlds unseen by the unassisted eye, so the believer in Jesus, through faith in the prophecies and promises of God’s word, beholds these glories to be revealed, which the eye of reason has not seen, and which the natural understanding cannot comprehend.

How delightful is the study of the Holy Scriptures. Faith is the key which unlocks the treasury. Jesus is the sum and substance of the Sacred Volume. Jesus is the Sun, placed in the center of this system of grace and mercy; around whom, all his ransomed ones, move in willing obedience; from whom, they all derive their light and warmth; to whom, they are all attracted, by the powerful influence of his Spirit. But as in the natural, so in the spiritual system, there is a counter-tendency. If left for one moment to themselves, these ransomed ones would fly far off from the center. Nothing keeps them in the path of holiness, but the attractive influence of the Sun of Righteousness. How experimentally true are the words of the poet–

"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it;

Prone to leave the God I love

Here ’s my heart--O take and seal it,

Seal it from your courts above."

How glorious, how happy, will that period be, when the "law in the members shall no longer war against the law of the mind;" when only one influence will be exerted, the influence of holy love, ever drawing the heart nearer and nearer to Jesus, the source and center of felicity. This blessedness is now, in part, experienced by the true believer. It shall be more delightfully enjoyed in the reign of the millennium. But the fullness of this bliss is reserved for the heavenly state.

Is it not strange, that creatures, born for immortality, should be so indifferent to joys like these? Why is it so? The Bible tells us– because of unbelief. We are blinded by the god of this world. We are sunk in earth-born cares and pleasures. Like worms of the earth, we creep out of our holes, and crawl in the dust; when, like the eagle, we should be soaring upwards, until the earth disappears from our view. Alas! how fallen are we! Sin has marred the image of our God, in which man was originally created, and now we bear the image of the evil one. We are a compound of brute and devil.

This is a most unwelcome truth to the pride of the natural man. We would sincerely exalt ourselves to the highest pitch of excellence; at the very time, when the truth of God proclaims our guilt and misery, "He that commits sin, is of the devil." "Vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild donkey’s colt." Let us, then, rejoice, that "salvation is of the Lord," that he does not desire the

death of a sinner; that he has "so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Yes! let us rejoice, that the reign of darkness shall not always continue; for as sin has reigned unto death, so grace shall reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. This reign of grace is now progressing; for Jesus has all power in heaven and in earth. But his kingdom is opposed by wicked men and evil spirits. His people are now in an enemy's country. They have to buckle on their armor, to take their weapons, and to fight under the banners of the Captain of their salvation. Outside the pale of his Church, are millions of Heathens and Mohammedans, who set themselves against the faithful soldiers of the Redeemer. Within his Church, are formalists, and hypocrites, who darken the truth, who despise the saints of the Most High; who belie their baptismal engagements, and who virtually unite with, and strengthen the hands of the infidel and the profane.

How precious is the book of God, which unfolds to us a brighter scene than this. Jesus, indeed, even now reigns in the hearts of his people. But, as yet they are only a little flock. Oh! how painful is the view of the present state of the world. Take, for example, one single large town, composed of one hundred thousand souls. As we walk in the streets, crowds of immortal beings press us on every side. Can we, in charity, hope that one in every twenty, is truly a child of God, a member of Christ? not a nominal, but a real Christian? Happy, indeed, were it so.

We cannot read the hearts of men, but we can read their lives. Does the great mass of our population live as Christians should live? as those should live, who have been admitted by baptism into the Church of Christ? Alas! no, the world reigns in the hearts of thousands. The chains of worldly pleasure, profit, and power are thrown around their affections, and make them willing slaves to the God of this world. Oh! how much should the true believer be engaged in prayer for the outpouring of the Spirit; and in multiplied exertions, to stem the torrent of iniquity, and to promote the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom.

Three things are perceivable in Prophecy–

I. The prosperity of the Church, in its enlargement, holiness, and glory.

II. The outpouring of the Spirit, as the great means for promoting this state of earthly blessedness.

III. The spirit of prayer, which is promised, and shall be imparted, as the dawn of this predicted felicity.

The prophet Ezekiel, in his description of the temple, which may refer to the millennial reign, beautifully describes the living water, issuing from the altar, emblematical of the Holy Spirit flowing to us, through the atonement of the Son of God. On either side of this river, which deepened as it flowed, so rich and full is the grace of God our Savior, "were very many trees," full of fruit, "whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed;" showing, how every spiritual blessing grows on the banks of this celestial stream, which makes glad the city of God.

The streamlet, which at first was ankle deep, increased as it flowed, until it became a mighty river, in which a man might swim. How descriptive this of the Messiah's kingdom, which he himself compared, in its beginning, to the mustard-seed; which, though the smallest of all seeds, grows to be the greatest among herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds lodge in the branches of it. "Of

the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end." The stone, which Nebuchadnezzar saw in vision, cut out without hands, and which became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth, is the kingdom of the Messiah; the reign of Jesus shall be co-equal with eternity. Every one who is taught of God, will feel the necessity of the Holy Spirit's influence; will rejoice in the promise that it shall be imparted; will acknowledge the duty of seeking for it; and will use the means for its attainment. Oh! that the dew of divine grace may descend upon the souls of all who labor to promote this happy reign of righteousness, until they arrive at that blessed abode.

This truth is clear from divine revelation, that nothing but misery and desolation will overspread the earth, "until the Spirit be poured out from on high." Then "the wilderness shall be a fruitful field," showing the happy change in the Gentile world, and among all who know not God, whether Jews or Christians; and "the fruitful field," those cultivated parts of the earth where the gospel is planted, "shall be counted for a forest," at once, permanent and useful, for "judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.

Who would not pray in the words which Jesus has taught us; "Your kingdom come." Oh! that our hearts may unite with the inspired Apostle "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." "The only wise God and our Savior," has connected the means with the end. As of this, so of every other spiritual gift and grace, the Lord will be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them. To obtain this blessing, how fervent was Isaiah "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof, as a lamp that burns. And the Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory and you shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God."

How blessed would be the result, did ministers and people thus unite in prayer, and endeavor to advance the glory of the Church, and the salvation of the world. To animate us to this delightful exercise, this concert of prayer; how gracious is the promise of Jehovah; "Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth—so wonderful that no one will even think about the old ones anymore. Be glad; rejoice forever in my creation! And look! I will create Jerusalem as a place of happiness. Her people will be a source of joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in my people. And the sound of weeping and crying will be heard no more. I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking to me about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers! The wolf and lamb will feed together. The lion will eat straw like the ox. Poisonous snakes will strike no more. In those days, no one will be hurt or destroyed on my holy mountain. I, the Lord, have spoken!"

This blessedness will, then, be preceded by the united, believing, fervent, unceasing prayers of the Church. But how abundant is the grace of God! "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear," is the voice of Him who never said unto the seed of Jacob, "Seek you me in vain." "Ho, every one that thirsts, come to the waters." Gospel blessings may well be called waters, from their rich abundance, from their purifying, fructifying, and refreshing quality. There is a sea of love and mercy, an ocean, into which the sins of believers are cast to appear no more forever. "You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea," "In those days, and in that time, says the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of

Judah, and they shall not be found; for I will pardon them whom I reserve."

If such blessings were vouchsafed to the ancient Church, when brought out of her captivity, what mercies are now in store for the Church of Christ militant, upon earth, when the Spirit shall be poured out in rich effusions upon all her members, when "judgment shall run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." Then "wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of our times." "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." "Hostile nations shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;" "they shall learn war no more; for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Then Jesus will "speak peace to the heathen; and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth."

And will this glory rise upon our earth, shrouded as it is with darkness? It will, for thus says the Lord; "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering for my name shall be great among the heathen, says the Lord of hosts."

The Jews shall then adore their long-neglected Messiah. Now, they are suffering under the fulfillment of this righteous judgment; "The children of Israel shall abide many days (already amounting to nearly eighteen hundred years) without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice." But then, at this glorious period, when Jesus shall take unto him his great power, and reign as King supreme, it is graciously promised, "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David Their King; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days."

How inexpressibly precious are these prophecies respecting our fallen race. They are like the rainbow on the cloud. They assure us of mercy; that we shall not be destroyed by a deluge of wrath. But while they breathe loving kindness, they call upon us to pray, to praise, to work with all our might, that we may become the honored instruments in the hand of our God, for helping forwards, and hastening this reign of grace. God is pleased, in general, to work by means. He could preserve us without food, but this is not his appointment. He could bring about the world’s regeneration by a single word, but this is not his plan. The Church of Christ is the medium through which be is pleased to communicate his blessings. For this end, he has appointed his ministers, as his ambassadors, as his stewards, as his laborers, as his watchmen. He commands all his people to work while it is day; to put forth all their powers, before the night of death comes.

"There are two little words in our language," remarks that lamented Missionary, John Williams, "which I always admired, try and trust. You know not what you can or cannot effect, until you try; and if you make your trials in the exercise of trust in God, mountains of imaginary difficulties will vanish as you approach them, and facilities will be afforded which you never anticipated."

What an encouragement is this for the Christian laborer. When Christ said, "Stretch forth your hand;" through faith, the man stretched out his withered hand, "and it was restored whole, like as the other." Let us implicitly obey the injunctions of our Lord. With the command he graciously imparts the power to labor, and the will to serve. He, who gives the command, makes his people willing in the day of his power. He imparts his consolations. He places underneath the everlasting arms. He enables them to endure unto the end; and then gives them a crown of life, which fades

not away.

If this be the end of the righteous, believers should not be afraid to die. Jesus has declared, "I am he that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." Blessed revelation! Jesus, the Savior, the Friend of sinners, has the keys of the invisible world. If we wanted to enter into some place of security, or happiness, we would feel easy if we knew that the keys were in the possession of a Friend, who dearly loved us, and sought our highest felicity. We would not fear a repulse, when we came to knock for admittance. But how different would be our feelings, if these keys were in the hands of an implacable enemy, who sought our destruction; or in the hands of a sovereign, against whom we were living in open rebellion, and from whom we could expect nothing but death. That a period of grace and glory, such as the Church has never yet experienced, will bless our world, is clearly revealed in the Scriptures of truth; but to determine the manner and circumstances of the reign of Christ is not required. "Secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children." In the midst of tribulation, we have prophecies of glory, and promises of rest, to cheer us. We may never live to see those days of the Son of Man; but we may now, by faith, enjoy his presence in our souls; the indwelling of his Spirit in our hearts. We may now rest in the love of God; repose on the faithfulness of Christ; and be refreshed with joy and peace through the Holy Spirit.

If this is our happy experience, we need not perplex our minds, whether the reign of the Messiah will be personal or spiritual. We know that Christ shall "appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation." We know that he will come "with clouds, and every eye shall see him." But the mode of his coming must be determined by the glorious event, when, "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God."

O! Almighty Savior, enlighten the eyes of my understanding by the beams of your Spirit. Enable me rightly to discern the truths of your word. Do not allow me to reject your revelations of glory, because I cannot comprehend them; nor to cavil at the mysteries of your grace, because I cannot explore them. Make my soul as a little child, humble, teachable, and obedient to your will. Give me a heart to mourn over sin, both in myself and others; a heart to rejoice over your mercies; a heart to love you supremely, for all that you are to me, as my present and everlasting Portion.

O in mercy keep me from the evil that is in the world; from the errors which, like hemlock, grow in the gospel field- your visible Church. Preserve me from being led away by the opinions of men, however great in name, renowned for learning, or extolled for piety, if such opinions be repugnant to the plain declarations of your word. Give me courage to reject, whatever opposes your Truth, though it be silvered over with age, or be sanctioned by ancient Councils. May I never forget that I must be judged at your tribunal; that the words which you have spoken shall judge me at the last day. Teach me, then, O Lord, to cease from man; to place my whole reliance upon You; to follow, through the teaching of your Spirit, the light of your holy word.

Oh! You, who are the Light of the world, be my guide. Wherever I see your footsteps, there may I plant my own. Shield me from the subtle attacks of Satan. Guard me against the flatteries and frowns of the world; and, when brought by your grace to the brink of Jordan, conduct me in mercy through the rolling stream, until I reach your blissful presence in the celestial Canaan. All praise to Sovereign Grace!

02.63. THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

63. THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

"Let no man deceive himself." 1Co 3:18

What a compound of contrarieties is this heart of mine! Heavenly Father! how wonderful is your forbearance; how amazing your patience! I pray unto you for humility. You graciously hear my request; and put me into a situation where my pride is mortified and wounded. Do I then rejoice at perceiving such an answer to my prayer? Alas! no. How are my feelings hurt; how do fretful complainings fill my breast. Lord have mercy on so weak, so wretched a creature, and make me more sensible of the mercies I pray for, and more resigned to your will.

I pray for the grace of self-denial. In answer to my supplication you give me an opportunity of exercising this grace. Do I bless you for this token of your love? Do I cheerfully embrace this opportunity for self-denial? Ah! no. My heart makes a thousand excuses for a little longer self-indulgence, saying, as Lot did with respect to Zoar, "Is it not a little one?" Oh! how numberless are the arts of self-deception. How slowly do we attain to the knowledge of ourselves! Lord increase my faith. Subdue my corruptions. Conquer my stubborn will. Cast me into the mold of the gospel, and make me wholly yours.

The danger of self-deception increases in proportion to the magnitude of the thing about which we are deceived. The salvation of the soul is the chief concern of man; to be deceived on this point, is eternally fatal. The Scriptures divide all mankind into two great classes, the spiritually and the carnally minded. The one walk by faith, the other by sight; the one, are the children of God; the other, the children of the devil. The former have their affections set on things above; the latter delight in everything earthly and sensual; their views are bounded by time; their interests are founded on the ’shadow of a moment’. Strange as it may appear, yet, upon this airy nothing, the men of the world build their hopes, which vanish like the midnight dream.

Our Savior has described by parable, the character and end of the rich worldling. When the man was promising to himself years of ease and pleasure, the sentence went forth to cut the cumberer down. "You fool! this night your soul shall be required of you."

A reflecting mind, impressed with the value of eternal things, mourns over this infatuation. What man would dare to sleep on the brink of a loose and crumbling precipice; or to stand on the summit of a mast, during the heaving of the vessel in a storm? And yet, thus rash is the man who trusts in his riches, and prides himself on worldly greatness. He leans on a vapor; he grasps a shadow; he sinks into destruction!

No character is more common than the carnally-minded. It is the character of all the unregenerated part of mankind, whether among Jews, and Heathens, or the baptized members of the visible Church. Actions speak more forcibly than words. They are the test of character. Like fruit upon the tree, they show the nature of the man, while motives, like the sap, are hidden from

our view.

Faith, producing love and obedience, characterizes the trees of righteousness of the Lord's planting; but are these graces of the Spirit to be found in the hearts of the worldly? Do we not there behold, as evidenced by the life; sensuality and enmity to God? Such people, if rich, are honored; if generous, are applauded; if possessed of power, are courted and flattered. But what said our Lord; "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you!" "That which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God."

The world is full of such people, and the visible Church has been contaminated in every age, by men who love filthy lucre, the lust of power, or the lust of the flesh. Paul mourned over a Demas, who loved this present world. John over a Diotrephes, who loved to have the pre-eminence. And the early Fathers of the Christian Church, over those who stained by impurity the so-called angelic state of celibacy. The Church of Rome is proverbial for these evils. Oh! that our Reformed Churches may ever shine in the beauty of holiness, and by a weanedness from the world. But alas! the world has crept into the Church. Hence arises the drooping state of our once flourishing vine. Lord look down from heaven, behold and visit this Vine. Water it with the dew of grace. "Revive your work in the midst of the years."

The history of the gospel is chiefly the history of Christ's conquest over the spirit of the world. And the number of true Christians, is only the number of those who, following the Spirit of Christ, have lived contrary to the spirit of the world. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "Whoever is born of God overcomes the world." This is the language of the whole New Testament. This is the mark of Christianity, "You are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

O! my soul, as standing on the borders of eternity, weigh well these things. Seek after heavenly wisdom, to know yourself. Dread self-deception. Prepare to meet your God.

There are a thousand ways whereby we may deceive ourselves. Vices, through the artifice of Satan, are decked with rose-buds, and concealed under specious titles. He puts a fascinating mask upon the face of sin, and thus, like the angler, hides the hook. The wretched sinner, like the silly fish, sees not the snare. Like the maniac, he imagines himself a king, while held in fetters, though his scepter is but a straw! Are not such people objects of pity? Should they not be subjects for prayer?

Oh! my soul, feel the pulse of your affections. Do they beat for Christ? Is he your Portion, your Eternal All? If so, then the Spirit of Christ and of glory rests upon you. God numbers you among his beloved people, his chosen ones, his jewels. But if you are a stranger to the covenant of grace; if you are unacquainted with Christ as the hope of glory; if you have never felt the plague of inward corruption; if you have never come to Christ as a poor heavy laden sinner, nor taken his yoke upon you; if, in short, you are not renewed in the spirit of your mind, striving against sin, crucifying the flesh, renouncing the world, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God; then are you, however honored, applauded, or courted by the world, an enemy of God, a child of wrath, an heir of hell!

Oh! eternal Spirit of all grace and truth, display your saving power in my salvation. Convince me of sin. Reveal me to the mighty Savior. Lead me to the garden of Gethsemane, to the hill of Calvary, that there I may behold the bloody sweat, and hear the dying groans, of my crucified Redeemer. There, in the sacred mount, melt my heart to penitence and love, and make me wholly, and

entirely yours.

A self-righteous spirit is a spirit of self-delusion, "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." This is a standing truth of the gospel, which age; cannot alter, though ages past and present have wrought hard to pluck it from the word of life.

Who, then, can be saved? The gospel tells us "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Faith in Christ opens the storehouse of heaven. Faith lays hold on Him who is the Possessor of all things. This is the mighty instrument which baffles all the arts of Satan, and the malice of the world. It shows the sinner to himself, and leads him to his Savior.

When Paul, by faith, beheld the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and himself, as the chief of sinners; when he beheld by faith, the preciousness of Christ, and the fullness, the fitness, and the freeness of his great salvation; he was overwhelmed with the view. Then he renounced his boasted virtues, his legal righteousness, and desired only, that he might win Christ, and be found in him. Then he gloried in nothing save in Christ crucified. Then his wish was, to die, and to be with Christ. He hastened to the cross, and there, through faith, he washed away his sins. He seized, by faith, the robe of righteousness which his Savior wrought, and wrapped it round his naked soul. He sought for grace to sanctify him, body, soul, and spirit; to prepare him for sufferings in his Master’s service, to preserve him unto eternal glory. He sought and found the blessing. Or, rather, Jesus, in Sovereign Love, sought him out, when hastening on his bloody errand to Damascus, and made him a vessel of mercy, a monument of grace, "a pattern to those who would hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

Was Saul, the persecuting murderer, converted into a patient lamb? Then, O sinner, fear not, Jesus ever lives. His grace can also save you. How wonderful is the operation of grace. The churches of Judea, heard the wonderful story; "He who persecuted us in times past, now preaches the faith which once he destroyed. And," adds the Apostle, "they glorified God in me." God ever gives his witness to the faithful preaching of the gospel, by making it the instrument of turning many to righteousness; and Satan gives his witness to it, by opposing it with all his might. This arch-enemy well knows the force and efficacy of preaching the doctrine of the atonement; of a free justification by faith, without the deeds of the law; of the work of the Holy Spirit on the heart; and against such preaching, he plants his artillery. He enlists, not only the worldly and profane, the infidel and the skeptic into his service, but also the formalist and the moral; yes, even some in the ministerial office, who, blinded by prejudice, think that they ought, like Saul of Tarsus, to do many things contrary to such preaching as this.

Do not facts attest this painful statement? We never find a ’moral preacher’ derided by the world; neither do we see a moral preacher bringing souls to Christ. He may, by dint of eloquence, arrest the profligate in his course, and lead him to a momentary reflection; but all his powers of rhetoric cannot change his heart. This conquest is reserved for the faithful preaching of the Cross. Christ crucified is the blessed magnet, which draws perishing souls to happiness and heaven. The gospel is "the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believes," though esteemed foolishness by the worldly-wise. Blessed are they, who hold forth, by their doctrine, and in their lives, the gospel of the grace of God. They may be called to endure the wrath of Satan, and the hatred of the world; the reproach of the formalist, and the anathemas of ecclesiastical rulers; but they shall have the smiles of Christ here, and their portion in his kingdom, though burned at the

stake, as heretics unfit to live.

Blessed be God! against this true Church, the gates of hell shall not prevail. The waves of trouble may dash against it, but it cannot be overthrown, because it is founded upon the Rock, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. The work of redemption is the work of omnipotence. The word of God is mighty in operation. It is as a fire to consume the chaff of error in doctrine, and the dross of sin in practice. It is as a hammer to break in pieces the adamantine heart of the rebellious sinner. It is the wisdom of God, and the power of God.

O! my soul, have you experienced this transforming grace, through a believing reception of Christ crucified? "Examine yourself whether you be in the faith; prove your own self." Rest not in forms and ceremonies, however excellent. "Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils." Let all your hope and confidence be in God.

True religion, such as God will approve, is not confined to particular times and places, but, if truly received into the heart, will show its influence in every place, in every part of the conduct. It is like the sap of a living tree, which extends to the most distant boughs, and circulates through the smallest fibers. Not only actions, but words; not only words, but thoughts; yes, motives, affections, and desires, are guided by the law of truth, and influenced by the law of love.

True religion consists in the right dispositions of a heart, sanctified by the Spirit of Christ; a heart, where self is humbled, where Jesus reigns, where holiness is promoted. When the renewed soul is enabled, through the power of the Spirit, not only to discern the exceeding sinfulness of sin, but also to forsake it; when it is strengthened by faith to overcome the world, and to trust in the righteousness of Christ alone for salvation; not pleading its own good works, (those never failing fruits of faith), but the riches of redeeming love; when the renewed soul is brought, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ,. in his temper, mind, and spirit, being clothed with humility, beautified by meekness, and adorned with charity; when thus renewed and born again, living upon Christ by faith, and being spiritually united to him, as the member to the head, the soul can cast itself in deep contrition at the foot of the loss, bewailing the imperfections of its holiest services, and imploring pardon and acceptance through the atoning sacrifice and all-perfect righteousness of the Redeemer; then is that soul truly a member of Christ, a child of God, and shall soon be made the happy inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.

Is this the prevailing character of baptized Christians? Does the visible Church thus shine in the beauty of holiness? Are all her members temples of the Holy Spirit? Would it not be so, if all were spiritually born again in baptism, since Paul has declared that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance?" Oh! it is well to have the mind scripturally enlightened, at a time when many would substitute the doctrines of men for the truth of God.

Some people are apt to confound the sign with the thing signified, and thus to make the ordinance of baptism and spiritual regeneration to be one and the same operation; that is, that every child sprinkled with water is invariably born again of the Spirit.

"The agency of the Holy Spirit, when he testifies of Christ and glorifies him, is quite distinct from the means which conveys the testimony. This important distinction is carefully noted in Scripture. In confirmation of this truth, it is written, that the Lord opened the heart of Lydia to attend unto the things which were spoken by Paul. In this instance we plainly see the man of God preaching

Christ, and all that is needful for the conversion of the soul on one hand; on the other, the God of all grace exercising his powerful influence, by which the Apostle's preaching obtained success." (Venn)

Preaching the Gospel is a divinely-appointed means of grace; so also are the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Super; but, as in the former, the agency of the Holy Spirit is quite distinct from the means; so it is with respect to the two latter. Many heard Paul preach with as much power as Lydia did; but they remained unconverted, and why? because of the hardness of their hearts! Many receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper without benefit, being destitute of true faith. And multitudes are baptized in the name of Christ, who never manifest their love to him, being still in the bonds of iniquity; for the agency of the Holy Spirit can alone render the means effectual, and not any power or virtue vested in the priest, or in the sacramental rite, apart from, the Sovereign grace of God.

The Holy Spirit's influence must, then, ever be earnestly implored, through faith in the name of Christ, whenever we hear the gospel preached, and whenever the sacraments are administered. We must cease from man. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase."

How different is the language and the doctrine of the Apostles, from their boasted successors in the Church of Rome. Oh! that our Reformed Churches may ever be preserved from Papal errors; and, like the primitive Church of Jerusalem, "continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Then will a divine blessing rest upon the labors of faithful ministers, "and many people will be added unto the Lord." Ordinances will then become as wells of salvation, out of which we shall draw, by faith, the living water, through the blessed influence of the Holy Spirit.

"Simon Magus was baptized, and yet remained in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity, as much after his baptism as he was before. And so it may be with us. And this is an infallible proof, that the change which the Scriptures call the new birth, does not always and of necessity accompany this sacred ordinance. As the circumcision of the heart did not always accompany the circumcision of the flesh, so neither does the renovation of the soul always accompany the outward rite of baptism, which shadows it forth; and if only our opponents will distinguish the sign from the thing signified, and assign to each its proper place and office, there will be an immediate end of this controversy." (Simeon)

Oh! my soul, pray earnestly to be guided into all truth. Guard against the influence of those, who would draw you from the simplicity of the gospel. It is most important, not only to know, but to be established, in the truth as it is in Jesus.

In the transactions of life, one false step is often attended with temporal losses; but in religion, false doctrine, producing wrong conduct as its natural fruit, endangers the salvation of the soul. Errors in doctrine are always dangerous, and never more so, than when they are disguised and clothed with the name of truth. Let me, then, never trifle with a subject which involves my present comfort and future felicity.

Am I born again? What question can be more important. Am I a child of God, or am I not? There are some who will say, "You are." If I ask, When was I made one of God's children? They will reply, "When you were baptized." Must; I, then, rest satisfied with this answer? Must I conclude that I am adopted into the family of God, through the baptism of water, without any internal evidence of the baptism of the Spirit? Must I take to myself the precious promises of the new covenant, if destitute of a new heart? Must I call heaven my home, if my affections are glued to this world? Surely I ought to look further into this weighty subject, lest, like the foolish virgins, when the cry is made, "Behold, the bridegroom comes; go out to meet him," I should only have the lamp of an outward profession, while destitute of the oil of an inward and spiritual grace.

John the Baptist, when showing the superior nature of the Baptism of Christ, said "He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire;" adds, "His fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." How strikingly is the mixed character of the visible Church described by this simile. He who runs may read, except his eyes be blinded through unbelief, and prejudice, and error.

What can be more awakening, than the declaration which Jesus made to circumcised Jews, and therefore equally applicable to baptized Christians, when he was commending the faith of the Roman Centurion; "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom, (awful thought,) shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Surely this should make every Christian to tremble, yes, all who rest their hopes of heaven upon their Church membership, and their baptismal regeneration, if they are unrenewed in the spirit of their mind. "The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness." Searching words indeed!

The Church, it is true, received me when an infant, into her maternal bosom, by the outward rite of baptism. I was then signed with the sign of the cross, as a badge of my profession, that I might become, through grace, a faithful soldier of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit was supplicated for me, and, in the language of hope and charity, I was admitted to the privileges of the gospel covenant, as a regenerated member of the universal Church. But, though thus received, much remained to be done. When come to years of discretion, I was taught by the Church, that all who truly receive the inward and spiritual grace of baptism, must die unto sin, and live unto righteousness; must repent and believe the gospel; that I am bound to perform, in my own person, the promises and vows then made for me by my sureties, and that if such performance be left undone, I am, by a natural inference, unregenerated, and have no saving interest in the blessings of the baptismal covenant.

That my mind might be deeply impressed with this truth, the Church puts this question to my conscience; "Do you not think, that you are BOUND to believe, and to do, as they have promised for you?"

In the same spirit of hope and charity, the Church teaches me to say, "Yes, verily, and by God's help so I will. And I heartily thank our heavenly Father, that he has called me to this state of salvation through Jesus Christ our Savior. And I pray unto God to give me his grace, that I may continue in the same unto my life's end."

Truly this is the language of a regenerate heart; language which only such a heart can sincerely utter in the presence of a heart-searching God. All who can say from the heart, in sincerity and truth, not trusting to their own strength, but to the grace of God, that they will renounce the devil and all his works; the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh; that they will believe all the articles of the Christian faith, and keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of their life; and whose lives are agreeable to their profession, are truly the members of Christ, the children of God, and the inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.

But, I would ask, is this the heartfelt language, is this the sincere determination, of every baptized child? Experience, alas! says no, for a tree is known by its fruits. If, while repeating these solemn vows and promises made for them at their baptism, and ratified by themselves at confirmation, the works of the devil are practiced; the pomps and vanity of the world idolized; the sinful lusts of the flesh indulged; the truths of the gospel, practically disbelieved; and the will and commandments of God, habitually transgressed; can such people be considered as regenerated, in the saving sense of the term? Though sprinkled with water, and baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and thus admitted as members of the visible Church, can they, while thus enslaved by sin, be the very members incorporate in the mystical body of Christ, which is the blessed company of all faithful people; and be also heirs, through hope, of his everlasting kingdom?

Surely a broad distinction must be made between real and nominal Christians, if we would avoid a strong delusion. If the blind lead the blind, it is no marvel, if both fall into the ditch. Oh! let us understand what regeneration really is, and the self-righteous will shrink from claiming it in baptism; and the spiritually-minded will regard baptism as a real help to holiness, humility, and love. From all this, it is evident, that throughout her beautiful liturgical services, from the baptismal font, to the burial of the dead, the Church of England provides for the strengthening and refreshing of real believers, not for the formal services of her worldly members. She could not furnish two liturgies- one for the sincere, and the other for the hypocrite. If any of her members draw near to God with their mouths, while their hearts are far from him, they, and not the Church, will be answerable for such hypocrisy.

Though baptized when infants, and thus brought into a covenant relation with God, we are bound, when arrived at riper years, to repent and believe the gospel. If we live and die impenitent and unbelieving, we shall never be admitted into the temple above. Great, indeed, is the delusion of those who place their hopes of heaven on the performance of outward forms, while destitute of the Spirit of Christ. And great is the responsibility of those ministers who, to such people cry, "peace, peace, when there is no peace."

"Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life; and few there be that find it;" are the words of Him to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hidden. Surely this declaration should awaken all our solicitude, when it is added, "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there are who go in there."

Am I now walking with the many, or the few? How important is self-knowledge. How dangerous is self-deception! Oh! that I may have grace to detect the deceits of Satan, the corruptions of my heart, the temptations of the world. The door of mercy is still open. The God of all grace is waiting

to be gracious. Jesus is pointing to his hands, his feet, his side. The Spirit bids me fly from the wrath to come; to hasten to the Ark of the everlasting Covenant. Oh! my soul, why linger, like Lot in Sodom? "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come." The Savior says, "Come, for all things are now ready;" the feast is provided; "and yet there is room." God the Father, Son, and Spirit, the Eternal Jehovah, invites you to happiness and glory; he calls you to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, where saints and angels are the guests; yes, where He Himself will be your everlasting Portion.

02.64. THE DESIRE FOR MORE

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"He that loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loves abundance with increase. This is also vanity." Ecc 5:10

Covetousness, in the language of inspiration, is the desire of having more. If we are habitually desirous of riches, for their own sake, we are, in the estimation of heaven, covetous people, idolaters, the servants of mammon. Our station may be exalted; our profession of religion may be outwardly strict, but still our destruction is sure; for Jesus has pronounced the sentence, "How hard is it for those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

Man is a restless thing; still vain and wild,

Lives beyond sixty, nor outgrows the child;

His hurrying lusts still break the sacred bound,

To seek new pleasures on forbidden ground,

And buy them all too dear. Unthinking fool,

For a short dying joy to sell a deathless soul!

'Tis but a grain of sweetness they can sow,

And reap the long sad harvest of immortal woe.

Another tribe toil in a different strife,

And banish all the lawful sweets of life,

To sweat and dig for gold, to hoard the ore,

Hide the dear dust yet darker than before,

And never dare to use a grain of all the store.

Happy the man that knows the value just

Of earthly things, nor is enslaved to dust.

'Tis a rich gift the skies but rarely send

To favorite souls.

Riches and destruction are not necessarily connected together, for we read that "Abram was very rich, in cattle, in silver, and in gold." But riches have a tendency to draw away the heart from God,

by opening the door to all earthly gratifications, as in the case of Solomon; by leading the possessor to the summit of power; by throwing around the rich, the splendid appendages of grandeur. Riches and humility, much wealth and great self-denial, are seldom found together. As "money answers all things," in the estimation of the worldly, so it is sought after, above all things spiritual and eternal. Nothing can be more opposed to each other than covetousness and contentment. Thousands labor to be rich, hoping thereby to enjoy the sweets of quietude, but when they have reached the object of their wishes, the desire of more, like "the horse-leach," which cries, "Give, give," urges them onwards, until, not infrequently, like the ponderous avalanche, they roll down the precipice, and are shivered to pieces in the valley below.

In this commercial country, where Satan has set up his golden image, instances are not lacking to exemplify this truth. "The love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." How many families have to mourn over the desire for more- that insatiable thirst for wealth, which brings its own curse along with it; for "those who will be rich," at all hazards, and by all means, "fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."

The remedy for this evil is given us by Paul, "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, let us be therewith content." How precious is "godliness with contentment;" an efficacious antidote to the evil of covetousness.

The advice of the Apostle is equally valuable, "Stay away from the love of money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never forsake you." That is why we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper, so I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" The example of Paul was in unison with his precept; "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." And then, he lets us into the secret of all this elevation above the changing varieties of time- "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." This is the great secret, which is hidden from the rich formalist, as well as from the rich worldling.

The grace of Christ in the hearts of his people, is the strengthening remedy against the covetous desire of more. He can give the blessing of peace in the absence of plenty. He can impart contentment, yes, even rejoicing, in a time of famine. "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains."

Can the world, with all its promises, confer such blessedness on its votaries? In the season of privation, do we find the worldly, calm, patient, and thankful? Is no repining word allowed to escape their lips? No hard thoughts of God permitted to invade their hearts? This fruit of contentment is not found on nature’s ground. It is the product of godliness; the work of Christ in the soul.

To those who are observant of the signs of the times, and of the sins of the nation, it must be apparent that the love of money, like a fatal worm, is gnawing at the root of our prosperity. The men of the world behold the withering process, and ascribe it to natural causes, though evidently baffled to discover the true one. The believer in Jesus, with the Bible in his hand, sees with unclouded clearness the source of all the evil. Covetousness, or the desire of more, eating, like a canker, upon the vitals of our religion, is the crying evil of the Church and of the world. The love of money insinuates itself into every heart, under every form.

Economy, prudence, foresight, and forethought, claim a place in the judgment and conduct. They approach us as friends, as auxiliaries to our comforts, while they are, too often, enemies in disguise. Thus Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, more effectually to deceive. Had he come to Eve in his proper character, as a fallen spirit, she would have dreaded his approach; but he came under a guise which caused her no alarm, and thus the poison stole into her heart. She was deceived- and fell! She believed the lying spirit in the serpent, instead of the God of Truth and Love. Her sin was a compound of unbelief and rebellion.

Oh! my soul, watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. Beware of the golden bait which covers the fatal hook. To his own people, the Almighty said; "Behold, I have refined you, but not with silver." The heart is seldom refined by the accumulation of wealth. "I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." To apostate Judah, Jehovah uttered, by his prophet, words of judgment; "You have forsaken your people, the house of Jacob, because their land is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses; neither is there any end of their chariots; their land also is full of idols. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day, when he arises to shake terribly the earth."

How true are the words of Solomon; "Riches profit not in the day of wrath." Covetousness and idolatry are so closely allied, that Paul declares, "You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or covetous person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a covetous person is really an idolater who worships the things of this world."

The proud city of Tyre, for her covetousness and idolatry, was doomed to destruction; "Tyre has built a strong fortress and has piled up so much silver and gold that it is as common as dust in the streets! But now the Lord will strip away Tyre’s possessions and hurl its fortifications into the Mediterranean Sea. Tyre will be set on fire and burned to the ground." "Who has brought this disaster on Tyre, empire builder and chief trader of the world? The Lord Almighty has done it to destroy your pride and show his contempt for all human greatness." Well might the prophet say; "Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?"

A day is fast approaching, when it will be clearly seen, whether Christ or Mammon has swayed our affections. There are, perhaps, few sins which assume so plausible an appearance; and for which so many excuses are made as for that of covetousness. And hence it is that we have need to guard so much the citadel of the heart. Our blessed Lord, who knew what was in man, and who well knew the subtlety of this evil, has given us a double caution; "Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man’s life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses." "For what is a man profited, if he gains the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?" What advantage did Achan, Gehazi, Judas, and Ananias and Sapphira, gain by their desire for more?

They reaped shame and death; and now stand as beacons in the word of God to warn us against their soul-destroying sin.

The simple possession of wealth is in itself no evil, because we read that this was promised to Israel as a blessing; "You shall remember the Lord your God; for it is he that gives you power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant, which he swore unto your fathers." It is the desire for riches and the passion for them, which is defiling and sinful. It is making an idol of money, by placing that confidence in it, which is due to God alone. "How hard is it for those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" "The difference," observes the excellent Henry Venn, "between possessing wealth put into our hands by the providence of God, and desiring to grow rich, is as great as that between a worthless ambitious intruder into a place of honor, seeking nothing but his own base interest; and a man sought out for his worth, and invested with the same office for the public good. And those, who can see no material, no necessary distinction, in the two cases, are already blinded by the love of money."

There is, however, a holy spirit of desire for more, which we should cultivate continually. Lord give me an increasing desire for more faith and love, more obedience and activity in your service; for more joy and peace, more humility and meekness; for more patience, and resignation to your will. I would covet earnestly the best gifts, and above all, the graces of your Holy Spirit. I cannot ask for these blessings too largely, nor expect them too confidently, if I only ask in reliance on the truth of your promises. You have said; "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." "All things whatever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive."

When praying for temporal blessings, may I ever do it with a cheerful acquiescence in Your will, knowing my ignorance in asking. The very denial of my request may be the greatest mercy to my soul. But, Oh! Giver of all good, when I supplicate for spiritual graces, I may ask for showers of blessings; for the outpouring of your Spirit in its richest measure, if I ask in faith, without wavering, pleading the merits of my Savior.

How happy is the true believer, whose heart and hope are in heaven. His treasure is there; and when he leaves this earth, it is only to take possession of it, for God is his portion. For his guidance and support, while journeying heavenward, many sweet precepts and promises are given; "So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today." "Seek not you what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, neither be you of doubtful mind." "Seek first the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you." "In everything you do, I want you to be free from the concerns of this life." "Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God’s peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

While living in this Christian spirit, we shall experience the truth of Solomon’s declaration; that God "has made every thing beautiful in his time." We shall avoid the folly of burdening today, with the cares of tomorrow; or of loading tomorrow, with the work of today. While we work for the food which perishes, according to the will of God; "In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, until you return unto the ground;" we shall, above all, "labor for that food which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give us." In this work and labor of love we cannot be too abundant. The most covetous heart may here find ample scope for all its desires.

Oh! that I may ever feel this panting, this longing, this thirsting after God. Lord increase every holy, heavenly desire. While my hands are employed in the duties of my calling, may my heart be ever fixed upon you. Take from me all covetous hankerings after earthly wealth. Give me a contented mind with the allotments of your Providence. Be my present and everlasting portion, and I shall be rich indeed!

As life advances to its close

The silent tomb appears in view;

Soon, where my aged sires repose,

Must I descend, and slumber too.

To dazzling wealth, or splendid name,

Each sparkling joy, the worldling joins,

Though in the midst of mirth and fame,

The soul, in secret languor pines.

That constant thirsting after more,

That torment of the carnal mind,

Creates of grief a plenteous store;

'Tis all the covetous can find.

What solid bliss can I obtain

From earth's most anxious toil and care?

I only forge a heavy chain,

To bind me fast in Satan's snare.

Yes! I have seen the poignant grief,

The torment cleaving close to sin,

Its fatal charms give no relief,

When gall o'erflows the heart within.

The thread of life is almost spun,

I hasten toward the eternal day;

Blessed Savior! before my race is run,

Wash all my sins and guilt away.

O cleanse my soul from VANITY.

02.65. ON THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

65. ON THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

"I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David!" Luk 2:10-11

What angelic mind can descend into the depth, or soar to the height of redeeming love! "Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh." "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." "Jesus Christ was of the seed of David;" and yet, "is over all, God blessed forever."

The two-fold nature of Christ was declared by himself on many occasions. To Nicodemus he said, "No man has ascended up to heaven, but he who came down from heaven, even the Son of man who is in heaven." As Man, he was on earth; as God, he filled the heavens with his presence. Proud reason staggers at this truth, but faith rejoices and triumphs. Salvation is of the Lord.

O for this love, let rocks and hills,

Their lasting silence break;

And all harmonious human tongues,

The Savior’s praises speak.

As Jesus was born in the flesh, so must I be born in the Spirit. He became the Son of man, that I might become a child of God. He died, that I might live. He ever lives to make intercession for me, that where he is, there I may be also.

And did He indeed shed his precious blood for me? Was it for one so vile and wretched, that he became incarnate, endured a life of suffering, and a death of pain? And shall I not love him with all my powers? Why is my heart like adamant for hardness, and ice for coldness? Oh! what ingratitude, worse than satanic baseness! Come, O Sun of Righteousness, dispel the clouds of unbelief which obscure your brightness; drive away the mists of error; melt my frozen heart; subdue my stubborn will. Come with all your vivifying rays of mercy, grace, and love; and make me humble, loving, teachable, and mild, an image of Yourself.

When the Savior of the world was born, angels filled the canopy of heaven with joyful hallelujahs. They sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Did angels rejoice at man’s salvation, and shall man, for whom this salvation was wrought, be silent and unmoved? Alas! the loving Savior came unto his own, and his own received him not." Do I condemn the Jews? "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her," said Jesus to the accusing Pharisees. I should sit in judgment on myself.

Blessed Redeemer! your word proclaims pardon and peace to a ruined world; your ministers preach salvation, through your atoning blood, to all who repent and believe; your Spirit strives with

sinners by powerful convictions; and still they withstand these workings of your love. And had not your grace been as omnipotent, as it is sovereign, I would even now have been in arms against you. But Oh! the mighty, the almighty power of Love; you did graciously draw me to Yourself, and shed abroad in my heart the kindly influences of your Spirit. Jesus, O Friend of sinners, O Physician of souls, how can I sufficiently adore and praise you. As you had compassion on the leper, the paralytic, the deaf, the dumb, the maimed, and the blind, so have you had pity on me. Yes, as you did raise Lazarus from the dead, so have you bid me live. Oh! that I may live to your glory while on earth; and live with you in glory, when time shall be no more.

The anniversary of the birth of Christ, should be a season of rejoicing, not of carnal feasting; a season for spiritual delight, not to pamper the appetites, like heathens in their idol-temples; a season to exalt the soul by divine meditations, and to console it by the assurance of pardoning grace. Oh! that I may thus rejoice with holy joy, and feel every emotion alive to gratitude and praise. I want to feel my heart full of holy rapture, while I meditate upon the wonders of this day. But I must examine myself whether I be in the faith- whether I have received Christ as offered to me in the gospel. Have I any saving interest in this redemption? Jesus is the Savior of the world. He came to seek and to save that which is lost. I am lost; therefore he came to seek me. But will all be saved? Alas? no! And why? because "not all men have faith."

Here, then, is the all-important question: Do I believe in the Son of God with the heart unto righteousness? If I do believe, through grace, though by nature a child of wrath, I am among the saved in Christ Jesus; for "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Oh! what a declaration of grace is this! Truly this is the gospel of my salvation. "Whoever believes." Here is my warrant to hope. "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." Give me a stronger and a stronger faith, that it may grow into the assurance of hope.

"Whoever believes." Oh! what a word of consolation. The word "whoever," in its full meaning, as expressed by our divine Redeemer, extends to the utmost bounds of the human family, whether in time or space. All, from Adam to the last man born into the world, would be saved, if believers in Jesus; for the word is, "Whoever." No nation, nor age, is exempted from this blessing, so long as "Whoever believes" is recorded in the word of Truth. No sins, however aggravated, shall prevent the participation of this salvation, if there only is true faith in the heart of the sinner, accompanied, as it ever will be, with sincere repentance, love, and obedience; for Jesus has said, that "Whoever," (let him be what he may; or where he may; or have lived when he may;) "Whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The same blessed truth was declared by our Lord in his last commission to his Apostles; "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to Every Creature. He that believes, and is baptized, shall be saved." O what mercy and grace is this! Surely none need now despair, who feel an earnest desire after salvation. Everything connected with the redemption of mankind, bears the impress of the divine goodness. The Son of the Virgin was to be called, "Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." A mere man could not do this; therefore he is, "Emmanuel; which being interpreted, is, God with us."

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David. How mysterious his character. He was the root and offspring of David. David’s Son, and David’s Lord. These names are full of meaning. David

signifies, ’beloved’. Jesus, when baptized by John in the river Jordan, was declared by a voice from heaven, to be the beloved of the Father; "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And Paul exhorts the Colossians to give thanks unto the Father, who "has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."

Bethlehem, the birth-place of Christ, is a name of rich import. Bethlehem signifies the ’house of bread’. How suitable is this for him who declared. "I am the bread of life." "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." O! that my soul may be nourished and sustained by this "true bread from heaven." Lord, evermore give me this bread. O dwell in me, and I in you. May I daily feed upon you, by faith, in my heart with thanksgiving.

Bethlehem signifies also the ’house of war’. How remarkable this. Jesus, when lying in the manger, was announced to the shepherds, as "Christ the Lord," the Anointed One, Messiah, the Prince. To Mary, before her conception, the angel said; "You shall bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and, shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

To Adam, in Paradise, the promise was given, that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head. This implies conflict and conquest. Christ was foretold by Isaiah as a mighty conqueror; "Who is this who comes from Edom, from the city of Bozrah, with his clothing stained red? Who is this in royal robes, marching in the greatness of his strength?" "It is I, the Lord, announcing your salvation! It is I, the Lord, who is mighty to save!"

David, in the spirit of prophecy, beautifully describes the glory and majesty of Christ. "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. Those who dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust."

Jesus, by his Spirit in David, thus speaks of himself; "The Lord has said unto me, You are my Son; this day have I begotten you. Ask of me, and I shall give you the heathen for your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; you shall dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel."

Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews declares, that through death, Christ destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. Thus fulfilling the first prediction: Satan bruised the heel of the promised seed, when Jesus suffered on the cross; And Christ, by his death, bruised the head, the kingdom of the power of darkness. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil."

Believers, then, must endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, knowing that the Captain of their salvation was made perfect through suffering. Spiritual armor is provided for the Christian warrior, the girdle of truth, the breast-plate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. The command is given, "Be on guard. Stand true to what you believe. Be courageous. Be strong."

The view of the conquering Savior is given, to animate his soldiers to the fight. John, in prophetic vision, saw Jesus going forth "conquering, and to conquer." "He was clothed with a robe dipped in

blood, and his title was the Word of God. The armies of heaven, dressed in pure white linen, followed him on white horses. From his mouth came a sharp sword, and with it he struck down the nations. He ruled them with an iron rod, and he trod the winepress of the fierce wrath of almighty God. On his robe and thigh was written this title: King of kings and Lord of lords." "The armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean." Well might Moses sing; "The Lord is a man of war; Jehovah is his name."

Let me not be ashamed of Christ; let me fight manfully under his banners; let me continue his faithful soldier and servant; and what will be the consequence? By multitudes of baptized Christians, I shall be derided as an enthusiast; I shall be shunned as a fanatic! And yet, these scoffers and deriders are to be considered as regenerated people! Paul, with fearless heart, through the power and grace of Christ, led his converts on, to conflict and to victory. To the Corinthians he declared "We are human, but we don’t wage war with human plans and methods. We use God’s mighty weapons, not mere worldly weapons, to knock down the Devil’s strongholds. With these weapons we break down every proud argument that keeps people from knowing God. With these weapons we conquer their rebellious ideas, and we teach them to obey Christ. "

To Timothy, Paul writes; "Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. And as Christ’s soldier, do not let yourself become tied up in the affairs of this life, for then you cannot satisfy the one who has enlisted you in his army." And when he came to lay down his life for Christ, and to receive the crown of martyrdom; he could triumphantly say; "I am now ready to be offered, and 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; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." If, like the blessed Apostle, I am drawing all my supplies out of the fullness which is in Christ Jesus; and if, like him, I keep the faith, enduring unto the end, with him also I shall receive the crown of life which fades not away.

When I think of Bethlehem, I will think of the House of bread, and of the House of war; out of which He came, whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting; even Jesus, who is the Ruler in Israel, the Light of the Gentiles, and for salvation to the ends of the earth.

Behold! through the regions of death,

What light and what gladness arise;

Jehovah, in manhood arrayed,

Descends from his throne in the skies.

Rejoice, O you sinners, rejoice!

Exult at the life-giving view;

Adore the rich grace of the Cross,

Where the Savior expired for you.

Now peace is proclaimed on high,

Oh! touch the blessed scepter and live,

Ask freely whatever you want,

For God now delights to give.

The blood of your Savior and Lord,

Has purchased each blessing above;

The mansions of glory and rest;

The Father’s approval and love.

The Spirit of grace shall descend,

And kindle the rapturous fire,

Whose flame will increase and expand,

When life’s feeble lamp shall expire.

In yonder bright region of bliss,

Your praise will incessantly flow;

Then sing to his glory and grace,

While strangers and pilgrims below.

02.66. A SABBATH MEDITATION

66. A SABBATH MEDITATION

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day." Rev 1:10

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty." Psa 84:1

I bless you, Oh! Lord, for the return of this holy day. When retired from the world and all its vanities, I can contemplate the glorious truths of your gospel, and listen to that still small voice, which is seldom heard amid the pleasures, companies, and cares of a world which lies in wickedness.

Often have I thought upon the evil of sin, both in its nature and effects; but give me, in mercy, a deeper view, and a greater abhorrence of it. Destroy its reigning power in my heart. Enable me to resist its rebellions, to subdue its lustings, until death shall end the warfare, and conduct me to the realms of peace.

I learn the malignity of sin at the cross of Christ. Was Jesus the beloved of the Father? Was he "daily his delight, rejoicing always before him?" Was he the eternal Son of God, "one with the Father?" He was; and yet, if he will undertake for sinners, he must stand in their place; if he will become their surety, he must smart for it. All their sins must meet upon him. He must bear the punishment due unto them. Though the delight and joy of the Father, yet, if he will become their bondsman, divine justice cannot release him, until he has paid the uttermost farthing.

How terrible to the sinner is the righteousness of Jehovah. Oh! my soul, what must become of you, if you are not in Christ; if all this wrath must fall on you? The forgiveness of the least sin, (esteemed least by men,) can only be procured by the blood of God incarnate! "Without shedding of blood is no remission." "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

From this day forth, may I have grace never to trifle with sin; never to cherish any sin under the false notion that it is a little one. To have the smallest transgression forgiven, Christ must die! The blood of Jesus Christ and nothing else, cleanses from all sin. How then can I escape, if I neglect so great salvation? If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me," though I make many formal prayers, practice many austerities, and go through a round of ceremonies. I may do many things, and apply to many physicians, but all will prove unavailing, if I neglect to go in faith to the Cross of Christ.

Give me grace, O God, to guard against positive evil; yes, to abstain, even from the appearance of it; to watch against and suppress the first motions of sin in the heart; and to avoid everything that might prove an inlet to it, or have a tendency towards it. Give me grace never to do that, of which the lawfulness is dubious; for "whatever is not of faith is sin." May I not only ascertain the lawfulness of an action but also its expediency, lest, by not attending to this Apostolic rule, I should become an occasion of sin to others, by emboldening them to do that which, though lawful to me, is contrary to the conscience of a weaker brother. "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are

not expedient," was the judgment of Paul. Give me grace to be circumspect in all my ways; to walk in wisdom towards those who are without; to redeem the time, because the days are evil.

This day I have been in the house of God; the place where his honor dwells. I have joined with the congregation in praising God, and in hearing the glad tidings of salvation. But, Oh! my soul, how have these services been performed? What sincerity has there been in your prayers; what fervency in your praises; what faith in listening to the words of eternal life? Lord! I am ashamed when I reflect on the wretched offering I have this day presented unto you; an offering so lowly, so full of blemishes, so unworthy the acceptance of the Majesty of heaven. "When you give blind animals as sacrifices, isn't that wrong? And isn't it wrong to offer animals that are crippled and diseased? Try giving gifts like that to your governor, and see how pleased he is! says the Lord Almighty." Alas! how often do I fall under this condemnation. Yet, Oh! all-gracious Father, accept my sacrifice of prayer and praise, defective as it is, through the all-perfect sacrifice of your beloved Son, who died upon the cross for me. I offer myself and all that I am, upon the altar of his cross, that I may henceforth be a living sacrifice, devoted unto you, body, soul, and spirit, which is my reasonable service. May all My hopes of pardon rest on the atonement of your dear Son; all my peace be drawn from his obedience unto death, all my joy spring from the assurance that he ever lives to make intercession for me.

The more I know of myself, the more I find cause for deeper humiliation. The more I know of my duty to you, the more I am convinced that I am an unprofitable servant. The more I know of your Majesty, Glory, Greatness, Holiness, and Justice, the more I am persuaded that no man can be justified in your presence. The more I reflect upon my holiest services, the more I discover of their imperfection and sinfulness.

Blessed Jesus! how lovely, how endearing do you appear, as the Lord my Righteousness. Oh! clothe me in this garment of salvation; that, being accepted in you, I may experience your Father's love; the Holy Spirit's consolation, and stand with "boldness in the day of judgment." Seal this blessing to my heart, through your sanctifying grace; then shall I have the witness in myself, that I am born from above.

While I remain in this earthly tabernacle, Oh! Almighty Savior, spiritualize my affections. Give me a heart to love you, to delight itself in you. Take away all relish for earthly, sinful pleasures. Sanctify all my enjoyments of creature comforts, by never forgetting you in them, nor losing the sight of your glory in the use of them. Let all my faculties and powers be consecrated unto you who made them. And let me praise you, blessed Lord, while life and being last.

It is comparatively easy to live in the form of godliness. To attend the service of the sanctuary, to pray in private and in the family, to read the Scriptures, to associate with religious people, to talk about religion, and to give alms to the poor, are duties which may be performed, though the heart may not be right with God. These things must be done to maintain the Christian character, as is evident from the word of God. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." "When you pray, enter into your closet." "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." "Search the Scriptures." "I am a companion of all those who do not fear." "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer every man." "You shall open your hand wide unto your brother, to your poor, and to your needy, in the land."

But experience affords abundant proof, that all this may be done from a principle of self-righteousness; from a principle of vainglory; from a desire to be seen of men, and to obtain a name.

To ascertain my real character, I must look into the heart. Do I labor to perform these outward duties with a single eye to the favor and glory of God? Am I more anxious about unseen duties, remembering the words of Hagar; "You God see me." The flame of vainglory, which is kindled by the pride of fallen nature, is fanned and increased by the suggestions of Satan, and kept alive by the praises of men. O! how difficult it is, to keep down this unhallowed fire. Even when we think it is quenched, it is still smoldering beneath the embers, ready to burst forth at the least blast of Satan’s temptations.

Let me, then, look within. Do I strive to keep my heart with all diligence, from every impure thought; from every idle imagination; from all irregular passions and desires; from all evil affections and lusts? Do I study to maintain a conscience void of offence towards God, as well as man? Am I continually watching over the motions of the mind, the rapid flights of fancy, that the enemy may not rush into my heart by some unguarded avenue; or find me sleeping at my post?

Conscious of my utter inability to help myself, am I daily, yes, constantly, looking unto Jesus for grace and strength, to mortify the flesh, and to cherish the influences of the Spirit?

If, while diligently performing the outward duties of the gospel, I am unwearied in cultivating inward sanctity, then, I possess an evidence of being renewed in the spirit of my mind, and may draw near to God, through Christ, with filial confidence. But, if my religion be confined to forms and ceremonies, coldly performed, from education or custom, I am a self-deceiver; and should I knock at the closed door, saying, Lord, open unto me; the answer would be, as to the foolish virgins, "I know you not."

O! Shepherd of your chosen flock, grant that the outward call of your word may be accompanied by the inward call of your Spirit. Then shall I be stirred up to call earnestly upon you, to seek you in all the means of grace, to pant after you, as the deer pants for the water brooks. Then will my interest in you be unclouded; my peace, through faith in your righteousness, be secured; for all your redeemed ones are the purchase of your blood, given to you by the Father; chosen in you before the foundation of the world; called in time, and preserved unto eternal glory. None of the tribulations of this evil world can separate their love from you, and no created power can separate your love from them.

O! blessed bond of union, cemented by your blood; their salvation is sure; their names are written in heaven; they are engraved on your heart; they are yours, and none shall pluck them out of your hands. Such is the blessedness, the security of the sheep of your pasture. You have said, "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me. My sheep recognize my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them away from me."

Are you Wisdom? They are taught of you, and made wise unto salvation. They are guided into all truth.

Are you Power? They are strengthened with might by your Spirit in the inner man; and made more than conquerors over sin and Satan.

Are you Goodness? They daily partake of its blessings; inviting others to taste and see how gracious the Lord is.

Are you Faithfulness and Truth? This is the Rock on which they build; and, being grounded and settled in your Truth, can triumph over all their foes. "Those who know your name will put their trust in you; for you, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you."

Are you Righteousness? This is their glorious dress, in which arrayed, they can appear before the throne, with holy boldness, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Are you Holiness? By this, they are made like unto You, being sanctified in body, soul, and spirit. They bear your image in righteousness and true holiness. They are beautified with your salvation; and made "a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Are you Mercy? This is their rejoicing and song of praise. Your grace is the theme of their thanksgiving. "Who is a God like you, who pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retains not his anger forever, because he delights in mercy" "Let them now that fear the Lord say, that his mercy endures forever."

Are you Love? Oh! how great is your people’s joy. They love you, because you have first loved them. They love you, because with loving-kindness you have drawn them. They love you, because you have shed abroad your love in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given unto them. Their language is, "By grace are we saved. By grace we are what we are. To grace be all the praise."

Are you a Prophet, Priest, and King; a Redeemer, Advocate, and Intercessor? In all these offices and characters they admire and love you. You are the Lord their God; their Portion; their All in All.

Do you feel, O my soul, this love to the Savior; this faith and hope? Is he precious to you, the chief of ten thousand, the altogether lovely One? Is he your beloved and your friend? Then rejoice; this comes from the Lord; this flows from the fountain of his Sovereign love. Rejoice, and look across this narrow span of time, to the boundless regions of eternity. There, in the world of glory, shall all the chosen flock, redeemed by his blood, surround the throne of Jesus, and swell with countless myriads, the chorus of his praise.

Oh! while life shall last, admire this free, this rich, this undeserved mercy. Lie low before him in humility. Rise high in gratitude. Never cease to love, until the pure flame shall reach the source from where it came. There it will burn with inextinguishable blaze, to the glory of the Triune Jehovah!

Sweet is the day of holy rest,

To souls renewed by love divine;

They lean as on the Savior’s breast;

Like Moses, on the Mount, they shine.

The Savior’s mild reflected grace,

Gives witness to their peace within;

While they, with arms of faith, embrace,

The Great Atonement made for sin.

With joy, they hear the Gospel sound,

With pure devotion, join in prayer;

They praise the Savior they have found,

And all his mercies richly share.

The sacred Sabbath of their Lord,

They love the best of all the seven;

With saints unite in one accord,

And antedate the bliss of heaven.

O that with them, I thus may love

The consecrated House of Prayer

Then fly to purer realms above,

And praise my Savior ever there.

02.67. CHRIST'S INTERCESSORY PRAYER

67. CHRIST’S INTERCESSORY PRAYER

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter to be with you forever." John 14:16

The last discourses which our Savior held with his disciples, closing them with his intercessory prayer, have been, and ever will be, a source of the richest consolation to his Church. While we read them in a spirit of love towards him who uttered them, our language will be that of the two disciples walking to Emmaus; "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way."

Those are, indeed, to be pitied, who can peruse, unmoved, those gracious words which proceeded out of his lips. Truly he spoke, as never man spoke. His words are spirit, and they are life.

How many Christians, baptized in the name of Christ, and professing themselves to be members of his visible Church, would rather read an exciting novel, or some highly-wrought work of fiction, than these words of eternal life. How true are the parables of our Lord, which describe those mixed characters, which abound in the so-called religious world. Surely it must be the duty of faithful ministers to point out the distinction, and to guard their hearers against self-delusion. But is it always so?

The beautiful Intercessory Prayer of our Redeemer, as recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John’s gospel, is full of the riches of the Covenant of Grace, and sets forth, in the most lively manner, the character and privileges of his people. We learn from the supplications of our Lord to the Eternal Father, that all true believers are the gift of the Father to the Son. "You have given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him." "I have manifested your name unto the men which you gave me out of the world; yours they were, and you gave them to me." "I pray not for the world, but for those who you have given me; for they are yours." "Holy Father, keep through your own name those whom you have given me, that they may be one, as we are." "Father, I will that they also, whom you have given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory."

These gracious petitions, which embrace all true believers, evidently declare that in the Covenant of Grace, entered into between the three Divine Persons in the Godhead, Jesus Christ had a people given to him, before the foundation of the world, which he should redeem unto himself in time, and glorify to all eternity. For this reason, the angel said, "His name shall be called Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." And to complete this act of mercy, Christ declared, "Where I am, there shall also my servant be."

In unison with these supplicatory addresses of our Lord, he declared in the synagogue at Capernaum, "All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and him that comes to me I will never

cast out." "This is the Father's will who has sent me, that of all which he has given me I should lose none, but should raise them up again at the last day." "No man can come to me, unless the Father, who has sent me, draws him." "No man can come unto me, unless it were given unto him of my Father." "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes unto me."

The natural heart is now, as it was when these blessed words were spoken. We read, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." They could not receive the doctrine of Christ; they were offended at him; they knew not the spiritual nature of true faith which can feed upon Christ as the nourishment of the soul. And in this our day, the more spiritual, the more experimental, any statement of Gospel Truth is, and the more it will be opposed by some who call themselves, "Masters in Israel;" and be derided by others, who pride themselves as being members of the Church. The heart, if unrenewed, is the same under every outward guise. The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, all opposed the Holy Savior.

Jesus, by his word, speaks to us as he did to the Apostles; "Will you also go away?" Oh! that the constant language of our hearts may be, "Lord, to whom shall we go? you have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God." How anxiously should we guard against declension, remembering the words of our Lord to the presiding minister of the Ephesian Church; "I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love."

The humble believer sees a fund of blessedness in these petitions of his Lord; and, while standing, by faith, on this immoveable Rock, he can say with joyful heart; "He has set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God."

In this Intercessory Prayer, we learn much of the character of Christ, as the Great Head of his Church. "Father, glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify you." "I have finished the work which you gave me to do." "I have given unto them the words which you gave me." "They have known surely that I came out from you, and they have believed that you sent me." "As you have sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." "That they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you." "The glory which you gayest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one." "That they may behold my glory, which you have given me; for you loved me before the foundation of the world." "Glorify me with your own self, with the glory which I had with you before the world was."

Jesus declared himself to be the Son of the Eternal Father. One with the Father. Glorious in himself before the foundation of the world. The Prophet of his Church. The Savior of sinners. Oh! that I may ever receive the adorable Jesus, as God manifest in the flesh. With such plain declarations from the lips of Christ himself, how fearful it is that any should dare to deny his divinity. The fallen spirits did not commit this sin, for they confessed his Godhead; "What have we to do with you, Jesus, Son of God?" The Savior wanted not the testimony of Satan, therefore he "allowed not the devils to speak, because they knew him."

But to the deniers of his divinity, among men, mercy is offered, if they will turn unto him by faith and repentance. Oh! how gracious are the words of our compassionate Redeemer. "Whoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him." Saul, of Tarsus, drew his own

character, and the Savior’s grace. " I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." The sin of Saul was, therefore, not the sin against the Holy Spirit, or he would never have been forgiven. "He did it ignorantly in unbelief."

In his Intercessory Prayer, Jesus points out the character of his redeemed people. "They have known that all things whatever you have given me, are of you." "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "Sanctify them through your truth; your word is truth." "I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." "That they all may be one; that the world may believe that you have sent me." "That they may be made perfect in one."

Thus wrote John to the believing members of the Christian Church; "You have an unction from the Holy One, and you know all things." "Whoever is born of God overcomes the world." "Whoever is born of God does not commit sin." "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."

How different is all this from nominal Christianity; from that religion of the world, which consists in the form of godliness without the power. Such religion, if, indeed, such it can be called, will never cheer the soul in a day of distress, nor support it in the hour of death. In this land of Bibles and Churches, people are almost constrained to show some deference to religion. The man of the world goes to church once on the Sabbath; and, to keep up appearances, will, perhaps, attend at the Lord’s table, once in the year. But his heart is not there. From the church he will stroll into the news-room, as if he could not too speedily obliterate the faint impression which the preacher may have made. The afternoon is passed away at his table, or on his horse; and his tedious evening is shortened by retiring earlier than usual to rest. His language is that of the Jews of old; "When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?

To such ungrateful members of the visible Church, how affecting is the language of the Almighty; "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel?" "O my people, what have I done unto you? and wherein have I wearied you?" "You have wearied the Lord."

In this Intercessory Prayer, the privileges of the true believer are interwoven with the petitions. "All mine are yours, and your are mine; and I am glorified in them." "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in your name; those that you gave me I have kept; and none of them is lost." "I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one." "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." "You have loved them as you have loved me." "I have declared unto them your name, and will declare it; that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

No language can convey to the spiritual mind greater blessings than these. Oh! for faith to receive, with child-like simplicity, these gracious truths, which dropped from the lips of incarnate Love.

As the blind are unaffected by the most sublime prospects, and the deaf by the sweetest sounds, so do these displays of sovereign grace, these accents of redeeming mercy, produce no saving benefit on the carnal mind. Unbelief and pride, sensuality and the love of the world, hypocrisy and formality, like so many bars, close the citadel of the heart. Nothing can dislodge the strong man armed, but the mighty power of God. No human efforts will avail. Who can stop the whirlwind with a feather? or the rolling tide with a straw? So helpless is man, when he attempts in his own

strength, to stem the torrent of his corruptions. He, who said, "Let there be light and there was light;" He, who said to the wind and waves, "Peace, be still;" He, who said to Lazarus, "Come forth!" and the dead arose; can alone subdue the heart, and make the sinner willing in the day of his power.

It is delightful to dwell upon this comprehensive prayer of our blessed Savior. Here I am taught, that all who are the subjects of grace, are the gift of the Father to the Son; that to such, the Son gives eternal life; that the beginning of this eternal life is to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent; that this knowledge is imparted by Jesus Christ through the teaching of the Spirit of Truth, the Comforter; that this knowledge is of a sanctifying nature; that it leads to a separation from the world, and to a union to each other; that these happy souls are loved by the Father and the Son are kept from the evil that is in the world; and preserved unto eternal glory.

Oh! blessed Lord, You who have cast your bright beams of light upon your Church, how does my heart pant after this blessedness. I cannot claim it; for through sin, I have forfeited every favor; but, let me never cease to crave it, since you have interceded, not only for your Apostles, but for all those who shall believe on you through their word. As a poor suppliant at the door of mercy, I wait in humble expectation of the promised grace. Lord, enable me to believe in you, through the words of your Apostles; then I shall experience all the riches of your love, contained in this precious prayer, which, as the Intercessor of your people, you did present to the Eternal Father.

02.68. REFLECTIONS ON THE COMMENCEMENT

68. REFLECTIONS ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF A NEW YEAR

Samuel then took a large stone and placed it between the towns of Mizpah and Jeshanah. He named it Ebenezer—"the stone of help"—for he said, "Up to this point the Lord has helped us!" 1Sa 7:12

Another year has fled! But how has it fled? Bearing the sins of unnumbered multitudes, which shall all be exposed at the judgment day! When first it opened upon me, it was greeted with thankfulness. A monument of gratitude was erected, on which was inscribed, "Up to this point the Lord has helped me." But, it has been an eventful year to many. Numbers, who beheld the opening year, full of hope, and prospects of happiness, are now in the silent grave.

"He builds too low,

Who builds beneath the skies."

I am preserved in life, while death has cut down many a lovely flower; and why is this? Why am I now on mercy's ground, within the precincts of salvation, while many are imprisoned, where hope can never come? It is because my gracious Lord has interceded for me. "Do not cut it down. Leave it alone one more year." His thoughts towards me, are thoughts of peace and not of evil. In richest grace, he bears with my rebellious heart; he deigns to wash me in his blood; to cover me with his merits; to purify my heart; to make me a trophy of his love. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy," is the language of a Sovereign. "I will," is the voice of the Omnipotent Jehovah.

How sweet is the sound, when coming through the Covenant of Grace, "I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them. And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." "I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God; for they shall return unto me with their whole heart." Precious indeed are those words of power, uttered by Sovereign Love. Truly it is by grace that we are saved. God works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. He inclines our hearts to himself, so that when the call is given, "Come you to the waters;" "whoever will, let him take the water of life freely;" the power goes forth with the command, and the sinner, by grace, is saved.

While I meditate on the days that are past, two principles operate in my heart–

1. Hatred of myself, for having so long and so grievously offended the best of Beings; for having so much delighted in sin, and so little in things divine.

2. Love to God, for such unbounded mercy, such amazing forbearance, such striving and inviting, such compassion and pity, shown to the chief of sinners- an heir of hell!

Oh! my soul, humble yourself in the dust before the Majesty of heaven. Think how many precious moments, hours, days, and years, have borne on their wings ten thousand times ten thousand sins, which you have committed, and which are obliterated from the tablet of your memory. But,

oh! remember, God has not forgotten them. He will bring into judgment every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. Can you think of this, O my soul, and not tremble? Can you think of this, and not fly with eager steps to the Cross of Christ, that, through faith in his atoning blood, all your guilty stains may be blotted out, and your sins and iniquities be remembered no more?

Lord! behold me prostrate at your feet. I come to your mercy-seat; to the Lamb which was slain, who alone can redeem me by his blood. Look upon the bleeding sacrifice, and then your look on me will be a look of pardoning love. Yes! blessed Lord, you never have, nor ever will reject the vilest sinner, who clings to the Cross of Christ, and there, besprinkled with the falling drops of his atoning blood, cries out for mercy. Look on me, O God of my salvation. Behold a sinner vile and wretched, pleading before your throne the merits of your Son. For his only sake, O Lord, pardon all that is past; for his only sake accept me graciously; for his sake love me freely; and mercifully vouchsafe a rich effusion of your Holy Spirit, that this opening year may be spent in your service, and to the promotion of your glory. May all my powers be devoted to you, every affection and desire be fixed upon you. Make me sincere in all I pray for. Give me a single eye in all I do. May every word spoken for you, be the sincere expression of my heart. You know what I am. Lord, teach me to know myself. Give me daily the victory over all my inward corruptions and spiritual enemies. Grant unto your servant every internal and eternal blessing; and not to me only, but to all who are united to me by the bonds of friendship, or the ties of blood.

Another year has elapsed. New mercies call for fresh praise. I long to be a Christian indeed. Mere profession will profit nothing. It yields no comfort. It brings no glory to God. It differs as much from vital godliness as the portrait does from the living subject. It is the appearance, not the reality of religion.

Nothing can make me happy, but a real, vital union to Christ by faith. Nothing can procure my acceptance with God, but his righteousness. The great Apostle Paul desired nothing so much as to win Christ, and be found in him; not having his own righteousness, which is of the law; but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. This is what I need, and for which I pray. Let differing Christians understand the blessed truth in whatever light they may, yet, of this I am persuaded, that no sinner has, by nature, any righteousness of his own. To assert this would be a contradiction in terms. How strange to talk of a sinner’s righteousness! of a sinner’s holiness! We might as well speak about the loyalty of a traitor, or of the sobriety of a confirmed drunkard. The most devoted children of God have cause to exclaim, "Behold, I am vile;" how much more those, who have never experienced regenerating grace.

An unconverted sinner is always proud. He is ever ready to place his honorable dealing, benevolence, and refinement, against his glaring violations of God’s commandments, and then to flatter himself, that the balance will be in his favor; or, at least, that God will be too merciful to execute his threatenings upon him. He charges with uncharitableness, the faithful dealings of the righteous, who boldly tell him, that "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." He will not believe that the God of Truth will be true to his word. He dares the result, and dies to learn in hell, what he willingly remained ignorant of while on earth.

But how different are the views and feelings of the awakened sinner. He sees the precipice on which he is standing, and trembles to behold the yawning gulf below. He stands amazed at his former blindness; sees his utter inability to escape from the ground which he feels to be sinking

beneath him; cries aloud for help, saying, "Lord, save me," embraces with anxious solicitude the gracious hand which is stretched out to preserve him; and acknowledges the infinite goodness of that God, whose free love thus snatches him from destruction.

Am I this ransomed sinner? Have I been saved through the beloved of the Father, from the curse of the law, and the damnation of hell? Have I experienced the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit? Do I feel the grateful emotions of a new heart? a sincere devotedness to the Author of all my mercies? Happy, thrice happy shall I be, if I possess this inward witness that I am a child of God. Then will the opening year, be a year of blessedness. Trials may come, but they will all be sanctified. Death may come, but it will only bear me into the presence of my Savior.

What abundant cause I have to bless and praise my heavenly Father for all the grace, mercy, and peace which he has bestowed on me through Jesus Christ my Lord. It is like a flowing stream, whose pure waters refresh and gladden the soul. God is love. Oh! that my heart could enlarge itself in some humble proportion to the blessings which it receives. May every affection, desire, and purpose have gratitude written upon them; and every action of my life be the fruit of holy love, of unfeigned faith in the Lord Jesus.

In the midst of the divine mercies, I have to mourn over an evil heart, ever ready to turn aside like a broken bow, and too prone to cleave unto the dust. Oh! how hateful is sin. It is the disease of the soul. It is the poison which kills my joys and comforts. When it works within, O what languor it produces, what deadness of feeling! Sometimes it racks the conscience, and then nothing but war reigns in the soul– a wild confusion, a stormy night!

How precious, at such a season, is a believing view of the Cross of Christ. How gracious the voice, "Look unto me, and be saved." The stormy wind is then hushed; the swelling waves subside; a sweet calm ensues, and peace once more resumes its empire in the soul. Every tempest-tossed, afflicted believer, can bear witness to the all-subduing, the all-consoling voice of the Son of God, when he says to the inward storm; "Peace, be still."

How great is the goodness of the Lord. His tender mercies are over all his works. Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life. What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits which he has done unto me? I can render nothing unto the Lord, but what I first receive from him. And what can I render, but praise and thanksgiving? How can I better show my thankfulness, than by receiving the cup of salvation, the glorious and gracious offers of redemption through the blood of his beloved Son. But this also comes from God. It is the fruit of his everlasting love. It is the work of his almighty power. All good comes from Him. I can render nothing unto God that is pleasing in his sight, but what he first bestows, according to the riches of his grace.

Oh! that I could feel my heart deeply and abidingly impressed with a sense of his goodness. I deserve nothing but wrath; yet God speaks in mercy. "Don’t be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."

When I look upon the year which is past, I have cause to lament my unfaithfulness, and unfruitfulness. The review should indeed fill me with humiliation. In myself, I find so much of earth, and so little of heaven; so much of the old man, and so little of the new; that I may well doubt whether any saving work has been begun in my soul. My feelings and sentiments about religion

may be the effect of the society with which I am connected, and of the ministry under which I am placed rather than the work of grace, before whose potent rays the darkness of error flies as the evening mist before the rising sun. I may be evangelically right in my views, and yet practically wrong in my heart and life. Knowledge and holiness are not always connected. There is a knowledge which puffs up, but charity edifies. The wisdom that is from above is pure.

In prosecuting my enquiry, I find much comfort from the Apostle's own experience in the seventh chapter to the Romans; and from his declaration to the Galatians; that "the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh;" that "these are contrary the one to the other; so that we cannot do the things that we would." Hence, there is a conflict in the heart of the believer, which is peculiar to himself, and which is unknown, because unfelt by the unregenerate. There is, indeed, in unconverted people, a struggle at times, between natural conscience, and their wicked desires and practices. But, as their conscience is darkened and defiled, through original corruption, so it is always insufficient to break through those sins which are constantly weakening its force by repetition, until it become, not only without feeling, but a justifier of those actions which once it condemned. Hence arises those excuses for sin, and those self-justifications, after a course of transgression, which would not have been made at the first outset into the paths of wickedness. David has strikingly described the progress of the wicked, by walking, standing, sitting. He who walks after evil counsel, will soon stand in the way of evil men, and finally sit down in the seat of the scornful.

This inward fighting, between natural conscience and wicked desires, is vastly different from the struggle between nature and grace. In this struggle, the flesh indeed rebels, but grace reigns. They both struggle, as the Apostle expresses it, but grace obtains the ascendancy. The will of the believer is decidedly for God, although the animal passions may struggle for indulgence. The affections are too often, alas! allured from better to baser objects, but the new principle checks the aberration, and preserves the heart from a total departure from God. Thus believers "are kept by the power of God through faith," that new implanted principle, "unto salvation." For the same gracious purpose, the Almighty says; "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me;" which fear is another holy principle tending to keep the believer in the way of life and salvation. This faith and fear, combined with holy love shed abroad in the heart, through the power of the Holy Spirit, forms that spiritual life, which is imparted and maintained by the indwelling Spirit of Christ.

The natural conscience may sometimes check, but it can seldom restrain, except through the fear of temporal punishment, or worldly disgrace; and these are often found to be feeble barriers against the violent assaults of natural corruption. So depraved is the heart. The new principle of grace in the believer, not only restrains from evil, but restores the soul to the image of God. Thus a person may know whether he be a child of God or not, by examining the habitual state of his mind and affections; by observing the inward workings of his heart; and watching over the continual motions of his spirit. Hence the Apostle draws this important conclusion; "Those who are after the flesh, mind the things of the flesh; but those who are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." So that, "to be carnally minded is death; but to the spiritually minded is life and peace."

O blessed Savior! be pleased to redeem my soul from the bondage of corruption, and bring me into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Implant in my heart the seed of holy desires. Ripen

those seeds of grace. Cause them to shoot forth and bud, to blossom, and to bear fruit. Make me more humble, more holy, more weaned from the world, more devoted to you, until you shall transplant me to the Paradise above.

Another year is now opening upon me. Where shall I be before it closes? in time, or in eternity? To many thousands this year will be the last; yes, to many, on whose cheek now plays the hue of health, and in whose limbs vigor is transfused. What reason have I then to suppose, that the arrow of death may not be commissioned to lay me in the dust? Surely none. Oh! that my heart may be duly and deeply affected by the following truths–

I AM A FALLEN CREATURE.

Blessed Lord! give me the deepest insight into myself. Make me to know, in some measure, the extent of my misery and corruption as a child of fallen Adam. Fully to know the desperate wickedness and deceitfulness of the heart, is your prerogative. But oh! let me not be ignorant of my vileness. Let not pride and self-love blind the eyes of my mind; or cause me to fancy myself to be something when I am nothing; less than nothing, and vanity. Show me to myself, through the light of your Holy Spirit shining upon your own word of Truth. In that faithful mirror may I behold my natural state of guilt and misery, and while beholding, loathe myself with perfect loathing. Oh! cause me to sink down before you in deepest self-abasement. Lord break my proud heart. Melt the stone that lies within me. Purge away the dross of sin, and make all new within; that my heart may become a temple, in which you will condescend to dwell.

I AM A HELPLESS CREATURE.

As a person, who has fallen down a steep precipice, and broken his bones, cannot stand upright; so, through the fall of my first parents, I am totally unable to recover myself from the dreadful consequences of transgression.

Lord teach me to renounce all self-dependence. In myself, I have no strength; therefore, of myself I can do nothing to satisfy your justice, or restore your lost image in my soul. Oh! may I never, for one moment, make the vain attempt of appeasing your wrath; or of appearing before you, in the filthy rags of my own righteousness. Your justice demands an infinite satisfaction; and your holiness delights only in unspotted purity. But I cannot pay the least mite, nor present before you a clean heart, being ignorant, guilty, polluted, and enslaved. Where, then, must I flee? To whom must I look for help, and support? How shall I obtain present and everlasting salvation?

GOD IS LOVE.

Oh! delightful truth! Oh! heart-cheering consolation! Let it be carried round the globe. Let it be echoed from hill to hill, from shore to shore, until all nations catch the joyful sound, that "God is love," that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here, in this one truth, this precious gospel message, proclaimed by the Savior of sinners himself, is contained all peace, and strength, hope, joy, purity, yes, heavenly glory. Only believe this sweet declaration, with a loving obedience; only receive Christ, through whom this salvation is procured; and all the promises which cluster on the living Vine are your portion, O my soul, freely and fully given by the Father of mercies, through the Son of his love.

O eternal Spirit of light and truth, proceeding from the Father and the Son, work this saving faith even now in my heart. O make me this day, which commences another year of my earthly existence, a true member of the mystical body of Christ, a regenerated member of his Church, a sheep of his fold. Take away the darkness of my mind, and shed a flood of light into my soul. Pluck my feet out of the net of Satan’s temptations; and enable me to walk in the path of your commandments. Give me to see the beauty of holiness, and to hunger and thirst after it; to discover the heinousness of sin, to flee from it, and abhor it.

If called into the furnace of affliction, be with me to support and comfort me. If led into the enjoyment of worldly blessings, preserve me from the snares of prosperity. Oh! grant that I may begin this year with earnest desires after Christ and his salvation, that, being kept by your power from day to day, I may be continually waiting for the Savior’s coming, and rejoice, when his voice of mercy shall whisper to my soul; "Come up here;" "Enter into the joy of your Lord."

Jesus! I will praise your name,

While my life and being last;

Your rich mercies are the same,

Which saints enjoyed in ages past;

A dying pilgrim here below,

’Tis my bliss, Your love to know.

With the lightning’s rapid flight

All my moments hasten by;

Day is soon o’erspread with night;

Flowers of Spring do quickly die.

Jesus, in this land of woe,

Let me Your salvation know.

Fleeting vapors are my days,

Life is but an airy dream;

As the sun’s declining rays,

Or the constant ebbing stream.

Fix my heart on You alone,

You, the Church’s Corner-Stone.

You, my kind redeeming Lord,

Wean my heart from earthly joy

Change me by your powerful word,

Every sin in me destroy.

Let my treasure ever be,

Safely hid, O Christ, in Thee.

Holy Spirit, Heavenly Fire,

Burn the hated dross within,

Kindle every pure desire,

Save me from indwelling sin.

Let my soul on You depend,

Faithful and Almighty Friend.

02.69. THE BELIEVER'S REVIEW OF HIS CHRISTIAN STATE

69. THE BELIEVER’S REVIEW OF HIS CHRISTIAN STATE

"Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would really obey his commands." Deu 8:2

Thousands live with no appreciation of the hand that supports them. They revel amid the bounties of Providence; and rebel against his chastening rod. They "regard not the work of the Lord," nor consider "the operation of his hands." "God is not in all their thoughts." Not so, the true believer in Jesus. In prosperity, he can say with David; "You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You welcome me as a guest, anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings." And with him, he can also say in adversity; "I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me."

In the Psalms of David, we find all the varied experience of a child of God. The mere religionist knows nothing of the internal workings of the renewed mind. The difference is indeed great, between the outward form, and the inward power of godliness. The former, while destitute of the latter, is like the body without the soul; it is a lifeless carcass. Hence we find David always breathing after the quickening influence of the Spirit. The hundred and nineteenth Psalm is full of these divine breathings. As David was a man after God’s own heart, so he was made well acquainted with his own heart. He abhorred the idols of the heathen. He never fell into the sin of idolatry; yet he could exclaim with grief; "My soul cleaves unto the dust; quicken me according to your word;" and with brokenness of heart confess, "I have sinned against the Lord."

This is the common complaint of all true Christians. They want an entire conformity to the mind of God. They pant after universal holiness. They labor to get their affections supremely fixed upon Christ and heaven. They long for the complete victory over indwelling sin, and the perishing vanities of the world. Yet, they find, to their inexpressible grief, that when they would do good, evil is present with them; not indeed as a thing indulged, but as mixing itself with all their aims and desires, so that they are constrained to cry out, "Woe is me! for I am undone." "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" They feel a force drawing them down to earth, when they would soar above.

This experience greatly humbles the Christian pilgrim, while traveling through the wilderness. He sees that he has no righteousness of his own; that of himself he can do nothing; and that it is of the Lord alone, that he has either righteousness or strength. This conviction of inward pollution, unseen by the eye of man, drives him to the blood of sprinkling. It makes Christ unspeakably precious. He is fervent in supplication for the supply of the Spirit, through the intercession of his great High Priest; and feeling his inability to think one good thought, or exercise one holy affection, without the grace and power of Jesus, he sits daily at his feet, to hear his word, to receive out of his fullness, to imbibe his spirit, and to copy his example.

Such is the experience and practice, not of one, but of all the faithful servants of Jehovah. They have many trials; for, "many are the afflictions of the righteous," but they have also many consolations. Thus writes Paul, "All praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the source of every mercy and the God who comforts us. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us."

Oh! that I may be found among these chosen vessels of the Lord. I have to mourn over deadness, lukewarmness, and earthly-mindedness; though, through grace, I abhor these evils! I am grieved that my heart is so cold, when God is so kind! Yes, I am grieved, that I grieve so little. What a paradox is my experience! In the midst of conflict, this is my comfort; when I am sensible of my weakness, and lean upon Christ, then I am strong- when I am tried, and trust wholly in the Lord, then I am supported- when I am sorrowful, through manifold temptations, and look unto Jesus, then I am exceeding joyful. O! what a blessed religion is the religion of Jesus Christ, when it has its empire in the heart; when the Redeemer is enthroned in the affections; when the will is brought into a willing subjection to the Prince of Peace.

It is profitable to take a retrospective view of the path of life; to retrace the various movements of Providence; the many vicissitudes of this chequered scene. This will help to strengthen faith, as well as to deepen humility. Moses, in the book of Deuteronomy, records the Lord’s mercies, and Israel’s transgressions, to awaken the gratitude, and to promote the humiliation of the Church in the wilderness. David, in his songs of Zion, recapitulates the dealings of the Lord with his people, "so the next generation might know them—even the children not yet born—that they in turn might teach their children. So each generation can set its hope anew on God, remembering his glorious miracles and obeying his commands. Then they will not be like their ancestors—stubborn, rebellious, and unfaithful, refusing to give their hearts to God." How good it is, when the dealings of the Lord are handed down from generation to generation; when his praises are sung by children’s children.

The review of our Christian state is both humbling and elevating. When we look at the rock where we were hewn; and at the Rock on which we are placed, we may well exclaim, "What has God wrought!" From the heart every true believer can say- Blessed Lord, with deepest abasement of soul, I desire to approach your divine Majesty. In myself, I have nothing but sin. In how many ways have I offended you. My conscience testifies against me. My own heart condemns me. When I contemplate your Holiness, Justice, and Truth, must I not fear before You? But, in the midst of the throne, I behold "a Lamb slain;" I hear a voice of mercy proceeding from it; "God is just, and the justifier of him which believes in Jesus. " "Salvation is of the Lord." I behold, by this revelation of grace, a way of access opened to poor perishing sinners, through faith in the blood of the Lamb. Lord, give me faith in your dear Son. Enable me to cast myself, without reserve, upon your covenanted mercies in Christ Jesus. In him, alone, is eternal life. In him, is treasured up grace, mercy, and peace. Oh! for a heart to believe unto righteousness. This heart is your gift, through the operation of the Holy Spirit. You know my wickedness, and wretchedness, my frailties and follies, my helplessness, and total alienation from you, through original and actual transgression. You know from what height of happiness I am fallen; into what depth of misery I am plunged.

Oh! sovereign love! Oh! matchless grace, which pitied me in my lost estate. To redeem my soul from hell, the Eternal Word becomes incarnate, bears my griefs, carries my sorrows, is wounded for my transgressions, is bruised for mine iniquities, and dies upon the cross, being made a curse for me. This is a mystery which heavenly minds cannot fathom; but which can be received into the heart by faith.

How precious is saving faith. It is the hand which receives the gift of grace; the hand which places the crown on the head of Jesus, ascribing glory and honor to the Lamb who was slain. Through faith, I am complete in Christ. Through faith in his blood, all my sins are forgiven. Through faith in his righteousness, I have peace with God. But when I review my Christian privileges, I must put to my heart, an all-important question: Have I true faith, "the faith of God’s elect?" Jesus has said, "By their fruits you shall know them." "The tree is known by his fruit " Here, then, is an unerring criterion, whereby to form a judgment of my real state in the sight of God. I must, then, examine myself whether I am in the faith.

What are the fruits which I habitually bring forth? What is the general tenor of my thoughts? When sinful thoughts arise, do I cherish them? Am I fond of retaining them? Or, can I say, in sincerity, I hate every sinful thought, affection, and desire. Have I obtained the mastery over my imaginations, so as to be able to suppress them when contrary to purity and holiness? Alas! they struggle to gain the mastery. Like a bold enemy, they rally again and again, until I am sometimes ready to cry out with David; "I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul." But, at these seasons, I find prayer a never-failing weapon, which puts to flight the armies of the aliens; and thus proves the truth of that gracious promise; "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

Have I delight in communion with God, in secret retirement, meditation, reading the Scriptures, and prayer? Can I say with humility, I do delight in these seasons of retirement, when, apart from the noisy world, I can hold sweet communion with the Father of spirits? But alas! I do not always enjoy that sweet and soul-enlivening communion with God, which I long and pray for. I have to lament over much unbelief, coldness of affection, and wandering thoughts. Still, though often discouraged, through the workings of indwelling sin, I would not give up these secret retirements. I am convinced, that no true happiness can be found, but in God. No salvation, but in Christ. No strength to resist sin, and grow in heavenly-mindedness, but through the Spirit. For this reason, Satan tries hard to drive me from a throne of grace, well knowing the power of prayer–

"For Satan trembles when he sees,

The weakest saint upon his knees."

I will therefore wait upon God, trusting to his promise, that he will never leave me, nor forsake me; but cause the light of his countenance to shine upon me, that I may be filled with joy unspeakable, and full of glory; and be able to say, like Peter, at another manifestation, "It is good for me to be here."

AM I CAREFUL OF MY WORDS?

Through divine grace, I have been preserved from corrupt conversation, from lightly using the sacred name of God, or venting unkind and uncharitable expressions, in spleen or anger. But, oh! what a load of guilt lies upon me for "idle words," those multiplied sins of the tongue. Though

cheerful conversation is innocent, when it does not degenerate into levity, yet the Christian has need to guard the door of his lips, when he remembers the words of his Lord; "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment for by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned."

From this declaration of Christ, it is evident that words are declarative of our true spiritual state. "By your words you shall be justified." James expresses the same of works; "By works a man is justified." It is the same as if they had said, "The tree is known by his fruit." The meritorious cause of justification is the righteousness of Christ, apprehended by faith, which is the instrument; while good, works are the fruit which evidence and declare our being justified in the sight of God; for, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

Surely, I have cause to cry out with the publican; "God be merciful to me a sinner." If I were to be judged, only for the words which I have spoken from childhood to old age, oh! how could I appear before the all-seeing, heart-searching God? David felt the force of this truth, "You God see me," when he penned his beautiful Psalm; "O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my every thought when far away. You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord."

Do I love, when suitable opportunities occur, to talk upon religious subjects, not controversially, but experimentally and practically? Am I desirous, at all times, to render conversation profitable and instructive, good to the use of edifying? Is Jesus, that endearing name, often on my tongue, not from mere profession, or vain display, but from a heart-felt love to Him, whom angels worship, and whom saints adore? "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Can we imagine Paul to have been in the circle of Christian believers for weeks and months, and never to have dwelt upon the theme nearest his heart– the dying love of Christ, except when engaged in the act of public preaching? And yet, alas! how seldom do some ministers of the gospel make Jesus the Alpha and the Omega of their discourses, either publicly, or, like the Apostle, from "house to house." May not Jesus say to such, "I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love?" Or, rather, "because you are destitute of the first love, which was manifested by the warm-hearted members of my primitive Church?" Both ministers and people have cause for deep humiliation on this account. "Those who honor me," says the Almighty, "I will honor." "If we deny him, he also will deny us."

Lord, make me faithful. Preserve me from false-heartedness and faint-heartedness. Keep me from the extremes of vainglory, and the fear of man. Clothe me with humility.

Do I seize opportunities for speaking a word in season; either of reproof, exhortation, or encouragement? A consciousness of my own depravity, mixed with an undue feeling of shame, often keeps me from being faithful in the performance of this duty. To speak about Christ to worldly people is difficult; but not impracticable, when the truth is spoken in love. Nothing wins its way to the heart so much as genuine Christian love, which is ever clothed with humility. It often disarms the violence of opposition; and disposes the worldling to listen to the voice of reproof; yes, even to confess the error of his way. O! that I may have grace to perform this, and every other self-denying duty; leaving consequences with God.

HOW ARE MY ACTIONS IN GENERAL?

If there are none that are openly vicious and immoral; or, such as bring a scandal on religion; or, make the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme; to God be all the praise. I may be punctually observant of all outward duties, which respect the sanctuary and the family; be chiefly associated with religious people; be actively engaged in promoting religious institutions; and yet be destitute of love to Christ, without which, all my doings are worth nothing. It is the principle, which gives the quality to the action. This our Lord has clearly declared in the sermon on the Mount.

Let me examine into this matter. When I perform the various commanded duties, is it from a desire to be seen of men? Or, does it spring from the force of education, habit, and custom? Or, from a change of sentiment, through the influence of the circle in which I move? If so, I am a tree without fruit.

True faith works by love; love to Christ and love to holiness. It is most important, that this be well established in the mind; that this point be settled on Scripture grounds. If I perform my duties from a principle of love to God, and delight in Him, then I have a clear scriptural evidence that I am his; for if I love God, it is because he has first loved me. Then I have a clear proof, that I have a saving interest in the work of Christ's redemption; for love is the fruit of faith, and the solid evidence of my acceptance with God; for whom he justifies, them he also glorifies; and what is our glory, but to be like him here in holiness, and to dwell with him in glory everlasting. Surely these will be the meditations and aspirations of every true believer in Jesus.

Blessed Lord! create in me these holy, heavenly desires, and endeavors to please you. Kindle the flame of love, and cause it to burn continually on the altar of my heart. Let it be like the fire of the sanctuary, which was never to go out. Increase my faith and love, my hope and desire, my ardent longings after you. O make me sincere, on every review of my Christian state and character. Make my heart pure; freed from unhallowed affections, and sinful imaginations. Let my conversation be pious and profitable; my actions be agreeable to your will, in every relation and department of life. Implant right principles in my soul, and keep me, through the merits of Christ, and the grace of the Spirit, to your everlasting kingdom.

02.70. A GRATEFUL RETROSPECT OF UNDESERVED MERCIES

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"How precious are your thoughts unto me, O God! They are innumerable! I can’t even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up in the morning, you are still with me!" Psa 139:17-18

It is delightful to contemplate what the blessed Jesus is to his believing people. He manifests himself to them in the most condescending manner, by using those similitudes which are comprehended to the humblest understanding. Truly, his words are spirit, and they are life. He spoke as never man spoke.

1. "I am the Vine, you are the branches; he that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit; for without me you can do nothing."

Here I learn, that as the branch receives all its sap from the parent stem, by which union, its fruitfulness is produced; so my soul can only bring forth the fruits of righteousness, by being grafted into Christ by faith. A branch cut off, lies withered on the ground; and, severed from Christ, I shall be barren also.

2. "I am the Bread of Life; he who comes to me shall never hunger; and he who believes on me shall never thirst."

David blesses God for the gift of "bread which strengthens man’s heart." If bread be called the staff of life, for its nourishing quality, how precious is the bread from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ! He is indeed the bread of life. He alone, can give life to the world, to all who come unto him by faith; for whoever believes shall be saved.

3. "I am the Door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

As the sheepfolds in Judea were enclosed, to keep out beasts of prey, it was important that they should be well guarded. Within such a protected sheepfold, the flock could repose in safety. Jesus is the only door of admittance into the gospel-fold. By faith in him, I am admitted into his Church, and form one of the sheep of his pasture, to whom he kindly says; "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom." The roaring lion of the wilderness, who is ever going about seeking whom he may devour, cannot invade this sacred enclosure, for He, who is the door, is the Omnipotent Savior.

4. "I am the Good Shepherd; the good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep."

Jesus is not only the door into the sheep-fold, but also the good shepherd of the sheep. He is the "All, and in all" to his people. While the hireling flees, and leaves his flock to the danger of the wolf, Jesus gives his life for the sheep, that they may be saved from every evil, spiritual and eternal. Happy are the sheep of his pasture, who hear his voice and follow him. To such he will give eternal

life, for none can pluck them out of his hands.

Oh! how great is the love and care of the good Shepherd. He died, that we might live; and ever lives to make intercession for us. He wills the salvation of his believing people. He seeks them, he saves them, he sanctifies them, he glorifies them. Oh! that we may rise to the full assurance of faith and hope.

5. "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no man comes unto the Father but by me."

As a pilgrim, traveling through a dreary desert, I need a guide to direct me. I perceive various roads branching out on the right hand and on the left, but into which shall I turn? Which of them will lead me to the city of Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem? I see a guidepost, on which is written; "This is the way, walk in it, when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left." While reading, I hear a voice; "Thus says the Lord, Stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and you shall find rest for your souls." I ask for direction, I entreat the Lord himself to guide me into the way wherein I should go; he hears my prayer; "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man comes unto the Father but by me." Oh! what a blessing! Jesus is both the way, and the guide to heaven.

6. "I am the Light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

What a glorious revelation is this! Jesus is the Sun of Righteousness. His bright beams illuminate his Church. As it was of old, so it is now. In the land of Goshen, the children of Israel had light in their dwellings, while the Egyptians were wrapped in darkness. The members of Christ’s true Church are now enlightened by the Spirit, while the unbelieving members of the visible Church are walking in darkness; for he, and only he that follows Christ, "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

7. "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whoever lives and believes in me, shall never die."

O! how rich are the promises of Christ! While a sojourner upon earth, if a true believer in the Son of God, I am a fruitful branch in the Vine; I am nourished by the Bread of Life; I am admitted by the door into the sheepfold, the true Church; I am protected and saved by the good Shepherd; I am led into the true and living Way to the Father; I am enlightened by Jesus, the Light of the world, to see and avoid the dangers which surround me. All this is vouchsafed to me while traveling Zionward.

But, I must die! My body must return to the dust, and my spirit to him who gave it. Is all then ended? No. Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life; he will re-animate my sleeping dust; he will re-unite my soul to my body made spiritual and incorruptible; and, he will give me eternal life. There is the climax of blessedness, the fullness of glory.

How precious are these beautiful sayings of Jesus. The more I meditate upon them, the more of richness and beauty I discover in them. When I take a retrospective view of my mercies, I see, that from a child, baptized in his name, these blessings were freely offered to me in the gospel; and, that from the moment I truly believed with the heart unto righteousness, they became my portion, my treasure, my consolation. I cannot sufficiently praise the Giver of all good, the God of my life

and of my salvation, for such unspeakable mercy, for such unsearchable riches of his grace. Oh! that my life may be one continued course of loving obedience, and believing reliance on the faithfulness and truth of God. May I, from henceforth, show my faith by my works; and my election in Christ, by being "holy, and without blame before him in love."

O! my soul, praise the Lord with a song, and magnify him with thanksgiving. Tell of his salvation from day to day; for He is good, and his mercy endures forever. Oh! how great is his goodness towards those who fear him; how transcendent his mercy towards the children of men. There is no end of his loving-kindness. It is inexhaustible; it is everlasting! Sing, then, the praises of your God, O my soul, for it well becomes a redeemed sinner to be thankful. Meditate continually on his excellent greatness, for such meditation is sweet. Rejoice in his salvation, for he has commanded his gospel to be preached to every creature, and has declared, that whoever believes in him shall be saved.

When a take a retrospective view of my undeserved mercies, I must bless my God, that I was born in a Christian land, where the light of the glorious gospel shines around me with meridian splendor. I might have been the offspring of some poor Hottentot, or wild Tahitian savage, ignorant of God, of Christ, and of heaven; sunk in all the sensualities of a debased idolatry. How, then, can I sufficiently admire the mercy of God in casting my lot in this favored island. Truly "the lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yes, I have a goodly heritage." I hear the sound of the Sabbath bells calling me to hear the sweet sounds of the gospel of Christ. I am blessed with the faithful preaching of Christ crucified, with the precious Bible, released from its fetters, by our martyred Reformers. Millions of my perishing fellow sinners have none of these things. Even in Christian lands, professedly so called, the bells may sound, but they call to the rites of superstition, or to the preaching of a dead morality.

But, Oh! my soul, remember, yes, remember, that as your privileges are great, so is your responsibility. Never forget the doom of Chorazin and Bethsaida. Peter felt all the force of his Lord’s words when he wrote, respecting backsliders and apostates; "And when people escape from the wicked ways of the world by learning about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and then get tangled up with sin and become its slave again, they are worse off than before. It would be better if they had never known the right way to live than to know it and then reject the holy commandments that were given to them."

The hearts of such people were never renewed, their natures were never changed. This they proved by their return to the propensities of their natural hearts; for thus added Peter; "They make these proverbs come true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and "A pig that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud." The pig, though washed, was a pig still. The outward washing could not change the inward propensity of the animal. Is it not so with multitudes of baptized people? Outward reformation must never be confounded with inward regeneration.

Paul alludes to the same awful people in his Epistle to the Hebrews; "Anyone who refused to obey the law of Moses was put to death without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Think how much more terrible the punishment will be for those who have trampled on the Son of God and have treated the blood of the covenant as if it were common and unholy. Such people have insulted and enraged the Holy Spirit who brings God’s mercy to his people." "For it is impossible to restore to repentance those who were once enlightened—those who have experienced the good

things of heaven and shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come— and who then turn away from God. It is impossible to bring such people to repentance again because they are nailing the Son of God to the cross again by rejecting him, holding him up to public shame."

Oh! how we should dread every approach to final apostasy. "If we deliberately continue sinning after we have received a full knowledge of the truth, there is no other sacrifice that will cover these sins. There will be nothing to look forward to but the terrible expectation of God’s judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies."

When Paul says of the despiser of the blood of the covenant, "with which he was sanctified;" may he not allude to the ordinance of baptism, whereby the individual was sanctified or set apart to sacred uses, like the vessels of the temple? Had such an one been truly renewed by the Spirit of God, he would have been kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

"Dear friends, even though we are talking like this, we really don’t believe that it applies to you. We are confident that you are meant for better things, things that come with salvation. For God is not unfair. He will not forget how hard you have worked for him and how you have shown your love to him by caring for other Christians, as you still do. Our great desire is that you will keep right on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true. Then you will not become spiritually dull and indifferent. Instead, you will follow the example of those who are going to inherit God’s promises because of their faith and patience." Here the Apostle assures his beloved converts, that he was persuaded better things of them, and things that accompanied salvation, though he thus spoke.

I would then ask– Are all those true Christians; who are born in a Christian country? Are all those born again of the Spirit, who have been admitted by baptism unto the visible Church? Are all those the real disciples of Jesus, who attend his preached word? Alas! alas! many a heathen heart dwells in the bosom of a baptized Christian! What then is my state and character? Before men, I may be esteemed religious; but what will this avail, since He that judges me is the Lord. "For the Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

Surely I have cause to bless God if he has brought me to the saving knowledge of Christ as my Savior, my Intercessor, my Righteousness, My Hope, my Refuge, and my Trust. The Rock on which I can securely build. The Friend in whom I can safely confide. The Fountain of supply for all my needs. I never can sufficiently admire this boundless grace, granted to one so worthless, when justice might have consigned me to the burning wrath of an offended God.

Lord, why is this? I search, but cannot find the cause in myself. I contemplate your own Eternal Love, and there I reach the Fountain of all my mercies. "I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself." Surely mercy and truth have followed me all the days of my pilgrimage, like the waters in the wilderness, which cheered and refreshed the Israelites of old. As they drank of that spiritual Rock which followed them, (and that rock was Christ,) so have I been blessed with the living water from my crucified Lord, smitten for me.

As mountains rise above mountains, so do my mercies. On every side, I see blessings rise. To have Agur's wish fulfilled, is a favor of no ordinary kind. He well knew the danger of extremes, when he asked a gracious Providence to lead him in the middle path. "O God, I beg two favors from you before I die. First, help me never to tell a lie. Second, give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs. For if I grow rich, I may deny you and say, "Who is the Lord?" And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus insult God's holy name."

If a believer in Jesus, my happiness will be increased by living near to him, by living to his glory. May humility and love ever dwell in my heart; then I shall be happy in all the changing scenes of life. If called to ascend the hill of prosperity, or to traverse the valley of adversity; if blessed with health, or depressed with sickness; if carried to old age, or cut off by early death; all will be well, if Jesus is my Savior, and my Friend.

It is profitable to consider what I deserve, and what I enjoy, to awaken self-abasement, and gratitude. If the righteous Lord were to deal with me according to my deservings, I should at this moment be under the rack of excruciating pain; or, under the pressure of most abject poverty; or, under the destitution of every friend to comfort me; or, under the sting of an awakened, guilty conscience; thus feeling the foretaste of eternal woe.

If thus dealt with in strictest justice, Death would receive his commission to hurl my affrighted soul into the gulf of endless misery, there to remain an everlasting monument of the vengeance of a holy God. All short of this is mercy! Do I enjoy a portion of health? It is all mercy. Am I undergoing a sanctified affliction? It is all mercy. Do I partake of the bounties of Providence? It is all mercy. Do I possess dear, affectionate friends? It is all mercy. Do I experience the love of God in Christ, pardoning my sins, and purifying my heart? Oh! this is mercy, beyond the power of language to praise or to express. Rejoice, O my soul, in such a heavenly Father, who thus spares and blesses his rebellious child. Rejoice in such a Savior, whose intercession for you is incessant and prevailing. Rejoice in such a Comforter, whose gracious work it is to snatch you as a brand out of the burning.

Oh! that I could be more and more grateful for those mercies which I enjoy. Let every murmuring thought be gone. Lord make me all praise, all gratitude, all love. May sin increase in hatefulness, as I increase in the knowledge of your goodness. Enlighten my mind to know both myself and yourself. Increase this salutary knowledge, that, from a deep abiding sense of my own depravity of nature, I may be led with greater earnestness to flee into the ark of safety– Jesus Christ, the righteous.

"My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give you praise." "I will extol you, my God, O King; and I will bless your name forever and ever." "You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, I will exalt you." "The Lord is my strength and song, and has become my salvation." "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable." Thus sang the sweet Psalmist of Israel. O that I could seize his harp and strike a chord in unison with his!

Glory be to you, O Father, Son, and Spirit. To You be ascribed, by angels and men, all blessing, and honor, and glory, and power. Your name alone is excellent, and your glory above the earth and heaven. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting; and let all the people say, Amen. Hallelujah."

Soon shall I bid this world adieu!

And enter soon the world above;

The eternal day bursts on my view,

The radiance of eternal love.

Weep not, O friends, nor mourn my loss,

My purest joys are all to come;

When far removed from every cross,

I reach my sweet, my heavenly home.

The shadows fly, the glorious light

Bespeaks the Holy City nigh;

Behold the day excludes the night,

My soul, is this Eternity?

The first-born form a sacred train

Around the Lamb, whom they adore;

While, safe beneath his gentle reign,

They chant his praises evermore.

I fly to join the victor’s cry;

To taste their transports, all divine!

I fly to share the bliss on high,

And in my Savior’s glory shine.

Release me now, you heavy chains;

Burden of flesh, drop down, and die

You piercing griefs, you earthly pains,

From you forever do I fly.

Come, then, quickly, Jesus! Come!

03.00.1. SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF THE HEART

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF THE HEART or CHRISTIAN RETIREMENT by Thomas Reade, 1837 1. Christian Retirement 2. On Insensibility To Eternal Things

3. On The Fall 4. On The Prohibition In Paradise

5. On Unbelief 6. On The Total Depravity Of The Heart 7. On The Deceitfulness Of The Heart 8. On Keeping The Heart 9. On The Blessedness Of A New Heart 10. On The Immensity Of God 11. On The Divine Sovereignty 12. On The Two Covenants 13. On The Love Of God 14. On The Gift Of A Savior 15. On The Design Of The Gospel 16. On Perverted Views Of The Gospel 17. On The Nature Of Christianity 18. On Neglecting The Gospel 19. On Inadequate Views Of Human Nature 20. On Two Common Errors 21. On The Cause Of Skepticism 22. The Almost Christian 23. On Conversion 24. On The New Creature 25. On Christian Unity 26. On Following The Lord Fully 27. On The Two Great Instruments In The Conversion Of Sinners 28. The Two Sources 29. The Two Pillars 30. On The Two Ways 31. Mercy Rejoicing Against Judgment 32. On Intellectual And Spiritual Light 33. On Knowledge And Wisdom 34. On Passive Impressions And Active Habits 35. On Union To Christ 36. On The Christian Character 37. On Christian Motives 38. On Christian Conversation 39. On Christian Privilege 40. Agreement Necessary To Communion 41. On Separation From The World 42. On The Importance Of Self-Knowledge 43. On The Spirit Of Prayer 44. On The Cautions And Warnings Of Scripture 45. On Self-Deception 46. On Lukewarmness 47. On Forgetfulness Of God 48. On Watchfulness 49. On The Danger Of Riches 50. On The Thorns In The Parable 51. On The Parable Of The Rich Man And Lazarus 52. On The Three Enemies 53. On Indwelling Sin

54. On Trials 55. On Affliction 56. On The Character Of Martha And Mary 57. On The Character Of The Bereans 58. On The Living Water 59. On The Burning Bush

60. On Adoption

61. On Faith

62. On Hope

63. On Love

64. On Joy

65. On Peace

66. On Humility

67. On Meekness

68. On Purity 69. On Godly Fear 70. On The Believer’s Aim And Hope 71. On True Happiness 72. On True Religion

73. On Election 74. On Spiritual Vision

75. On Heaven 76. On The Blessedness Of The Saints 77. On Christian Obedience 78. On The Day Of Judgment

03.00.3. PREFACE

PREFACE The Bible is the sacred storehouse of heavenly wisdom. Its pages are stamped with the divine seal of eternal truth, and contain the charter of our hopes, our privileges, and our joys. Whatever tends to lead us from the love and study of the Holy Scriptures, should be dreaded as inimical to the highest interests of mankind; while every attempt, however feeble, which has for its object the promotion of the Redeemer’s glory, and the good of souls, will be received with affectionate indulgence by real Christians, who well know that success in any effort of usefulness is ’from above’. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord," is a declaration at once calculated to strengthen the weak, and to humble the strong. The simple design in publishing the following reflections, is to induce a habit of self-examination and prayer; and to excite to a more diligent perusal of the word of God. The author, therefore, desires to come in the kindly aspect of a friendly visitor; and if privileged to enter into the sacred retirement of the Christian, would there, through the blessing of God, endeavor to lead him into a closer communion with his own heart, and with Jesus, his exalted Savior. Nothing new is here presented to the Christian. The good old way in which the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and all true believers in every age have journeyed to the heavenly Canaan, is pointed out- Jesus is the way, the only way to the Father; the living way to holiness, happiness, and heaven. The prophet Isaiah was commanded to teach the people by line upon line, and precept upon precept; where, therefore, the same unspeakably precious truths recur again and again in these pages, their recurrence will not offend the humble believer who has tasted that the Lord is gracious. As bread and water are always pleasant to a healthy stomach, so the bread of life and the water of life are peculiarly refreshing to the soul which is hungering and thirsting after righteousness. An original hymn is subjoined to each meditation, which, it is hoped, may assist the spirit of piety, although it can lay little claim to the charms of poetry. The Christian reader must kindly excuse the frequent lack of close connection between the hymns and the meditations to which they are attached, as they were composed before the present volume was contemplated by its author. Should the Lord condescend to bless these humble exercises of the heart, to the guiding of some young inquirer to the Friend of sinners; to the quickening of some lukewarm professor; to the convincing of some skeptic; or the comforting of some afflicted believer; to the Triune God of our salvation be all the praise.

03.01-1. CHRISTIAN RETIREMENT

1. CHRISTIAN RETIREMENT

How needful to the real Christian, surrounded as he is by sensible objects, which have so powerful an influence on his mind and affections, are seasons for retirement from the hurry and distracting cares of the world! The soul cannot prosper in spiritual things, without much secret converse with its God and Savior.

Many duties are unavoidably of a public nature; but these, except in extraordinary cases, should not occupy those portions of time, which are sacred to meditation, reading the Scriptures, and prayer.

There is something peculiarly pleasant and profitable in the interchange of activity and retirement. As activity sweetens retirement, so retirement prepares the mind for renewed activity. Those people who are most engaged in active labors for the benefit of others, will find peculiar need for frequent retirement. In their closets, they must draw down from the Fountain of love, by faith and prayer, that spiritual strength, and those heavenly graces, which alone can enable them to labor perseveringly, as well as suffer patiently for Christ’s sake. The present times, which are so happily characterized by religious exertion, render this duty highly needful. It is no uncommon thing to hear excellent people complain, that their whole time is nearly divided between their own jobs and the claims of multiplying religious societies; thus leaving little or no leisure for the important duty of Christian retirement. Hence, spirituality of mind is much injured from the constant bustle in which some benevolent people live. They have frequent cause to join in the lamentation of the Spouse in the Canticles: "They made me a keeper of vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept." The increase of valuable institutions, formed for the purpose of extending the kingdom of Christ throughout the earth, calls for perpetual gratitude to God, who thus designs to bless our favored island with the light of his truth, and to stir up his faithful servants to those interesting labors of love. But it never was the design of Infinite Wisdom, that one duty should extirpate another. As every thing is beautiful in its season, so there is a time for every thing. The art of accomplishing much, consists in giving to every duty its proper place, time, and quantity. Here much wisdom is required; yet by prayer, watchfulness, and self-denial, much practical knowledge may be attained. When we seldom retire for holy converse with God, is there not great reason to suspect some latent, though perhaps unconscious repugnance to the more silent, unobtrusive offices of secret devotion? Some people grow almost melancholy if much alone. This surely betrays a defect either in the constitution or the heart. Absolute solitude is decidedly injurious; since He who made us has declared, that "it is not good that man should be alone." But occasional retirement, for the delightful purpose of holding converse with the Savior, greatly refreshes the spiritual faculties, just as rest from bodily labor recruits the wasted powers of our animal frame.

Some good men are so wedded to their studies, that they can scarcely force themselves from their beloved retreat; while others are so fond of active pursuits, that their minds seem averse to the sedentary employments of the closet. Like birds of passage, they live upon the wing. Both these

extremes are faulty, and consequently hurtful to each party. Every man has his circle of duty to fill up. This is larger or smaller, according to the station in which God has placed him. Let no one think that he may live for himself alone. Each individual has a sphere of usefulness to occupy; and his happiness is closely connected with the performance of his duty. Our divine Redeemer has left us an example that we should tread in his steps. May we daily study the conduct of Him whose life was one continued exercise of unwearied benevolence - "who went about doing good."

Nothing can more beautifully exemplify the duties of holy retirement and active benevolence, than the life of Jesus. In the Gospels, we read how incessant were his labors for the spiritual and temporal good of the thousands who followed him. And there we also read, how "he went up into a mountain apart to pray;" how "when the evening was come, he was there alone;" how "he continued all night in prayer to God." This he did, not occasionally, but frequently; thus setting us an illustrious example of ardent devotion, combined with unceasing exertion for the present and future happiness of fallen man.

Come, then, Oh! my soul, and withdraw yourself from a thoughtless world, which is so eagerly pursuing the phantom of happiness. Look unto Jesus - place all your affections upon him. He is the only source of spiritual felicity. While delighting yourself in the active services of a loving obedience, seek an increase of grace by daily secret converse with the Savior. We love the society of a dear friend. Can we then be strangers to communion with Jesus, if we indeed love him? Oh! that we may feel a sweeter relish for sacred retirement, when this retirement is designed to cultivate a closer acquaintance with our own hearts, and with Him who is "the chief among ten thousand," - the "altogether lovely One."

Blessed Spirit of grace and truth, shed forth your kindly influences on my soul. Preserve me from spiritual sloth, under the specious mask of religious retirement; and from ostentatious pride, under the imposing garb of active benevolence. Oh! make me sincere in all my professions of love and obedience; simply depending on your grace, while laboring to promote the welfare of my fellow-creatures; that in all things I may be willing to do and suffer your righteous will.

Jesus! my soul would now repose Beneath the banner of your love:

Each rising storm do you compose, Each darkening cloud far hence remove.

Beneath your smile is heavenly bliss;

How sweet in solitude with thee! My soul, in such a world as this, May now from anxious cares be free.

Reveal your mercies to my heart; With joy my longing spirit fill; Your grace unceasingly impart, To do and suffer all your will.

03.02-2. ON INSENSIBILITY TO ETERNAL THINGS

2. ON INSENSIBILITY TO ETERNAL THINGS

Come, Oh! my soul, call in your scattered thoughts; collect your wandering desires, and meditate with solemn awe on everlasting things. How busy is the world! How big with designs, all resting on tomorrow! But tomorrow's sun may never rise on thousands who are fondly hoping to behold a range of following years. Short-sighted mortals! He who rules over all, has assigned to each a limit, beyond which the worldling cannot pass. Man has an appointed time upon earth; his days are days of an hireling. Oh! for true wisdom to learn the measure of our days; and to compute with justness the extent of life. The volume of inspiration has done this with peculiar force and beauty. There human life is compared to a sleep; to the rapidity of a flood; to a tale that is told; to a vapor that appears for a little time; to a flower which flourishes in the morning, and in the evening is cut down and withered; to vanity; to a shadow that passes away.

Eternity - that solemn word soon passes from the lip; but who can grasp the mighty, the immense idea, which this word ETERNITY conveys? All thought is lost in its immensity, and swallowed up in its fathomless abyss. The mind may conceive, though faintly, of millions of ages heaped upon millions, until numbers lose themselves; or rather until we are lost in the vast calculation. But who can measure eternity? compared with, whose everlasting lines, myriads of years are infinitely less than atoms floating in the mid-day sun?

All men are hastening to eternity. All are standing upon the brink of an interminable state of being. Yet all, except the little flock of Christ, are living as if life would never end; and die as if beyond the grave there was nothing to awaken their solicitous concern. Awful insensibility! How fatally has sin blinded the mind of those who believe not! Men are willing to believe that which they wish to be true. They flatter themselves that all will be well at the last, though they follow the corrupt desires of their hearts, in direct opposition to the revealed will of God.

Here indeed, in this present world, the wicked, from their animal nature, have many objects to gratify their sensualistic appetites, even at the very time when their spirits are enduring the stings and lashes of an upbraiding conscience. But in eternity, where the body shall no longer be the seat of carnal desire; in eternity, where all the sensual gratifications shall forever cease; the soul will experience no change from pain to pleasure, or from pleasure to pain; but all will be either unmixed pain or unalloyed pleasure. Surely no thought can be more awakening than this; and yet with what subtlety does the heart evade its force; with what shocking indifference is it treated by a world of dying sinners!

"Oh blessed Jesus! compassionate High Priest, awaken my drowsy sense. Deliver me from the fatal lethargy of unbelief. Captivate all my heart by the sweet constraining influence of redeeming love. You who are the Sun of Righteousness, dispel the mist of error; dissipate every darkening cloud which would intercept your cheering beam; and let all your brightness burst upon my ravished sight. Reveal yourself as my Savior; let all your goodness pass before me; say to my

trembling heart - "I am your salvation" - then shall I be able to contemplate eternity, with joyful expectation; knowing, that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

Moses was well acquainted with the insensibility of the human heart to eternal things, when he prayed, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." We are walking every moment on the verge of eternity! A slight accident can loosen the cords which unite soul and body; and thus bring us instantly into the world of spirits. Then why should we calculate upon length of days? Why should we act as if we had years at command? This moment only is our own. So precious is time, that Infinite Bounty deals it out by seconds. And yet how prodigal we are of time, as if it were of all things the easiest to attain, or its loss the easiest to repair! Dying sinners whose consciences are awakened, and whose eyes are opened to see their danger, know the incalculable value of time. They feel every moment to be inconceivably precious, if, in this fleeting remnant of time, they can find the Savior whom they have basely slighted, and through his pardoning grace be saved from the wrath to come.

It is at dying beds that we learn something of the value of time. The keen self-reproaches of the convicted sinner show the folly of wasting days and hours, which have a value beyond the power of human calculation. The shortness of life is continually forcing itself upon us by the passing funeral-bell, the funeral procession, and the weekly voice of the obituaries. Yet its very commonness, which ought to alarm us, tends only to lull us into a strange security. This is observable in large towns, where multitudes are continually summoned into eternity; while in villages, where deaths are less frequent, a solemn awe is usually excited; at least for a time.

"Whatever others do, Oh! may I think seriously on my dying hour. Lord, teach me so to number my days, that I may apply my heart unto wisdom. Enlighten my understanding to perceive what things I ought to do, and give me grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same."

We are born in sin; therefore, to be happy we must be born again. We have lived in sin - and to be happy, we must be delivered from its reigning power. As in this world there is no peace to the wicked, so, in the next, they have no rest day nor night; for the smoke of their torment ascends up forever and ever. Oh! that they were wise; that they understood this; that they would consider their latter end. All that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Then those who be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever.

"Oh! blessed Lord, sit upon my heart as a refiner’s fire, and as a purifier of silver; that the dross of corruption may be purged away, and my soul prepared for the hour of death, and the never-ending glories of your heavenly kingdom." My soul, on Pisgah’s mount ascend, Where Moses once admiring stood;

There view the promised land extend Beyond the swelling Jordan’s flood. By faith survey the landscape over, Where living waters gently flow;

Until earth usurp your love no more;

Until all your kindling passions glow. In that blest region of delight, The saints not sin nor sorrow feel Eternal day excludes the night, And all possess the Spirit’s seal. The ransomed soul, in glory clad, Shines brighter than meridian sun; The weary pilgrim, now so sad, There finds his toilsome

journey done.

Cheer up, you saints, oppressed with grief With joy expand your drooping wing;

Jesus affords the kind relief;

Jesus extracts the envenomed sting.

Soon will you reach the blest abode, Where happy pilgrims ever reign;

Soon shall you see the face of God, And all the bliss of heaven obtain.

03.03-3. ON THE FALL

3. ON THE FALL

He who can contemplate the introduction of moral evil into our world without feelings of deep humiliation, is little prepared to receive with gratitude the stupendous mystery of redemption. The doctrine of the fall, with all its direful consequences, shines with awful clearness in the Book of God - "as by one man sin entered into the world, death by sin: so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." The doctrine of the fall lies at the foundation of atonement: for "those who are whole need not a physician, but those who are sick." Jesus came not "to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." He came "to seek and to save those who are lost." "This," therefore, "is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into world to save sinners." His glorious work was announced to Joseph by the angel, when he said, "His name shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.

While viewing the once happy pair after their awful fall, we are constrained to use the language of weeping Prophet: "how is the gold become dim, how is the most fine gold changed!" The sin of Adam was a compound of unbelief; pride, sensuality, ingratitude, and rebellion.

Unbelief; in giving credence to the tempter, rather than to God. Pride; in the fond desire of being wise as gods, knowing good and evil. Sensuality; in lusting after the forbidden fruit. Ingratitude; in leaguing with the fallen angels. Rebellion; in trampling the authority of Jehovah. The Apostle says, "Adam was not deceived; but the woman being deceived, was in the transgression." The serpent first beguiled Eve through his subtlety and then Eve gained an easy conquest over her husband; for it is recorded, "She took of the fruit then and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her and he did eat." By this act Adam acquiesced in sinful compliance with the temptation, and became a full sharer in her guilt and misery. In this guilt their whole posterity were likewise involved; for it is written "by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation. In Adam all die." The effect of the fall was shame, the never-failing companion of sin. "They knew that they were naked." The image of God was gone. Their native robe of innocence was gone. Their peace and purity were gone. Awful condition! They were indeed naked and exposed to all the terrors of incensed justice, without a covering from its wrath.

Another effect of the fall was the darkness of the mind. "They hid themselves from the presence of Lord God among the trees of the garden." Amazing blindness! to hide themselves from that Being, who eyes are brighter than ten thousand suns; who fill heaven and earth with his presence, and from whom no secrets are hid.

Slavish fear was another fruit of the fall. When God asked Adam why he hid himself, he replied, "I was afraid." Ah! what inward torment did sin produce in the soul of our first parents! How changed their condition! They are now afraid to look upon Him whose presence was their heaven and their joy.

Impiety and impenitence were also the baneful offspring of the fall. When God charged Adam with eating of the tree whereof he commanded that he should not eat, Adam replied, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." Mark the impiety. "The woman whom you gave to be with me;" thus charging the guilt upon the Almighty: as if he had said, "If you had never given me this woman, I would have never sinned against you." Oh! the impious insult upon divine benevolence, goodness, and love. Then mark also the impenitence of Adam; "she gave me of the tree and I did eat;" thus throwing the blame of his eating upon Eve; as if he were compelled to eat because she presented the fruit to him; and as if his own will had no part in it.

We see here no conviction of sin - no confession of guilt - no contrition on account of it. The garden of Eden exhibited no signs of penitence, no brokenness of heart; nothing but hardness and obduracy. Eve was just as bad as her husband. She, in like manner, endeavored to exculpate herself by saying, "The serpent beguiled me and I did eat."

Now observe, Oh! my soul; yes, observe with wonder, gratitude, and love, the boundless grace and mercy of Jehovah.

He, who spared not the angels that sinned, proclaimed a rich and free salvation to rebellious man. The Lord promised a deliverer, even the seed of the woman, who should bruise the serpent’s head. In the fullness of time, Jesus, the Savior, was born of a pure virgin; born to save his people from their sins, and to vanquish the powers of death and hell. This precious Jesus is now preached, through the everlasting Gospel, to all the guilty sons and daughters of Adam; with the blessed assurance, that all who believe in him shall be saved. From this short view of man’s apostasy and recovery it is evident that man is the sole author of his destruction; and that his salvation is altogether of free, unsought for, unmerited grace. Through the fall, man lost all spiritual power and will to love and serve God. But through the covenant of grace, he regains both; "for God works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." An attentive perusal of Gen 3:1-24 and Gen 4:1-26 will convince every humble inquirer after truth, through the teaching of the divine Spirit, that every man born into this world deserves nothing but everlasting damnation; since "that which is born of the flesh is flesh;" and "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." "Marvel not that I said unto you, you must be born again," was the reply of the Savior to the inquiring Nicodemus. The sinner may cavil and dispute, but his own heart will condemn him. His own life will condemn him. The law of God will condemn him. The sin of his nature, as a child of fallen Adam, will condemn him. He will find nothing but condemnation here, and judgment in the world to come. But let him look out of himself, to the second Adam, the Lord from heaven; to Jesus Christ, the promised deliverer; and there he will find every thing needful to repair the ruins of the fall; yes, to raise him to a more glorious state than if Adam had never sinned. And what in yonder realms above Is ransomed man ordained to be? With honor, holiness, and love, No seraph more adorned than he.

Nearest the throne and first in song, Man shall his hallelujah’s raise;

While wondering angels round him throng, And swell the chorus of his praise.

Amazing mystery! Oh wonderful wisdom of God, in thus educing such good out of such evil; and making that to redound to his glory, and manifest the bright display of his perfections, which Satan

intended as an awful blight on his new and fair creation!

Thus Satan is foiled, and "grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." "Sing, Oh! you heavens, for the Lord has done it. Shout, you lower parts of the earth; break forth in singing, you mountains, Oh! forest, and every tree therein; for the Lord has redeemed Jacob; and glorified himself in Israel."

Surely none but fools can make a mock at sin.

Sin transformed the angels of light into powers of darkness. Sin rendered the happy pair in Eden wretched outcasts in a world of woe. Sin was the cause of the universal deluge, and the fiery overthrow of the cities of the plain. Sin has ever marked its steps by misery and blood. Pride, malice, envy, murmuring, uncleanness, and every abomination hateful to a holy God, and destructive to our wretched race, spring from this poisonous root. Every particle of sin contains an infinity of evil, and deserves everlasting damnation.

But, Oh! my soul, if you would view sin in darkest colors and most terrible effects, go to Bethlehem, and ask, "Why did the King of heaven become infant of days? Why was He who fills all space, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger?" Go to Gethsemane, and ask, "Why did the incarnate God agonize, and sweat great drops of blood?" Go the judgment-hall, and ask, "Why did the Sovereign Judge of men and angels submit to be judged? Why did the innocent suffer such indignities? Why was the guiltless condemned to die?" Go to Calvary, and ask, "Why did the Lord of glory hang on the accursed tree? Why did the Lord of life condescend to pour out his soul unto death?"

It was to save you from your sin to redeem you from the curse of the law, by being made a curse for you; to deliver you from going down into hell, by becoming your ransom: it was to merit heaven for you by his precious atonement and obedience unto death; it was to purchase for you the eternal Spirit, by whose powerful aid you might believe, and love, and delight in this precious Savior this adorable Redeemer, this almighty Deliverer through whom your sins are pardoned, and by whom you have access unto God, as your reconciled Father. Oh! my soul, praise the Lord for his mercy, and never cease to speak good of his name.

Let this view of sin, and of a sin-bearing Savior humble you in his presence; and empty you of pride and vain glory. Let it, at the same time, fill you with gratitude to God, for having provided such a remedy against the evils of the fall.

Sin, even your sin, nailed, pierced, and agonized the Lord of glory! Oh! then, hate sin, and avoid it as you would tremble to plunge a spear into your Savior’s bosom; as you would shudder to trample under foot his sacred blood. "The wages of sin is death." But Oh! rejoice in this gracious declaration, "The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." And what is sin? "Sin is the transgression of the law." "All unrighteousness is sin." Sin is enmity against God; an inveterate opposition to the gospel method of salvation; a preference of our own will and the enjoyment of the creature, to the will and favor of the Creator. As sin crucified the Son of God, so it hates and persecutes him in all his faithful people. Sin is a daring rebellion against the Majesty of heaven, and would if it were possible, pluck the Eternal from his throne. The proud sinner presumptuously asks "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him!" And "the fool has said in his heart, There is no God."

Oh! my soul, is this hideous evil the inmate of your heart? Can you cherish such a serpent in your bosom? Lord, I tremble at the thought. "Blessed Jesus, turn out your enemy - my sin, and make me wholly yours; the purchase of your blood, the trophy of your grace, the monument of your mercy, a living temple consecrated to your praise.

Why is my heart so prone to leave A God of mercy and of love?

Why dare the Holy Spirit grieve?

Why far from Christ and heaven remove?

Lord, it is the fruit of Adam’s sin, The awful taint which nature bears;

Create me all anew within;

Dissolve my flinty heart to tears. To you I look, my only Lord; On you, my trembling soul depends;

Blest Savior! speak the healing word; Your pardoning mercy never ends.

Then will my heart overflow with joy, My life proclaim its grateful praise, Until safe in bliss, without alloy, My soul shall chant celestial lays.

03.04-4. ON THE PROHIBITION IN PARADISE

4. ON THE PROHIBITION IN PARADISE

Much of the beauty of Scripture is lost to us for lack of spiritual discernment. The ways of God appear dark, in proportion to the thick film which rests upon our understanding.

It is awful to reflect, how weak, polluted worms of earth dare to charge the infinite wisdom of Jehovah with folly. Surely we must say with the Psalmist, "God is strong and patient" - and God is provoked every day. The following considerations show at once the reasonableness, holiness, and goodness of the law of paradise.

1. As God had made man the governor of this lower world, and crowned him with so many mercies, "it was manifestly proper that he should require some particular instance of homage and fealty, to be a memorial to man of his dependence, and an acknowledgment on his part, that he was under the dominion of a higher Lord, to whom he owed absolute subjection and obedience.

2. What instance of homage could be more proper, circumstanced as man then was, than his being obliged, in obedience to the divine command, to abstain from one or more of the fruits of paradise?

3. It pleased God to insist only upon his abstaining from one; at the same time that he indulged him in full liberty as to the rest.

4. This easy and reasonable prohibition served both as an act of homage to the supreme Lord from whose bountiful grant he held paradise, and all its enjoyments; and was also fitted to teach our first parents a noble and useful lesson of abstinence and self-denial; one of the most necessary lessons in a state of probation; and also of unreserved submission to the authority and will of God; and an implicit resignation to his supreme wisdom and goodness.

5. This test of their obedience, from the nature of it, tended to habituate them to keep their sensitive appetites in subjection to the law of reason; to take them off from too close an attachment to inferior sensible good; and engage them to place their highest happiness in God alone.

6. This injunction not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, would also tend to keep their desires after knowledge within just bounds, so as to be content with knowing what was really proper and useful for them to know; and not presume to pry with an unwarrantable curiosity into things which belong not to them, and which God has not thought fit to reveal.

Now who can seriously meditate upon these valuable considerations, without being affected at the goodness of God in commanding, and at the baseness of man in transgressing, such a reasonable test of his obedience? This law was truly a law of love; and the breach of it was the highest instance of ingratitude and rebellion.

How inconceivably great is the grace of God, that at the very time when he came down to pronounce the sentence of death upon his offending creatures, he should reveal, by promise, an Almighty Savior, even Himself, who should destroy the power of darkness, put an end to transgression, make an end of sin, bring in ever-lasting righteousness, and form a people to show forth his praise!

If we examine attentively the foregoing considerations, we shall find that nothing was imposed upon Adam, that we are not now commanded to perform, with respect to the spiritual part of the injunction.

We must love; God supremely - acknowledge our dependence upon him - seek our whole happiness in him - delight in his law - be resigned to his will - keep our sensitive appetites in subjection - and check all unhallowed curiosity into the ways and wisely hidden things of God.

Every deviation from this state of heart and practice is a deviation from the holy law of God; and as a necessary consequence entails guilt and misery upon us. Thus we see, that happiness is inseparable from obedience. We learn from hence, that misery and wretchedness do not depend upon our station, but on the state of our souls. Adam in paradise was happy, while innocent. Adam in paradise was miserable, when guilty. The law delivered on Mount Sinai is a standing revelation of the holiness of God; and the various precepts of the Gospel are all in consonance with these pure and undefiled commandments. Both the injunctions of the moral law, and the precepts of the Gospel, were virtually included in the original law given to our first parents in paradise, thus forming a chain of holiness from the beginning to the end of times. It resembles a beautiful flower, of which the bud is seen in Eden, the expanding leaves on Mount Sinai and its glowing beauties in Emmanuel’s land.

Heaven is its native soil. There shall all the trees of righteousness be finally transplanted; and there shall the lovely flowers of paradise expand their beauties, and spread their fragrance fed by perpetual dews of heavenly grace, and screened forever from the blasting pestilence of this sinful world.

Oh blessed Redeemer, Lord divine! With beams of mercy on me shine;

Until every thought and word agree, Until every work be done for thee.

What is the world but grief and care?

What heaven, if you be absent there? Your glorious face illumines the sky, And sheds ecstatic joys on high Your love, with beams of heavenly grace, Gladdens our guilty, fallen race; In Sharon’s lovely, blushing rose, You deign your beauties to disclose.

03.05-5. ON UNBELIEF

5. ON UNBELIEF

Unbelief is a sin of much greater extent than is generally imagined. Some people confine the sin of unbelief to Jews, Muhammadans, and Pagans; to atheists, deists, and skeptics. They deem it a breach of charity to charge this moral evil upon those who profess to believe the Gospel to be a revelation from God; and who exhibit in their outward character, the amiable virtues of benevolence, kindness, and compassion. But if we bring what the world denominates faith to the test of Scripture, and try its genuineness by the touchstone of the word of God, we shall soon discover it to be "reprobate silver." This counterfeit coin bears some rude outlines of the King's image; but it is so badly executed, that it may be easily detected by a spiritual discerner.

True faith is lively, operative, and fruitful. True faith works by love, that sacred spring which sets all the wheels of obedience in motion. True faith purifies the heart, by uniting the soul to Jesus, and drawing from him through the Spirit, continual supplies of grace and strength, to mortify sin, and walk in the ways of holy obedience. True faith overcomes the world, by raising the believer above its vanities and follies; by enabling him to renounce its pomps and honors; and to live as a pilgrim and stranger upon earth. True faith realizes the invisible glories of heaven, and thus becomes the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. But how does the world's faith operate? It leads men to the house of God on the Sabbath; and then allows them to attend theaters, and gayeties of every description through the week. It induces them to attend the Lord's table on some great festival of the church, and then lulls their consciences to sleep by the assurance that they have done "some great thing" towards liquidating the contracted debt of daily transgression. It prompts them, it may be, to read their Bibles on the Sabbath, and then to close the sacred volume until the Sabbath returns again. The faith of the nominally Christian world, bad as it is, is nevertheless valuable to civil society; inasmuch as it restrains men in some degree from the licentious and savage practices of heathen nations, and preserves some portion of external decency and respect for religion among us. But it has nothing saving in it, because it has no respect to the will and favor of God. This profession of faith is consistent with worldly ambition, pride, lust, avarice, hatred of God, and enmity to the Gospel. These evils abound in the lives of multitudes, with whose praises the world resounds.

Look at the great mass of our population, all of whom profess to be Christians. And what is the character of their life and conduct? Who fill the theaters? who resort to houses of debauchery? who tread the giddy circles of maddening pleasure? who compose the midnight revel, and waste their reason amid the fumes of intoxication? who defraud and circumvent their neighbors? who defile their conversation by obscenity and oaths? who spend their time, when worldly business releases them from labor, in idle indulgences or active wickedness? The nominal professors of Christianity; men who would be highly offended if you ranked them among the degraded idolaters of the heathen world- men, who pride themselves upon their elevated scale in society, and who glory in the name of Christian. Yet these pretended admirers of Christianity abhor the spirit of the

religion which they profess! They scruple not to charge the humble followers of Jesus, who "run not with them to the same excess of riot," with hypocrisy, enthusiasm and fanaticism. They regard them with a sneer of contemptuous scorn; and delight to make them the sportive subject of their bacchanalian carousals. Many of these enemies of the cross of Christ are loaded with the common bounties of an indulgent providence.

"How terrible it will be for you who sprawl on ivory beds surrounded with luxury, eating the meat of tender lambs and choice calves. You sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and you fancy yourselves to be great musicians, as King David was. You drink wine by the bowlful, and you perfume yourselves with exotic fragrances, caring nothing at all that your nation is going to ruin." The poor of Christ's flock are allowed to perish around them, unheeded and despised! But oh! what an awful change ensues, when death strikes the fatal blow! Instead of beds of ivory and couches of luxurious ease, they lie down on the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. Instead of bacchanalian songs and the melody of sweet music, they hear and join in the dreadful concert, composed of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth! Instead of the delicious wine poured with profusion into their golden bowls, they crave in vain for a drop of water to cool their flaming tongues.

Instead of continuing their laugh of ridicule at the once despised follower of Jesus, "they, repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit, are amazed at the strangeness of his salvation, so far beyond all that they looked for;" and exclaim, "this was he, whom we had once in derision and a proverb of reproach. We fools have accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honor; how is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints! Therefore have we erred from the way of truth, and the light of righteousness has not shined unto us, and the Sun of righteousness rose not upon us. We wearied ourselves in the way of wickedness and destruction; yes, we have gone through desert places where there lay no way, but as for the way of the Lord we have not known it. What has pride profited us? or what good has riches with our bragging brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow, and as a post that hastens by." Oh! that men were wise; that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!

Unbelief manifests itself in characters of another class.

Many nominal professors of Christianity are of a sweet, amiable disposition; temperate in their enjoyments, and benevolent to their poor neighbors. They are ready to promote objects of general usefulness, and pride themselves upon their integrity of principle and strict propriety of action, But how does their faith operate? Does it wean their affections from the world? Does it make Jesus daily more precious to their souls? Does it break them off from all self-righteous dependence? Does it produce real contrition for sin; and continual application to the Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness?

Alas! they know little, and they feel less, of all this. They had never seen their absolute guilt and wretchedness as the offspring of fallen Adam; and therefore they feel not their need of a crucified Jesus, to save them from the curse and dominion of sin.

They profess indeed to believe in the Gospel; but they come to it as "they who are whole." Their language is that of the young ruler, "What lack I yet?" Hence they deem all experimental religion, all warm affections to the Savior, all renunciation of worldly pleasures which are incompatible with

the pure spirit of the gospel, as carrying matters too far; as being righteous over much. They wish to possess both worlds; to taste the joys of earth - and the bliss of heaven. But eternal truth has said, "you cannot serve God and mammon." Such profession of faith must therefore lead to the chambers of death; for "if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." And Christ has declared of all his true disciples, "you are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

It is also a melancholy truth, that unbelief is not wholly eradicated from the hearts of believers. If it were, there would have been no need for this caution, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." And again: speaking of the Israelites in the wilderness, Paul says, "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." And then he adds this solemn warning: "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

Those who are in the habit of observing the secret movement of their own spirit, will soon perceive how this subtle evil lies at the bottom of all their languor in devotion: their inertness of duty; their dulness in spiritual perception, and their declensions from the ways of God. This acquaintance with our own heart will lead us to the continued exercise of watchfulness and prayer, through the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit. A consciousness of inbred sin will cause us to distrust ourselves, to look continually unto Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. This salutary fear, implanted in the heart through the covenant love of God, alone can keep us from falling. We shall walk over the slippery paths of this sinful world with safety, when we tread with cautious step, "leaning upon our beloved." This knowledge of our corruption, when taught by the Spirit of truth, in connection with the remedy provided to remove it, even the atoning blood of Jesus, causes the soul who receives it, to sink deep in self-abasement; to rise high in heavenly affections; to renounce the vanities of the world; and to grow in a daily fitness for the inheritance of the saints in light.

How extensive, then, is the evil of unbelief. It blights the whole moral creation of God, producing sterility in every heart unrenewed by sovereign grace; while it sheds its baneful influence even over the trees of righteousness which stand in the garden of the Lord.

Just in proportion as its influence is felt in the people of God, it operates like the chilling blast in the vineyard. The blossom is injured - the fruit is checked - yes, too often withered. To this root of bitterness may be traced all the wickedness of the world; all the evils which have abounded, and do abound in the visible church of Christ; all the declensions and falls which have unhappily stained the lives of many, who, by their deep repentance, have proved themselves to be among the redeemed of the Lord.

"Blessed Savior! you who came down from the throne of glory to die for poor perishing sinners, save me from the deadly sin of unbelief. Oh! give me faith in your precious blood. Enable me to rely upon you with the simplicity of a little child. On you may I repose my soul, for you did bear my sins in your own body on the tree. Lord save me from self-righteousness; from the love of the world from pride of heart; from fleshly indulgence. Keep me near to yourself. Wash me daily in your cleansing blood from every contracted defilement. Clothe me with the robe of righteousness, with the garment of salvation. Cause me to rejoice in you; to live in the light of your countenance; to taste that you are gracious; and to glorify you by a growing conformity to your mind and will." In the hour or death and danger, When the angry storms impend;

Woe to you, you wilful stranger To the great Almighty Friend. In the days of ease and pleasure, When your sun unclouded shone, Every folly was your treasure, And usurped your heart alone.

Jesus Christ was disregarded, Love and mercy smiled in vain;

Vengeance threatened - wrath retarded;

Nothing did your lust restrain. But behold! He now arises, Clad with frowns and armed with woe, He your guilty soul surprises;

Where, ah! where will you go?

Earth, with all its gilded treasures, Cannot yield a moment’s ease;

Folly, with her wanton pleasures, Now has lost her power to please.

Swelling streams of guilt surround you, Like an overwhelming flood;

Ah! poor sinner, haste and turn you To a Savior’s cleansing blood!

See his agonizing features;

See his pains endured for thee;

See him bleed for rebel creatures, Groaning on the accursed tree.

Still perhaps he may be gracious;

Still his mercy may forgive;

Like the heaven so vast and spacious, Is the love which bids you live.

03.06-6. ON THE TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF THE HEART

6. ON THE TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF THE HEART The corruption of the human race after the fall, was radical and universal. "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually;" Gen 6:5.

It would seem surprising, that any one should read this passage in the Bible, and yet deny the doctrine of human depravity, did we not know the natural blindness of the understanding by reason of sin. A painful truth is however plainly stated- that the heart of man is evil. And that this solemn truth may be placed in the strongest light, it is further added that not only the thoughts, but the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart are evil. By this declaration we learn how the fall has corrupted all the secret workings of the human mind; since the very outline or rude sketch of the thoughts is polluted.

If the fountain be thus poisoned, can we wonder at those deadly streams which issue from it? All who know themselves, through the teaching of the divine Spirit, can testify to the truth of this Scripture from their own experience. "The heart knows its own bitterness."

Oh! that sovereign grace may cast down every proud and sinful imagination which is contrary to the holy law of God, and bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Some, contending for a portion of natural goodness, may perhaps say- True, the imagination is often defiled; but must we acknowledge no remainders of virtue? What says the Scripture? "every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart is evil." Allowing that this is true, yet may there not be some mixture of good with the evil? What says the Scripture? "every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart is only evil." Admitting this, yet may there not be some intervals of goodness? What says the Scripture? "every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart is only evil continually."

If this be indeed the state of man’s heart, yet may not the innocent season of youth be an exemption from this awful charge? What says the Scripture? "the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth." Gen 8:21. "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies." Psa 58:3. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child:" Pro 22:15. "Childhood and youth are vanity." Ecc 11:10. And, as if determined to abase the pride of fallen man, and to place the doctrine of original sin beyond dispute; David, speaking under the influence of the Spirit of truth, declares, "I was shaped in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Psa 51:5.

Very many pertinent and important passages might be adduced, all of which attest this solemn truth of original sin. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one!" Job 14:4. "What is man that he should be clean; and he which is born of a woman that he should be righteous?" Job 15:14. "how can he be clean that is born of a woman?" Job 25:4. Hence we conclude, with divine inspiration, that we are "by nature the children of wrath." Eph 2:3; "that there is none righteous, no not one." Rom 3:10.

Oh! my soul, cavil not with your justly offended Creator, but confess your guilt, both original and actual. Seek for grace to lie low at his feet; and to accept with joyful heart those gracious offers of pardon and peace, which are so freely made to you, through the great propitiatory sacrifice of his well-beloved Son. The grace of God when viewed, as it always ought to be, in connection with the wretched state of sinful man, shines like the beauteous rainbow on the darkened cloud. Its lovely hues cheer and delight the mind in the midst of surrounding gloom.

How consoling to a soul bowed down under a sense of guilt, are the following promises: "When I passed by you, and saw you polluted in your own blood, I said unto you, LIVE; yes I said unto you, when you were in your blood, LIVE!" Eze 16:6. Then comes the source of this mercy- "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you." Jer 31:3. But how can a polluted creature be pleasing to a pure and holy God? Behold the effects of sovereign grace: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you; a new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh; and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statues, and you shall keep my judgments and do them." Eze 36:25-27. The safety and perseverance of the redeemed is sweetly declared in the following delightful promise "I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them; that I will not turn away from then to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me" Jer 32:39.

Support and final success are also promised to the believer under all the various trials and difficulties which he may be called upon to endure in the cause of his covenant God and Savior. "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." Isa 41:10. "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: for I am the Lord your God, the holy one of Israel, your Savior." Isa 43:2-3. For the present and everlasting consolation of the believer, a full and free forgiveness of all sin is graciously declared: "I even I, am he that blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember your sins." Isa 43:25. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and as a cloud your sins: return unto me, for I have redeemed you." Isa 44:22. "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; you shall not be ashamed nor confounded, world without end." Isa 45:17.

Well may the ransomed sinner exclaim: "Oh, Lord! I will praise you: though you were angry with me, your anger is turned away and you comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." Isa 12:1-2. "I will extol you, my God, Oh, King! and I will bless your name forever and ever. Every day will I bless you, and I will praise your name forever and ever." Psa 145:1. "Bless the Lord, Oh, my soul! and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, Oh, my soul! and do not forget all his benefits: who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases; who redeems your life from destruction; who crowns you with loving-kindness and tender mercies." Psa 103:1-4.

Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name forever. And let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen. When I

survey the human race, And sin’s deceitful windings trace, Lord, what is man, amazed I cry, That you for him should deign to die?

How vast the love that brought you down, To take affliction’s thorny crown, Midst scoffs, the gorgeous robe to wear Midst sneers, the sceptered reed to bear, Yet with this crown and purple robe; Your kingdom far exceeds the globe; A kingdom wide as endless space, Prepared for man through sovereign grace.

While others spurn this matchless love, You, my warm affections move;

Drawn by your sacred Spirit, Lord, May I adore the incarnate Word.

Then shall I live in heavenly rest, And die in peace, supremely blest;

Borne on some friendly seraph’s wing, The praises of my God to sing.

03.07-7. ON THE DECEITFULNESS OF THE HEART

7. ON THE DECEITFULNESS OF THE HEART The word of truth declares, "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Jer 17:9. The deceitfulness of the heart is so great, that no human penetration can discover its extent, or detect its various windings. Fully to know this hidden evil is the prerogative of Jehovah; for when the question is asked, "Who can know it?" the important answer is given, "I the Lord, search the heart and try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings." The holy, ever blessed Trinity, three persons in one Jehovah, can alone raise man from the ruins of the fall, and restore him to holiness, happiness, and heaven. How vain then are all attempts to renovate the old Adam. The ancient philosopher and the modern rationalist have each found their boasted efforts ineffectual, in restoring the disfigured mind of man to moral beauty. The arts of civilization may indeed render the savage peaceable, domestic, and industrious; just as a refined education gives to the more cultivated parts of society, that vigor of mind and suavity of manner which greatly add to the enjoyment of social life. But without the sanctifying grace of God, communicated through the faithful preaching of the Gospel, the rude barbarian, though civilized, still retains his blindness respecting the true God, and all his native propensities to evil.

If we turn our eyes from the civilized heathen, to his superior in the scale of intelligence, the polished and well-educated inhabitant of a Christian country, we behold in this latter character, science, taste, politeness; all that can charm the mind and imagination in the brilliancy of wit, strength of intellect, and sportive flights of fancy; yet even this polished stone, cut out of the quarry of nature, and rendered so beautiful by art, is still destitute of real worth, while devoid of those qualities which alone can render it precious in the sight of God. Such a character, the world’s idol and the Gospel’s bane, is held up as the pinnacle of excellence, while utterly abhorrent in the eye of Him who sees not as man sees; and who has declared, that while man looks at the outward appearance, he looks at the heart.

Hence we see the necessity of converting grace, whether in the crude, or more polished parts of the human race. In all, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. In all, sin reigns, until divine love dethrones the tyrant, and brings the humbled sinner to the feet of Jesus.

We cannot have a more convincing proof of the corruption of our nature, than that proneness which we continually feel to seek rest in the creature, and to find our satisfaction in earthly things. This alienation of the heart from God, may and often does exist to a most awful extent, under the fair garb of amiability of temper, and the creditable profession of orthodox Christianity. It is therefore possible to be highly esteemed among men, and yet be an abomination in the sight of God. The holy Scriptures declare, that God will not accept of a divided heart. We must love God supremely, or we do not love him at all. We must rest altogether upon his grace as manifested in the gift of his beloved Son, or our partial dependence will be found a delusion. The language of the Almighty Father is, "my son give me your heart." Oh, happy hour! when the heart is cheerfully and without reserve given to a gracious God. As all sin lies in the departure of the heart from God. So

all holiness is concentrated in this unreserved surrender of the heart to him. Herein lies the secret of holiness and of happiness. When the heart is once truly given to God; when the affections flow delightfully towards him; when the will is swallowed up in the Divine will; when the whole soul is devoted to the service of its Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer; then the fruits of righteousness will appear and abound; then joy and peace will gladden the heart; and hope and love will unite to prepare the believer for his eternal rest. But it is most awful to think how little the blessed God is regarded and obeyed by creatures whom he has endued with reason and reflection.

Man, although formed to show forth the praises of Jehovah, is of all his lower works, the only creature who rebels against his sovereign will. "The ox knows' his owner, and the donkey his master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not consider." "The stork in the heaven knows her appointed times; and the turtle-dove, and the crane, and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord." "Listen, you foolish and senseless people - who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear. Do you have no respect for me? Why do you not tremble in my presence? I, the Lord, am the one who defines the ocean's sandy shoreline, an everlasting boundary that the waters cannot cross. The waves may toss and roar, but they can never pass the bounds I set. 'But my people have stubborn and rebellious hearts. They have turned against me and have chosen to practice idolatry.'" Jer 5:21-23 When we read the sacred pages of revealed truth, what an awful catalogue of crime meets our eye. What unbelief, what pride, what sensual lust, what covetousness, what supreme attachment to the world, what daring independence and contempt of the Almighty, what entire forgetfulness of God, and abominable idolatries, what gross impurities, what envy, malice, cruelties and love of murder, what deceit and fraud, what superstition, hypocrisy and formality, what crimes of every name and character stain the history of our fallen race, and prove by an incontrovertible evidence, that we are born in sin, and are by nature the children of wrath. For such a world of hateful sinners, Jesus died! Oh! stupendous miracle of mercy! Well may angels desire to look into this mystery of love. But Oh! amazing infatuation, man, for whom this mercy was provided, man to whom this mercy is offered, man, who so greatly needs it, and who without it must perish forever, is careless and indifferent, yes, most awfully opposed to it!

We do not dislike mercy, but we dislike the channel through which it flows. We do not dislike forgiveness, but we dislike the purity of heart connected with it. We do not dislike heaven as a place of rest from toil and sorrow, but we dislike those dispositions and affections which alone can qualify us for the enjoyment of it.

While we would gladly be saved from future misery, we cannot part with present sinful attachments: therefore we willfully renounce the infinite joys of heavenly glory, and choose the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, with all their tremendous consequences, in a future world. Awful delusion! Lord save us from such a miserable choice and condition. In the midst of this general aversion to the humbling, purifying, elevating doctrines and precepts of the Gospel, there is, in every age, a "remnant according to the election of grace," who most gladly and thankfully embrace the rich offers of mercy made to a lost world through the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God. These happy souls receive Christ into their hearts by faith, obtain pardon and peace through his blood, and are renewed in the spirit of their minds through the power of the Holy Spirit. They walk in humble fear and holy obedience; are admitted as heirs of glory into God's everlasting kingdom; and reign with Christ their Lord and Savior forever and ever.

Blessed Jesus! you who are the kind Physician of souls, heal this fatal distemper of my fallen nature - an earthly mind. Spiritualize my affections - elevate my views - enlarge my heart. Fill my soul with your own self. Let me not grovel here below, fond of the perishing vanities of time. Wean my heart from the transitory enjoyments of sense, and fix my affections upon yourself, the eternal unchanging source of good. Oh! satisfy me with your mercy, and that soon. Hasten to help me, for you are my God.

Short-sighted man can only see The outward form of piety; But God can in a moment dart Within The caverns of the heart To his all-searching, piercing eye, Our secret evils naked lie;

Pride cannot work by him unseen, Nor angry passion; lust, or spleen.

Wash me in Jesus' blood divine; May I be his, and he be mine; From all deceitful workings, free My heart that pants to live for thee. A monument of grace I stand, Redeemed, supported by your hand;

Whatever I am, whatever possess, It is all the gift of richest grace.

Then let my soul forever raise The incense of adoring praise; And join the heavenly choirs above, In sweetest songs of grateful love.

03.08-8. ON KEEPING THE HEART

8. ON KEEPING THE HEART When we are spiritually taught of God to know something of the desperate wickedness and deceitfulness of our hearts, we are prepared to feel the force of this exhortation: "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Our blessed Lord has told us, that out of the heart proceed evil thoughts; from where we learn, that the heart is the fountain of all wickedness. Evil thoughts are the springs of evil actions. Until the fountain be cleansed, all the streams which issue from it must therefore be impure. The heart undergoes a wonderful change when renewed by the Spirit of grace. But, as man is renewed only in part, it becomes the constant duty and work of every believer to keep his heart with all diligence. Sinless perfection is the glory and blessedness of heaven. Here on earth, the most holy servant of God finds daily need of deep humiliation.

"A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet." John 13:10. Daily contracted defilement needs daily washing. All the children of God labor to abound yet more and more in all knowledge and in all goodness. Forgetting the things which are behind, they reach forth unto those things which are before; and eagerly press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Uniting with holy David in sentiment and feeling, they can individually say, "I hate vain thoughts, but your law do I love." "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, my strength and my Redeemer." And is this your prayer, Oh, my soul? Are you laboring to maintain a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards man? Is "the thought of foolishness" distressing to you? Can you with Christian sincerity join in this prayer of the Psalmist "Search me, Oh God, and know my heart, try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way?" The Scriptures declare, "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he." This habitual inward state of the thoughts determines his character in the sight of God.

"Lord give me grace carefully to observe my thoughts, and to watch and pray, lest being drawn into temptation through the wiles of the devil and the deceitfulness of my heart, I should grieve your Holy Spirit, by whom your people are sealed unto the day of redemption."

Evil thoughts are not our sins, when, being injected by Satan, our will does not consent unto them, but hates and opposes them: and when we earnestly entreat the Lord to save us by his grace from these fiery darts of the wicked one. But as the difficulty lies in ascertaining whether these evil suggestions spring from Satan, or the corruption of our nature, the safest way is to be humbled on account of them: to betake ourselves to Jesus for deliverance from these spiritual enemies, remembering how kindly he has said, "Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." If, through inattention, our souls lie open to the inroads of our ever watchful foe, then the evil thoughts which he stirs up within us, and which are allowed to lodge in our hearts, become our sin. All wanderings and distractions of mind in our religious exercises, arising from lack of watchfulness and due keeping of the heart are sinful.

Those evil thoughts which are excited by dwelling on forbidden objects, reading immoral books, associating with carnal people, or partaking in worldly amusements calculated to inflame the passions, are most awfully chargeable upon us; and will, if not repented of and atoned for through a believing application to the blood of Jesus, sink our souls into endless perdition. If evil, ever bubbling up in the heart, so soon issues into the various actions of the life; how needful to every true believer is this exhortation of Solomon: "keep your heart with all diligence." In order that our thoughts may please God, they must be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. The word of Christ must dwell in us richly, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that out of the abundance of the heart, our mouth may speak to his praise and glory. "Your word," says David, "have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against you." "Whatever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, we must think on these things."

We must carefully watch against the first risings of sin, that through grace, the sprouting evil may be nipped in the bud.

We must be much in the habit of mental prayer, lifting up our heart to God on all occasions in humble, fervent ejaculations: which is what the Apostle recommends when he says, "pray without ceasing." This spirit of prayer, this holy habit of devotion, these sacred breathings of the soul, hinder no business except the evil workings of Satan on the mind. This heavenly frame, this delightful communion with the Father of Spirits, forms the purest source of enjoyment to the Christian pilgrim, while journeying through a valley of tears. To prevent the intrusion of evil thoughts, we must always take care to be usefully employed; since idleness is the soil in which Satan sows his tares with liberal hand. The best way to keep the heart, is that which Jude prescribes; "Keep yourselves in the love of God." We must meditate often on the nature of Almighty God, his majesty and glory, his truth and justice, his holiness and purity, his grace and mercy. We must also contemplate our own apostasy, vileness, and nothingness. We must think much on the love of Christ in dying for sinners, on his agony and bloody sweat, his cross and passion; and then ask - "Can I indulge a sinful thought, and cherish in my mind those dreadful evils, which nothing but the blood of God incarnate could expiate and wash away? Can I sin against such transcendent love?"

We must dwell with delight on the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit, in leading the trembling sinner to Jesus; in enabling him to believe with the heart unto righteousness; and in causing him to love that precious Savior, who is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. We must be continually looking with an eye of faith to Jesus, as our great example; remembering that "those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them are not Christians at all." Rom 8:9. He left us "an example that we should follow his steps;" and has declared, "my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." His whole mediatorial character must be the object of our thoughts, until our souls are changed into his same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord. In order to the keeping of the heart with all diligence, we must labor to set the Lord always before us. We must feel ourselves surrounded with his omnipresence, to whom the darkness and the light are both alike; who weighs the spirits; who is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Oh! my soul, trifle no longer with your thoughts. The irregular desire, the impure look, the angry purpose, though unseen by man, are all recorded by the Omniscient God; and will be condemned

as actual transgressions of his holy law, in that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed.

Hasten then to Jesus for grace to save you, and to keep you. Forever renounce all hope of saving yourself by any merit of your own. If "the thought of foolishness is sin," where is the man that lives and sins not?

"Blessed Savior! in you alone have I righteousness and strength. Put forth your mighty power. Deliver me from the assaults of Satan, and the workings of an evil heart.

Enable me to watch and pray, to wrestle and fight, to labor and strive in your promised strength, until conflict shall end in victory; weariness in rest; and mourning in eternal songs of joy." With guilt oppressed, bowed down with sin, Beneath its load I groan;

Give me, dear Lord, a heart of flesh, Remove this heart of stone. A burdened sinner, lo! I come, An heir of death and hell;

Oh! seal my pardon with your blood, And all my fears dispel. Nor peace, nor rest, my soul can find, Until your dear cross I see;

Until there in humble faith I cry, My Jesus died for me.

Oh! give this realizing faith, This soul supporting view;

Until old things be forever past, And all within be new.

03.09-9. ON THE BLESSEDNESS OF A NEW HEART

9. ON THE BLESSEDNESS OF A NEW HEART

It is delightful to contemplate the beauties which are contained in one short passage of the Holy Scriptures. In grace, as in nature, we find much beauty in what appears comparatively minute. Faith, like the microscope, discovers the hidden charms, and presents to our mind those excellencies, which lie undiscovered to the eye of reason. The following short promise is of this description: "I will give them one heart and one way." Jer 32:39. The whole of the Christian character is summed up in these few words. This precious promise virtually contains every thing which relates to inward and outward godliness; faith working by love; and love working by obedience. "I will give them one heart and one way." The two great features of the Christian character are here expressed: SINGLENESS OF HEART, and CONSISTENCY OF CONDUCT. Without a single eye, that is, without a unity of desire, and a unity of design, to promote the glory of God, all profession of faith and love is hypocritical and vain.

True faith is simple in its dependence and looks only unto Jesus for pardon and peace, and every other spiritual blessing. It draws off the mind from all other objects, and causes the believer with "one heart" to rely upon the atonement made by the Son of God for sin; and to draw only out of his fullness every needful grace. This "one heart" is, therefore a most comprehensive blessing. The more we examine into it with spiritual discernment, the more of new beauties we shall discover, unfolding themselves to our enlightened minds. When Adam was in a state of innocence, he had only "one heart." Since the fall, the heart of man is "divided." The world, sin, and self, each claim their share; and as the Almighty will have the whole or none, he has, in righteous displeasure, left his rebel creatures to the miseries of a divided and distracted heart. But in the covenant of grace, he promises to repair the breach; to give us "one heart," that we may fear his name, seek his glory, become his portion, and thus enjoy, through the merits of the Savior, the inestimable blessings of communion with himself, peace of conscience, and assured hope of glory. "Unite my heart to fear your name," was the ardent prayer of David. Through the fall, we are dead in trespasses and sins. There is no movement for God. All is disorder and confusion, like a broken watch, whose wheels lie scattered here and there, and whose spring ceases to work. But when divine grace renovates and regulates our spiritual faculties; when our heart is united; when we have "one heart" given to us; when all our soul is alive for God; and with singleness and simplicity aims at nothing but his glory, and the fulfillment of his will: then we become new creatures; then we are a people formed to show forth his praise; then we possess an inward witness of our union to Jesus, and our adoption into the family of God.

All the family of God, possessing this "one heart," must necessarily be united to each other in brotherly love. This loving spirit our blessed Lord made the badge of discipleship. "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John makes it a mark of conversion: "we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Paul strongly exhorts to unity and fellowship; and declares that all divisions mark the carnality of the mind, and

the unsoundness of profession. This "one heart" is then a great blessing, since it constitutes the very essence of the Christian character, as opposed to unbelief, and the love of the world and sin.

"I WILL GIVE THEM ONE WAY." Christ is the one only way to the Father. Faith is the one only grace whereby we become interested in the work of Jesus. Love is the one only principle which gives intrinsic excellence to our various operations. Universal holiness is the one only Scriptural evidence of our possessing true faith and love; and being savingly united to Jesus, the living way to the Father. Our outward conduct must, therefore, be in consistency with our principles and professions. We must have "one way," the way of God’s commandments, and walk steadily in that one way, that we may fear his name for our present and everlasting good. Thus the whole Christian character is contained in this short, but beautiful promise: "I will give them one heart and one way." Here, we behold one of the sweet fruits of mercy hanging on the tree of life. All the precious promises are so many pledges of God’s covenant love, which he engages to fulfill.

"Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" but here holiness is promised as the work of Jehovah in the heart of poor sinners. What we cannot do, God has graciously promised to perform. He who says "I will," is Almighty and true. All his declarations of mercy are marked by solidity and stability. "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, says the Lord, that has mercy on you." "Your word," says David, "is tried to the uttermost, therefore your servant loves it." This he could affirm from personal experience, having felt its blessed influence on his own heart. "Your word has quickened me." "Your word is true from the beginning." "My soul has kept your testimonies, and I love them exceedingly." "For your loving-kindness is before my eyes; and I have walked in your truth."

"Oh! divine Redeemer, out of whose inexhaustible fullness I would daily draw a rich supply of grace into my needy soul, be pleased to impart unto me this one heart; that to please you, may be my greatest happiness, and to promote your glory my highest honor. Preserve me from false motives, from a double mind, and a divided heart. Keep me entire to yourself, and enable me to crucify every lust, which would tempt my heart from you. Enable me by your grace to walk in ’one way’; one uniform path of holy, childlike obedience. Allow me not to start aside like a broken bow. When tempted to turn aside to the right hand or to the left, may I hear a voice behind me saying, ’’this is the way." And oh may I keep steadily therein, until I reach the outer borders of the Wilderness; and then, blessed Jesus, may some blest seraph be commissioned to bear my happy and transported spirit along the shining way which leads to your abode; until brought before your throne, I see your face, behold your smile, and fall in ecstasy at your feet, lost in wonder, love, and praise."

Fill me, Oh Lord, with holy joy, With humble, filial fear! My undivided heart employ In praise to you and prayer.

Protect me from the power of ill;

Defend my soul from sin;

Subdue my proud rebellious will, And make me pure within.

Create an ardent, active love, Your goodness to proclaim;

Oh may I sweetly feel and prove The power of Jesus' name! May Jesus my beloved be, My shepherd and my friend;

Unite my soul, Oh, Lord, to you, In bonds that never shall end!

Then will my raptured soul repeat The wonders of your grace;

Until prostrate at your mercy-seat, I view you face to face.

03.10-10. ON THE IMMENSITY OF GOD

10. ON THE IMMENSITY OF GOD

It is from the Holy Scriptures alone, that we can attain just views of the being, nature, and character of God. How sublime are the revelations of the divine perfections there made known to us! Who can grasp this one thought, "Thus says the high and lofty One, who inhabits eternity!" We are astonished when we read of the Egyptian pyramids, and the magnificent palaces of mighty monarchs; but what sightless atoms are they, when compared with eternity, that boundless habitation of the King of kings. "From everlasting to everlasting, you are God." The existence of one supreme Being, who is without beginning, is consonant with right reason; for he who made all things, must necessarily be before all things. A creature cannot make itself. This would imply exertion before existence, which is an absurdity. And yet how far above our finite comprehension is the nature of the self-existent, eternal Jehovah. Our minds are lost when we plunge into infinity. "Who by searching can find out God? who can find out the Almighty to perfection?" The volume of creation displays the wisdom, power, and goodness of God. What wonderful contrivance, what wise adaptation of one part to another; what power in upholding, what goodness in preserving the myriads of creatures which fill the air, the earth, the sea, is discoverable around us. A late eminent astronomer found, that in 41 minutes not less than 258,000 stars in that part of the heaven, called the milky way, had passed through the field of view in his telescope! What must God be, who made, governs, and supports so many worlds, who tells the number of the stars; and calls them all by their names.

It is, however, from the volume of Inspiration that we derive our knowledge of the moral attributes of the Deity; and obtain those awsome, yet sublimely interesting views of Him with whom we have to do, which at once elevate and purify the soul. The Holy Bible may well be called the BOOK of God; not only because it has God for its author, but because it is filled with such revelations of his glorious character, as surpass the powers of human reason fully to comprehend.

How fervently did the apostle pray for his Ephesian converts; that the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give unto them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: that the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, they might know the hope of his calling; and the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints; and the exceeding greatness of his power towards those who believe; that being rooted and grounded in love, they might be able to comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth and height; and know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, and so be filled with all the fullness of God. We stand upon the sea-shore, and survey with admiring delight the wide extended ocean, whose distant waters lose themselves in the blue horizon. But what is this great abyss of waters, compared to that ocean of Almighty love, which is without a bottom and a shore?

"Oh! my God, when I contemplate your sovereign will, which, from eternity, in highest wisdom, consulted my welfare, I am lost in astonishment! When I reflect upon your omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence; upon your infinite holiness, inviolable justice, and unerring

wisdom; upon your faithfulness, and truth; your everlasting love, your sovereign grace, your patience and long-suffering - how am I filled with awe and dread! Yet faith can contemplate this bright display of uncreated excellence, and rejoice in your infinite perfections as exhibited and harmonized in Jesus, the incarnate Word. Here I behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord. Oh! that while beholding, I may be transformed into the lovely image of the Savior, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Who does not long to feel the purifying effect of these sacred views of God in Christ? "Lord, make me humble, while I meditate on your humility; loving, while I think upon your love; holy, while I dwell upon your purity; just, while I contemplate your righteousness; merciful, while I behold your grace; joyful, while I review your everlasting covenant. Oh! fill my heart with gratitude, and my mouth with praise. To you, blessed Jesus, do I look. Remove all spiritual darkness from my mind: all spiritual deadness from my heart. Cause me to know you as my Savior; to follow you as my leader; to love you as my friend; to trust in you as my atonement; to be found in you as my righteousness; to feed on you as the living bread; to walk in you as the way to the Father; and to dwell with you in heaven forever."

What comfort may every humble believer derive from the declaration of his Lord! "Am I a God at hand and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? Do not I fill heaven and earth, says the Lord?"

"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." "Lo, I am with you aways, even unto the end of the world." How happy must that soul be, whose refuge is always near. But to have an enemy always near us; an enemy armed with omnipotence - an enemy, made so by our willful transgressions; is a consideration most appalling.

Yet this is the case, as it respects every impenitent sinner. The thought of such a God being ever near, whose eye is ever upon us, whose power can crush us in a moment, and drive the outcast spirit into outer darkness, would, one would think, awaken every dormant sensibility, and arouse every sleeping sinner! Yet, alas surrounded with such peril, the soul sleeps on in dreadful security, until either grace quickens it to repentance, or justice awakens it in the fire that shall never be quenched. "Lord, awaken my drowsy sense. Quicken all my powers. Draw me by the powerful, constraining influence of your love; and cause me to rejoice in this sacred truth- that you are always near, my help in trouble and my life in death." When we begin to measure distances with respect to natural objects, we are lost in astonishment. What thought can reach the boundary of creation? Many stars have probably been sending forth their rays in quick succession from the first moment of creation, whose light has not reached our earth. Who, then, can measure such distances? And yet, what are millions of worlds revolving round each other, compared with infinite space, and eternal duration? If we cannot, by the boldest flight of imagination, conceive the mighty stretch of creation, how shall we dare to sin against that inconceivably glorious Being who fills heaven and earth with his presence - who inhabits eternity!

How truly sublime are the questions of the enraptured prophet Isaiah! "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand; and meted out heaven with a span: and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?"

"Behold the nations are as the drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold he takes up the islands as a very little thing." "All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity." "It is he that sits upon the circle of the earth,

and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers. It is he that stretches out the heavens as a curtain; and spreads them out as a tent to dwell in." "Have you not known, have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary?. There is no searching of his understanding. He gives power to the faint; and to those who have no might, he increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary; and the young men shall utterly fall. But those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

Every doctrine of Scripture is designed to promote our growth in grace. They are given to us, not for speculation, but for practice. From this view of the divine immensity, we are taught humility, reverence, and circumspection. Wherever we are, whatever we are doing, the eye of God is upon us, viewing us, not as an indifferent spectator, but taking cognizance of every action, of every word, yes of every thought that rises in our minds; that, from his awesome gaze; his continued, his never to be avoided scrutiny, our eternal condition will be fixed at the judgment day.

How plain are the declarations of Scripture: "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil:" Ecc 12:14. "He has appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness:" Acts 17:31. "God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ:" Rom 2:16. "Every one of us shall give an account of himself to God:" Rom 14:12. "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels: and then he shall reward every man according to his works:" Mat 16:27. For by actions, the sincerity of faith in Christ is best known and evidenced. And our reward, though not of debt but of grace, will be more or less glorious according to our works, those fruits of faith, done for Christ in this present world. See Mat 25:42,

Mat 25:34, Mat 25:40. Dan 12:3. 1Co 15:41-42. In like manner, the punishment of unbelievers will be proportionate to their respective degrees of wickedness, and their comparative abuse of light, mercies, and privileges vouchsafed to them. "Woe unto you, Chorazin; Woe unto you, Bethsaida: for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you." "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment; for by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall condemned." Because our words will evidence the state of our hearts; and therefore prove us either in the faith, or unregenerate, before an assembled world.

"He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart:" 1Co 4:5.

How infinite is that omniscient God, who can search the deep recesses of every heart; yes, of hundreds of millions of heart’s in every age, and at the same moment of time, without confounding in the least degree the motives and purposes of his rational creatures; and who at the great day of account will reveal to each his secret sins, while all shall stand speechless and self-condemned before his awful tribunal!

"Lord, give me grace to judge myself now, that I may not be condemned in that day. Oh, send down your blessed Spirit into my heart! Sanctify every thought, every affection and desire. Purge me with the cleansing blood of your dear Son. Clothe me with his spotless righteousness; that,

being viewed by you in Christ my Savior, I may be saved with an everlasting salvation; and never be confounded, world without end."

"YOU, GOD, SEE ME." To feel the abiding impression of this solemn truth, would be a sacred preservation from sin. When an evil thought arises in my heart, should I like to divulge it to my nearest friend? Ah! no. Conscience, shame, or a regard to his good opinion checks the disclosure. What! and shall I dare to indulge such a thought, exposed to my Almighty friend, and naked in his sight, when I would not dare to mention it to a fellow worm! Where is the fear of God? Where is the belief of his omniscience? Where is the awe of his omnipresence? Where is the dread of final judgment? Yes, where is my love to Christ, who died to save me from my sins? "Does not he see my ways, and count all my steps?" Job 31:4. This method of addressing conscience may, through grace, present a powerful barrier against the injections of Satan, and the workings of natural corruption.

"Lord, strengthen me more and more. Give me grace never to harbor a thought which I should be ashamed to express. May I never forget, that, as speaking is but thinking aloud, so thinking is speaking to you, who require not, like weak mortals, the medium of words and sounds. You hear the inward voice of the soul, pouring out itself before you in silent yet fervent breathings of desire; and you know the subtle workings of inbred sin. May I ever consider myself as in your immediate presence; surrounded by your immensity. 'YOU, GOD, SEE ME.' May this thought constrain me to act with purity, truth, and sincerity, when no human eye can observe my actions; or, if my actions are visible, when they cannot unveil my motives. May I do all from a principle of love to you, and with a simple desire in all things to promote your glory; for your eyes 'run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show yourself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect towards you.'"

How consoling is this view of the divine immensity, with respect to our distant Christian friends! Wherever they are, whether crossing tempestuous oceans, or dwelling in distant climates; whether traversing dreary deserts, or climbing craggy steeps; God is still near them, to protect and bless them. Should he call them out of the body, when separated from all they love upon earth; yet he is still near, to cheer their departing spirits, and to conduct them in safety to their eternal home.

"Let me then rejoice, Oh Lord, in your presence. Let me be always happy in this sweet assurance, that you are a sun and shield, and will give grace and glory to every humble follower of the Lamb. Oh may I live daily nearer to you by faith and prayer! Unite my heart to fear your name. Bind my affections to your cross; and allow me not one moment to wander from you, or lose the thought of your immensity and glory. It is in you that I live, and move, and have my being; it is from you that I derive every spiritual and temporal blessing; and it is through you that I humbly hope to be brought in safety, as a monument of mercy, into your everlasting kingdom."

Oh, holy, holy, holy Lord! Whom angel-hosts adore; When shall I join, in raptured strains, The bright celestial choir? In pity, view a sinful worm, A prisoner here below; A pilgrim journeying through the land Of darkness, sin, and woe.

Ten thousand voices round your throne Unite in hymns divine;

"Salvation to the Lamb!" they cry, As high in bliss they shine.

Sincerely would I now begin the song, To you, my God and friend;

Then mingle with the choirs above, In praise which never shall end.

03.11-11. ON THE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

11. ON THE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY At the creation, amid the darkness of chaos, Jehovah said, "Let there be light, and there was light." When veiled in human flesh, he commanded the raging wind and waves, saying, "Peace, be still: and immediately there was a great calm." To his tempest-tossed people he now speaks these composing words: "Be still, and know that I am God" - and they find rest unto their souls. In violent public commotions, God can "still the madness of the people;" and in inward mental agonies, he can calm the agitated spirit. "When he gives quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hides his face, who then can behold him - whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only?" (Job 34:29). When we read the history of past ages, and consider the ever-changing scene before us; when we study man, and perceive though but a small portion of the passions and contending interests, which shake the fabric of society; how delightful, how composing to the mind, is this all-gracious declaration, "Be still, and know that I am God!" The political world, like the air and sea which surround us, is ever in motion; but the happy believer finds his rest in God. In the present day, the human mind seems to be acted upon in a most remarkable manner. Knowledge is diffusing its light in every direction; and the intellectual powers are acquiring an expansion, which their ancient boundaries can neither limit nor control. The Christian world is all awake to the spiritual and moral degradation of mankind, and is laboring to disseminate the sacred truths of revelation, which alone can raise our fallen race. The enemies of the Gospel and of social order are alike awake to their deeds of darkness. There is, therefore, at the present eventful period, an evident struggle between light and darkness. The struggle may be violent, but the believer hears the cheering voice from heaven, which dissipates every rising fear: "Be still, and know that I am God."

Oh my soul, rejoice that the Lord reigns. He can calm the rough surges of the mind. He can bid the inward tempest cease. He can pour an enlivening ray upon the drooping heart; and cause a sweet serenity and peace to reign within. Trust in the Lord at all times. Be still, and know that he is God.

There is something peculiarly soothing to the heart of a pious Christian, to know that he who rules over all worlds, in whose hands are the destinies of nations, and who guides the minutest concerns of families and individuals, is his Father and his friend. The more we know of God, of his power, wisdom, love, faithfulness, and truth; the more we shall bow before his throne in humble adoration, and filial confidence and love. To know God in Christ; to know him as a covenant God; to know him as our God; is to possess all the sources and secrets of true peace, in the midst of surrounding storms and tempests. This knowledge will raise us above the agitated elements of the world, and place us in that pure region where the soul can breathe more freely, and expand her powers more fully. Faith views with admiration the perfections of Jehovah. Hope rests the fulfillment of her expectations on these perfections. Love delights in them, and gradually assimilates the soul to them. While patience calmly waits, under every changing dispensation, for that abundant harvest of rich blessings, which the God of truth has promised, and which his faithfulness will perform.

Come, then, Oh, my soul, and learn, from this view of your privileges, the blessedness of trusting in God. "He changes not, nor knows the shadow of a turn." All his promises are yes and amen. All his ways are righteous and true. Cast your care upon him who cares for you; and, under every trying event, be still, and know that he is God.

It is truly animating to reflect, that, while every thing seems given to change, the Almighty has declared, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." "I change not." The purposes of God are moving steadily and directly towards their fulfillment. Many things, according to our short-sightedness, appear to thwart his designs. Persecutors arise, and cut off his most zealous servants. Death seizes eminent laborers in his vineyard. Unforeseen circumstances spring up, and appear to check the progress of the Gospel. Hence we are ready to exclaim with David, "Lord, let no man have the upper hand." But is not this the language of despondency; the language of a soul looking through a dark and gloomy medium? Man never had, and never shall have, the upper hand. David was in a right frame when he sang, "The Lord reigns." This is the triumphant song of the redeemed above. "Alleluia - the Lord God omnipotent reigns."

Nothing can happen without the divine will and permission. The Almighty sees the end from the beginning. Unto him are known all his works, and all events from eternal ages. He has firmly laid his eternal plans of goodness, justice, and mercy. All things serve him. He has made even the wicked for the day of evil. (Pro 16:4). Can any thing, then, unforeseen, strike across his purposes, or derange his plans? Can any man who is crushed before the moth, the creature of a day, turn aside the grand machine of providence, whose constant wheels revolve their everlasting rounds? Ah! no! As every thing respecting the eternal purposes of Jehovah springs from his own will, so every thing shall terminate in his own glory. Higher and farther than this, we cannot go. "He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end; the first and the last." Clouds and darkness may surround the throne of the Eternal, and veil his bright designs: but faith can pierce the veil, and view, beyond this darkening scene, the rising glories of Emanuel’s kingdom.

How great, then, is the blessedness of true religion! How highly privileged is the child of God! As nothing can happen without the divine permission, so everything shall work together for good to those who love God; to those who are the called according to his purpose.

Satan may rage, the world may frown, the flesh may rebel, and providence may seem to cross the humble believer; but yet, notwithstanding all this tempest, his soul is safe, being hid with Christ in God. He may groan, being burdened; yet still he can rejoice. He looks through the curtain of time, which hangs over the glories of eternity: and, in joyful expectation of soon entering within the veil, he endures, with much patience, the trials of this transitory state. Not so the worldling. He knows no joys but those of sense, or those perhaps of a more refined nature, flowing from intellectual pursuits. But in respect of heavenly pleasures, arising from communion with his Savior, and a delightful foretaste of future bliss, he is an utter stranger. To him, "the future is a dark unknown." His views are indistinct and dim, when he reads or hears of joys forever flowing from those sources which are now the objects of his unvarying dislike.

What happiness can arise from the contemplation of being eternally with Jesus, when prayer and meditation are now irksome and insipid to him? What happiness, from the idea of being made like Jesus, when holiness is offensive to him? or from the consideration of beholding his glory, when the splendors of this world have far more powerful attractions to him?

It is true, he prefers heaven to hell, as a choice of two evils; but he secretly disbelieves the word of revelation, and therefore hopes that hell has no existence, and that death is an eternal sleep. If he is not be thus far advanced in infidelity, yet he flatters himself that God will be more lenient and merciful than his own word declares him to be. Thus he ventures upon the dreadful step of putting the truth of God to its most awful test, and passes through death to learn by tremendous experience the madness of his unbelief!

Happy, thrice happy, is the man who receives with childlike simplicity the word of God, and acts upon it. He sees God in everything, and can feed upon the hidden manna. He finds the promises to be full of truth and comfort. On them, as on a rock, he rests in safety. With wonder he beholds the raging tempest, which, sweeping over the nations of the earth, clears away deep-rooted prejudices, and prepares a smoother path for the chariot of the everlasting Gospel.

He knows that glorious days are hastening on, and therefore is not discouraged, though they be preceded by a stormy night. He hears the voice of his Almighty Father, speaking in gracious accents to allay his fears: "Be still, and know that I am God;" and is kept in perfect peace.

Come, then, Oh my soul! and take courage. Fear not the face, nor the frown, of man. The Lord reigns, be the earth ever so unquiet. Sing with David - unite with Luther, and say, "God is our refuge and strength; a present help in trouble." Do not be dismayed at the troubles of the earth. Tremble not at the convulsions of empires. Only, fear God; only believe in his promises; only love and serve him; and all things shall work together for your good, as they assuredly will for his glory.

Life is hastening quickly away. Eternity is at the door. Live, then, for eternity, and leave with God the concerns of time. Leave in his hands the safety of his church, and the security of his cause. Cleave to him with childlike simplicity. Seek his glory. Aim at perfection. Look high, and look forward; and soon you shall be removed out of the reach of evil, and be placed securely in the paradise above! In times which are gloomy and sad, When nations are trembling with fears, The Christian, in confidence clad, Serene amid dangers appears.

He knows that the black lowering sky, Whose bosom destruction contain; In a moment will vanish and fly, When God his dread vengeance restrains. In him, whom archangels adore, In him, whom the cherubs obey, While thunders tremendously roar, He trusts without fear and dismay.

It is Jesus who reigns in his heart, While Satan is raging around;

It is faith quenches every dart, As pointless they fall to the ground. The peace he enjoys in his breast, Descends from a reconciled God:

While sinners, those strangers to rest, Groan under the stroke of his rod. When troubles invade and oppress, When death rips his comforts away He still, in the midst of distress, Has God for his comfort and stay.

Thrice blessed, you saint of the Lord; In Jesus your refuge is found;

Oh! trust to his promise and word, And joys shall increase and abound.

Yes! joy shall increase like a stream; Your peace, like the waves of the sea; Your grace into glory shall beam; And Jesus your portion shall be.

03.12-12. ON THE TWO COVENANTS

12. ON THE TWO COVENANTS The covenant of WORKS, in the order of time, was proclaimed to Adam before the covenant of GRACE. But, the covenant of grace, called in Scripture the everlasting covenant, was entered into by the divine people in the Godhead, before the world was made. While contemplating this dispensation of mercy, our views must stretch themselves into eternity. We must pass beyond the origin of earth, and enter into those revelations which record the purposes of God before time began. And how wonderful are the counsels of infinite love, wisdom, and power!

Jesus, in the volume of inspired truth, is declared to be "the Lamb of God, who was foreordained before the foundation of the world," (1Pe 1:20). "Slain from the foundation of the world," (Rev 13:8). His redeemed ones were "chosen in him before the foundation of the world," (Eph 1:4). "From the beginning chosen to salvation," (2Th 2:13). "According to his own purpose and grace, which was given them in Christ Jesus before the world began," (2Ti 1:9). "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father," (1Pe 1:2). Predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will," (Eph 1:11). From these glorious passages, and many others of similar import, it is evident that the whole economy of human redemption was devised and planned in the eternal counsels of Jehovah before the earth or man was formed. Hence we are taught that the covenant of grace originated in the everlasting love of God. But with respect to us finite creatures, who can know nothing of the purposes of God, but as he is pleased to reveal them, it may aptly be called a NEW Covenant. When Adam was created in the image of God, the Lord placed him in a garden of delights, surrounded with everything that could gratify his pure and innocent desires. In the midst, however, of this garden, was placed the tree of knowledge of good and evil, as a reasonable test of his obedience; for God created man in righteousness and true holiness, with powers and faculties to know and serve him. In the garden was also placed the tree of life, as a pledge of immortality. Of this tree he might freely eat, while he continued obedient to the divine command. But man, alas! ate of the forbidden fruit through the subtle temptations of the serpent, and thus the covenant of works was broken, and death entered into the world by sin. His whole posterity are involved in the dreadful consequences of the fall; for the Scriptures declare, "In Adam all die." All die spiritually; for "we are conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity." "We are by nature the children of wrath."

All die naturally. The sentence, "Dust you are, and unto dust you shall return," extends to all the children of Adam. "It is appointed unto men once to. die." "By man came death." "Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

All die eternally, if left in righteous judgment to the awful consequences of transgression: "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." "The soul that sins, it shall die;" "He that believes not, shall be damned." In this wretched, lost, and sinful condition, when he was without strength and without hope, Adam heard the voice of mercy. The ’seed of the woman’ was proclaimed and promised. Jehovah spoke the word of life, at the very moment when justice

was lifting up the sword of vengeance, as if determined to magnify his mercy. Oh what encouragement is this to trust in him, whose love outstripped his justice, or rather provided a satisfaction to it, that mercy might have free course, and be glorified in the salvation of a ruined world! The new covenant was then made known to Adam; and (may we not hope?) more delightful to his guilty, trembling soul, than all the sweet harmony of birds which had regaled his ear in the lovely groves of Eden. At the voice of pardoning grace, hope revives, love rekindles, and joyful admiration holds the mind in wondering meditation on the goodness of our justly offended Creator! The covenant of works made with Adam being broken, all hope of happiness from that covenant is done away forever. But the covenant of grace made with Christ, the second Adam, is immutable and everlasting. Jesus, in our nature, fulfilled all the conditions, performed all the requirements, and answered all the demands of the broken covenant of works. By his unsinning obedience and meritorious death; he brought in everlasting righteousness; and thus became the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey him. So that now, all the blessings of the covenant of grace are made over to every fallen son and daughter of Adam who truly believes in Jesus.

Here, then, is the spring of the believer’s hope, and peace, and joy. Here he finds security and stability. Here he reposes his soul, and smiles at every storm. Oh how rich, how full, how sovereign is the covenant of grace! This covenant, as we have seen from the pages of eternal truth, was made before the world began - made from eternity. What a wide expanse for the mind to range in! But we need a guide, or else our minds will soon be lost in wandering mazes and dangerous speculations. This guide is the Bible, read with prayer in a spirit of humility and faith, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Where the line of revelation stops, there we must stop; or rather, where it enters into the unfathomable depths of eternal wisdom, there we must pause, and wonder, and adore. We must not dare to tread within the veil, or curiously to pry into those hidden mysteries, which God has wisely concealed from mortal eyes. "You know not now, but you shall know hereafter," will quiet and satisfy every humble, loving, obedient, grateful follower of the Lamb.

What personally concerns every believer is this: have I the spirit and character of those who are interested in the covenant of grace? If not, what will all its glories and blessings avail me? I shall only resemble a person looking over the title-deeds of a vast estate, in which he has no interest.

How plain and express is the word of God, in describing the character of the redeemed! Here is no ambiguity - no darkness - no mystery. It is a faithful mirror, held up to all mankind. Happy indeed are they, who beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord! The character of God’s peculiar people is thus portrayed by the pen of unerring truth:

They are "chosen in Christ, that they should be holy and without blame before him in love." "Chosen to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." "They are saved, and called with a holy calling, not according to their works, but according to his own purpose and grace." "They are elect according to the foreknowledge of God, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." "They are predestinated unto the adoption of children." "Predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son." "Created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has foreordained that they should walk in them." "They are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that they should show forth

the praises of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light." "He gave himself for them, that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."

Such is the spirit and character of those happy souls who have fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before them in the Gospel; the character of all who truly believe in Jesus. To them all the promises of God in Christ Jesus are yes and amen; sure and abiding. To them the most affectionate exhortations are addressed. "Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, affections of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, patience; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another: if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do you." "Be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." "Be therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savor." "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts." "Put on charity" and "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit." "Be clothed with humility." "Love not the world, neither the things which are in the world." "Seek those things which are above." "Set your affection on things above." "Let your speech be aways with grace." "Rejoice evermore - pray without ceasing." "Abstain from all appearance of evil." "Fight the good fight of faith." "Be faithful unto death."

These beautiful exhortations contain a lively portrait of the true believer. How different from the worldling, the nominal Christian, the cold-hearted adherer to the Gospel, the double-minded professor! With the true believer, all is life and energy. Here, all is spirit, unction, and power, Here, we see "the workmanship of God" "the new creation in Christ Jesus." Where these lineaments are found, there grace is begun; where they are lacking, all pretensions to religion, all hope of final salvation, all self-appropriation of the promises, is delusion - a device of Satan, to lull the soul to sleep on the lap of carnal security, until it drop into the flames of hell. "Lord, open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of your law. Change my heart by the powerful influence of your Holy Spirit. Fill my soul with humility, love, and purity. May Christ be formed in me the hope of glory. May Christ dwell in my heart by faith. May love and every grace abound within me, until I am brought by sovereign mercy to the general assembly of the church of the first-born; whose names are written in heaven."

How free the love, how rich the grace, A pardoning God bestows; To Adam's vile apostate race In boundless streams it flows.

What joy arises in the heart When Jesus' cross appears - Salvation to my soul impart, Subdue my guilty fears.

Blessed Savior, speak the healing word, Bid all my sorrows cease; Be you my great atoning Lord, My righteousness and peace.

Oh, let your precious blood divine Wash all my sins away!

Then will my soul resplendent shine, Through heaven's eternal day.

03.13-13. ON THE LOVE OF GOD

13. ON THE LOVE OF GOD

"God is love!" sweet truth! Oh my soul! rejoice daily in this blessed revelation, "God is love." Before all worlds, before any being was formed, "God is love" - love, eternal and unchangeable. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is love. How inconceivably great is the love of God! All worlds rolling in the infinite expanse; all beings inhabiting those innumerable spheres, which extend far beyond the boundaries of the most excursive imagination; all the myriads of angelic spirits which dwell forever in the bright effulgence of uncreated light, are only the overflowings of that love, which is inexhaustible. The immense fountain loses not one drop, though countless millions are filled by its streams. It is ever flowing, ever full. "Lord, you are love. Oh, fill my soul with your love! You can not be diminished, and I shall be made everlastingly blessed." When the Almighty created the angels in heaven, and man in paradise, he endued them with powers suited to their distinctive degrees of excellence. Both were formed holy, and consequently happy. All nature proclaims the benevolence of the deity; the unbounded goodness of Jehovah. The moral law emanated from the love of God. This law was stamped upon the heart of Adam, when in a state of innocence. It is a transcript of the divine mind; holy, just, and good. When man sinned, he broke the law of God. He fell under its curse. To redeem him from this wretched state, Jesus, the Son of God, assumed our mortal nature, expiated our guilt, and brought in an everlasting righteousness. He burst the bars of death. He ascended up on high; and reigns the sovereign Lord of angels and of men. When the "royal law" of love was broken in paradise, how soon did Adam’s first-born imbrue his hand in a brother’s blood! Violence overspread the earth with awful rapidity; until God, in righteous judgment, swept the guilty rebels from the earth, by a tremendous flood of waters. Every succeeding age has been marked by miseries of every name, all flowing from one common source - an evil heart of unbelief. Sin is the cause of all misery, and sin originates with man.

If it be asked, what is the true cause of man’s inability to love and serve God, may we not answer, a criminal indisposition of heart so to do? It is not that man cannot love God, from a natural incapacity, arising from a total destitution of understanding, will, and affections; but rather that he will not, owing to a deep-rooted enmity against the holy character and commands of God. This aversion of the heart from God, constitutes the chief guilt of man. Man is a responsible being, and must render an account to God, from whom he receives all his powers, for the abuse of those talents committed to his trust. He has a heart that can love the world; he can love sensual delights; he can love riches and honors, yes, every thing which tends to gratify his passions, and to exalt him in his own eyes, or in the estimation of others. He has a will to choose what is pleasing to his animal appetites, and to refuse what is painful or distasteful to him. He has an understanding to judge upon worldly matters; and a quick eye to discover the path to temporal advancement. He finds his hopes and fears, his joys and griefs, his love and hatred, brought into continual exercise with the ever-varying events of life.

Hence man does not labor under a natural incapacity. His inability is altogether of a moral kind. Sin has darkened and corrupted all the higher faculties of the soul; so that now "the world by wisdom knows not God." "Men choose darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil;" for "the carnal mind is enmity against God." This wrong state of the heart, this evil bias of the soul, this radical corruption of our nature, is universal. It spreads itself through the whole human race, without exception; for all are born in sin; all are by nature the children of wrath, and the heirs of hell. So powerful is this innate evil, this natural indisposedness of the heart towards God, that neither reason, conscience, nor philosophy can remove it. God alone can turn the heart of the sinner to himself. The language of divine revelation is, "you have destroyed yourself, but in me is your help."

While, therefore, in deepest self-abasement we bear the burden of our guilt, and acknowledge that we have destroyed ourselves; we must ascribe all the glory of our salvation to omnipotent love, in whom our help is found, and say, with the grateful Psalmist, "Not unto us, Oh Lord, not unto us, but unto your name give the glory, for your mercy and for your truth’s sake." The whole human race must soon stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. No plea will then be accepted in arrest of judgment. In that awful day, every mouth shall be stopped, and all the world will become guilty before God "for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap." From this view of our fallen state, we may scripturally conclude, that sinners, if left to themselves, would never turn to God. And hence we see the blessedness and necessity of that grace which turns us from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

It is a true saying of Augustine, that without free will there could be no condemnation; and without free grace there could be no salvation. But the voice of sovereign love declares to the great Melchisedek, "Your people shall be willing in the day of your power." Here is set forth the power of God; the people on whom that power is exerted; and the blessed effects of it upon their souls. This power is the power of God unto salvation. When he works, who can resist it? It is convincing power, converting power, sustaining power. Oh that this divine power; this ENERGY of LOVE, may be felt in every soul! Lord, may I feel it in mine. But on whom is this power exerted? When we view the whole human race sunk in sin and misery, in a state of open rebellion against the majesty of heaven, where shall we find "his people?" The very words, "they shall be willing," imply that they were not always so. Prior to this great change, they "were enemies in their minds by wicked works." They are "his people" in purpose and grace; chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy and without blame before him in love; predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son." When Paul was at Corinth, the Lord appeared to his persecuted servant, and said, "Do not be afraid, but speak; hold not your peace: for I am with you, and no man shall set on you to hurt you, for I have many people in this city." Oh! that my proud heart could submit to receive salvation as the free gift of unmerited mercy! Lord, make me willing in the day of your power, to yield myself unto you, a living sacrifice, as my most reasonable service.

We see what is the effect produced by this power on the minds of "his people." "They shall be willing" - willing to receive Christ - willing to suffer for Christ - willing to give up all for Christ. This change in their will is not effected by any natural effort of their own, or by the moral persuasion of others; but solely by the power of God, through the instrumentality of the Gospel.

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ," wrote the apostle to the Romans, "for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes." Those favored souls, who are thus made willing in the day of God's power, are not compelled by an unwelcome force to embrace salvation; but are sweetly and lovingly inclined, through the soft influences of heavenly grace, to choose, delight in, and appreciate the work and service of Emanuel. They are made willing. Their whole heart goes forth towards the Savior, as when Jesus said to Levi at the receipt of custom, "Follow me." They love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. They embrace him as their only Savior his precepts as their only rule - his promises as their only support - his cross as their only glory - his righteousness as their only boast - his people as their only friends - his heaven as their only home. Oh what a change! "Lord, may I long, and pant, and labor after this blessedness. Stir up my soul to seek it more and more."

I have here an evidence to judge of my own character. "Your people shall be willing." If, then, I belong to this happy number, I must be willing to be saved on God's terms; to delight in his salvation, to choose his ways. Do I feel my will subdued, and cheerfully inclined to embrace, in humble faith, the whole revelation of mercy, as made known to me through a crucified Jesus? "Lord, put forth your mighty grace. Let this very day be the day of your power. Tomorrow may find me in the eternal world. Oh may I now be willing to be wholly yours; that every succeeding hour may only increase my willingness to do and suffer your whole righteous will."

How different is earth to heaven! Here on earth, an awful disinclination of heart to love God is discoverable in all the fallen children of Adam. Even the regenerate feel with grief this hated deadness of soul to God. "My soul cleaves unto the dust," was the lamentation - "quicken me, according to your word," was the fervent prayer of David. In heaven, all is governed by the sweet constraining principle of pure, undivided love. Were a soul to leave this earth under the influence of alienated affections, how could such a soul be either fit for, or happy in, that blessed place, where every note is harmony, and every heart is love? Reason, even in its present beclouded state, must see the unfitness of such a soul for glory; when that glory consists in loving God with a supreme affection, and being made like him in all his communicable perfections.

How great, then, is the happiness of loving and serving God, while journeying through this valley of tears! This is the sweet peculiarity of the religion of Jesus. It diffuses joy and gladness wherever it is received in the simplicity of faith. "God is love; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God." To love God, and to be the object of his love, constitute the bliss of angels. The opposite of this is hell.

What poor miserable creatures we are while in a state of nature, and under the power of sin and Satan! We smile, when we should sigh. We laugh, when we should mourn. We appear gay and sprightly, when we should be of a sorrowful spirit. But, Oh the change which takes place when the Gospel comes to the heart, not in word only, but in power! Then we receive beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Then we are privileged to rejoice aways, and to delight ourselves in the abundance of peace. Oh happy, blissful state! thus to be the genuine disciples of the blessed Jesus, who has assured his faithful people that he will manifest himself to them, as he does not unto the world; yes, even come unto them, and make his abode with them. Who can contemplate these wonders of grace, and not feel the holy influence of this precious revelation - "God is love!" Surely none but they who know not God; for thus says

the apostle, "He that loves not, knows not God; for God is love."

You trembling saint, cast off your fear, Your mourning garments lay aside;

It is Jesus speaks: "Be of good cheer, My love, my sister, and my bride."

Oh listen to the voice of love! Its gentle accents whisper peace; The Savior; from his throne above, Delights to view your joys increase.

Blessed Jesus! cheer each drooping heart;

Uplift, revive, each fainting soul; Your presence, gracious Lord, impart;

Oh make each wounded sinner whole!

Then shall your church more beauteous grow, "As lilies" in Judea’s vale;

Like widening streams "her peace shall flow," Whose "springs in you" can never fail.

You trembling saints, no longer fear, Your mourning garments lay aside;

Since Jesus is forever near, The church’s husband and her guide.

03.14-14. ON THE GIFT OF A SAVIOR

14. ON THE GIFT OF A SAVIOR

Before the earth was formed, or man created upon it, the Almighty foreknew that his moral creatures would apostatize from him. The angels had already sinned, and were cast into the place prepared for them. They were doomed, in righteous judgment, to be the eternal monuments of divine indignation. A just, yet infinitely gracious sovereign, did not determine to leave man under the same hopeless condemnation. The revelation is truly wonderful. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, "God over all, blessed for evermore," was foreordained in the councils of heaven to be a sacrifice - a propitiation - an atonement for the sins of apostate man. As "all things were made by him," so all things were made "for him." Earth was to be the theater on which should be displayed the mercy and justice of Jehovah. The glorious plan was gradually unfolded through succeeding ages. The bleeding lamb was instituted as the appointed emblem of the Savior of the world. When offered up in faith, in humble reliance on the divine mercy, and with a contrite heart, the believing suppliant, thus approaching the mercy-seat through the bleeding victim, found pardon and peace. In this way, the ancient believers obtained rest unto their souls. They trusted in God, and were not confounded. The prophets depicted in glowing colors the glories of Emanuel, while they blended the deepened shades of his amazing humiliation with the resplendent luster of his divine nature. When the "fullness of time" was come, how grand to the eye of saints and angels was the entrance of the Messiah into our world! The angel Gabriel was commissioned to convey the glad tidings to Zacharias, that he should be the father of him whom Isaiah and Malachi had predicted as "the voice," "the messenger," who should prepare the way of the Lord. He was then sent with joyful news to the humble virgin at Nazareth; announcing to her that she should be the highly favored mother of the Messiah, of whose kingdom there should be no end. The tender fears of Joseph were next dispelled by a dream, in which he was assured that he who should be born of Mary, his espoused wife, was no less than the Son of God, who should save his people from their sins. The emperor Augustus was made the instrument, though unconsciously, of bringing the virgin mother to Bethlehem; thus fulfilling the prophetic declaration of Micah, and establishing the truth of the descent of Jesus in the line of David, by a public enrollment. When born in the city of David, the infant Savior was announced by the angel of the Lord to the humble shepherds of Judea, who were keeping watch over their flocks by night; while the angelic host sang, in exulting strains, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men." In the temple, during the ceremony of Mary’s purification, and the dedication of her Son to the Lord, Simeon took the blessed child in his arms, and declared him to be "a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel;" while Anna, the prophetess, spoke of him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. When returned to Bethlehem, the divinely directed Magi of the east came to pay their homage to the infant King, presenting to him gifts - gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled, while saints and angels were rejoicing, at the birth of the long-expected deliverer. When John entered upon his prophetic office, he bore witness to the

dignity of the Messiah; and pointed to Jesus, as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. The Father himself testified of his Son; for Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo! the heavens were opened unto him, and the Spirit of God, descending like a dove, lighted upon him; and lo! a voice from heaven said, "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The blessed Jesus, when he made himself public to the world, astonished the thronging crowds by his stupendous, yet beneficent miracles; by his heavenly wisdom; by his holy example; by his unwearied labors to do good. The worldly, the proud, and the self-righteous, could not endure the light of his doctrine, and the keenness of his reproof. Hence they conspired against him, however discordant were their peculiar views and practices. Herod and the high priest - Pilate and the Scribes - Sadducees and Pharisees - heathens, and the professed worshipers of Jehovah, - all allowed their national antipathies and religious differences to merge into one common cause against the Lord and against his anointed. Herod, from jealousy; the chief priests and Scribes, from envy; Pilate, from slavish fear; and the common people, from popular feeling excited by their rulers, conspired the death of Jesus, whose meekness and innocence, contrasted with the rage of his bloody enemies, shone like the arch of heaven on the angry cloud.

He died praying for his murderers. He died a sacrifice for their sins. He died, a sacrifice for the sins of a lost world. Amazing love! Oh my soul, look to this precious, bleeding Savior; trust in him for your whole salvation; rejoice in his grace, and adore that wisdom that could overrule so much wickedness, to produce so much good!

How awful the period! The sun was darkened; the rocks split apart; the veil of the temple was torn in two; the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had died, arose, and appeared in the holy city after his resurrection. On the third day, the conquering Savior rose triumphant from the dead; appeared to his weeping followers; ascended into heaven in their sight; and soon after his session at the right hand of power, poured out upon his infant church that great promise of the Father - the Holy Spirit.

How wonderful was the effect of this heavenly gift! The apostles, once illiterate, now spoke with new tongues; their former fears were lost in an undaunted courage; timidity gave place to zeal. In the emphatic language of the sacred historian, "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God with boldness." They preached Christ in the face of danger and of death. Thousands, through their labors, were turned from Satan unto God. Churches were planted in all the known countries of the world; and at length they sealed their truth with their blood, counting it all joy to suffer for the sake of their beloved Lord.

Great is the mystery of godliness - God manifest in the flesh. That the Almighty should become the Savior of his rebellious creatures, by taking upon him their nature: that he, who rules over all worlds, should stoop, not to be a mighty monarch, but a humble carpenter: that he, who cared for and provided the foxes and the birds with holes and nests, should voluntarily leave himself destitute of a place where to lay his head: that he, who is the great proprietor of all things, should condescend to be supported by pious females, who ministered to him of their substance: that the Fountain of felicity should become a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: that the Lord of glory should be despised and rejected of men: that the Judge of the living and the dead should stand, like a criminal, at an earthly tribunal, charged with crimes which he never committed, and

condemned for transgressions of which he was declared innocent: that the Majesty of heaven should be spit upon, scourged, and crucified: that the Lord of life should pour out his soul unto death: this, this is the wonder of wonders - the unsearchable riches of Christ, "Not to be thought of; but with tides of joy; Not to be mentioned, but with shouts of praise." Well may Christ be styled by the enraptured prophet, "Wonderful!"

Men ate naturally fond of great things, and yet they feel an aversion to the greatest thing in the world - the Redemption of the Soul. This would be inexplicable, had we not the volume of inspiration to unfold to us the hidden reason. This aversion to so glorious a work arises from- the state of the human heart, and the nature of redemption. The heart is in love with sin; yes, is itself desperately wicked. Sin is its food; its element; its very constitution.

Salvation by Christ is a deliverance from sin; a renovation of the heart to holiness; a surrender of the soul to God. Hence arises the enmity. Darkness is opposed to light; and Satan reigning in the sinner, is opposed to Christ the Savior claiming his usurped possession. This enmity is universal, and proves the universality of the fall. Wherever redemption by Christ is faithfully preached, and honestly exhibited in the life, there it is powerfully resisted both by the worldly laity and mercenary priests. As the bitterest enemies of our blessed Lord were those who wore the priestly vestments, so multitudes of the faithful have, in all ages, been devoured by wolves in sheep’s clothing. Lord! clothe your ministers with righteousness, that your people may sing with joyfulness.

None can receive the Gospel in the love and power of it, but those who are enabled by sovereign grace so to do. All others lie under the just condemnation of willfully rejecting it; and shall be punished for such rejection. Men may cavil at such a statement as this, and call it inconsistent; but God will, before long, vindicate his own cause. If it be true, that "by grace we are saved," it is equally true, that "this is the condemnation, that light as come into the world; and that men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." This great redemption is by price. And Oh! what a price! the precious blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God. This blood cleanses from all sin; satisfies offended Justice; clears away the obstacles in the sinner’s path to glory, and procures pardon and peace, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. "He made peace for us, by the blood of his cross." "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" This redemption is by power. God, the Holy Spirit, descends into the sinner’s heart, applies the healing balm to the previously smitten conscience, and, by his almighty influence, produces the new birth, the new creation. He leads the trembling sinner to the bleeding sacrifice; points to the cross; gives saving faith; causes joy to spring up in the heart; and thus enables the soul, delivered from the penalty and pollution of sin, "to sing in the ways of the Lord," and to glorify the rock of his salvation.

None can love this work of grace but the subjects of grace. This sadly wounds the pride of man; but so it is. We must forever stand indebted to unmerited love for this great salvation. All boasting is here excluded. He that glories, must glory in the Lord. The language of the redeemed is: "in the Lord, I have righteousness and strength."

Oh! that I may now put the crown upon the head of Jesus. May all my affections center in him. To him may I devote every power, and be altogether consecrated to his praise.

Oh! my soul, forever bless your beloved Lord, for thus becoming your Redeemer. He is always near his people to support and comfort them. He dwells in their hearts by faith. He abides in them

by his Spirit, to enlighten their minds, to purify their hearts, to regulate their wills, to direct their walk, to lead them in the paths of righteousness, for his name’s sake.

Thus they are safe and happy under the Shepherd’s care. Their union with their divine Lord is sweet and constant. They "lean upon their beloved," and are supported through the wilderness. They are made strong by his strength; wise by his wisdom; righteous in his righteousness; holy by his grace. They daily receive out of his fullness, who of God is made unto them, "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."

Jesus is the head over all things to his church. All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth. As he rules over all, so he overrules all for the good of his people. Hence the apostle could confidently declare, "all things shall work together for good, to those who love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." All this is cheering to the humble followers of the Lamb. Are they in trouble? Jesus appoints it for their good. Are they joyful? The joy of the Lord is their strength. Well may the believer triumphantly exclaim: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

Jesus is the universal Lord: to him every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth. Jesus will be the Almighty Judge; all nations shall be assembled before his throne; he will render unto every man acceding to his works.

When, through faith, the sinner is admitted into the family of God, and changes both his state and nature, through the blood and spirit of Jesus, then his desire is to maintain the peace which he has happily obtained through believing. This he learns to do from the prophet Isaiah: "you will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you." A wandering, backsliding, double heart, can never enjoy peace. To possess the blessing of peace, the mind must be stayed upon God. This is the same as "abiding in Christ:" being "steadfast in the faith," "rooted and grounded in love."

It implies stability, constancy, perseverance. The mind must be stayed upon the covenant of grace as an unchangeable, everlasting covenant; ordered in all things and sure. In this covenant, every thing is treasured up which can furnish the believer with grace here, and glory hereafter. Staying his mind, therefore, upon this covenant of life and peace, he finds rest unto his soul. The mind must bow with humble reverence to the authority of God. Pride and rebellion destroy peace. Humility and submission promote it. The believer must wait the Lord’s time for deliverance: "Oh! tarry you the Lord’s leisure; be strong, and he shall comfort your heart," is the affectionate advice of David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel. This childlike reliance on the divine goodness tranquilizes the mind in seasons of darkness, perplexity, trial, and temptation. That soul is the most happy, which can the most cheerfully acquiesce in the appointments of infinite wisdom. Murmuring and repining grieve the Holy Spirit. Resignation and contentment produce serenity and sweetness of mind.

While cultivating these important duties, which are brought into daily exercise by the very nature of Christian experience, the mind is kept in peace, holiness is promoted, and God, the author of all good, is equally glorified. Who, then, dare say, that the doctrine of grace, abounding to the chief of sinners, through a crucified Redeemer; is a doctrine which tends to licentiousness? As a sick stomach may corrupt the most wholesome food, so a wicked heart can turn the grace of God into

lasciviousness, and, under a most dreadful delusion of Satan, sin that grace may abound. But let not this evil be charged upon the holy Gospel of Jesus, any more than the disordered frame upon the wholesome food. The natural and spiritual consequences in both cases are similar. The one, arising from a bad stomach - the other, from a bad heart.

"Blessed Jesus! bestow upon me, your unworthy servant, that realizing faith, that tranquilizing hope, that operative love, which will enable me to know and serve you more and more, until my soul shall be made fit for that happy world, where all sin and sorrow shall flee away, and where perpetual peace and purity shall gladden the redeemed forever and ever!"

What soul can reach the lofty height, From where the Savior came to die?

What soul can trace the Lord of might In his profound humility?

Angels, who stand before the throne, Here feel the weakness of their powers; In wonder, they, adoring, own The Lord of life, both theirs and ours.

Oh for a heart of faith and love, To taste the Savior’s richest grace, To emulate the choirs above, Who ever see his blissful face.

Blest Spirit! beautify my soul With humble joy and holy fear; Your power can make the wounded whole And bring each Gospel blessing near.

Descend and dwell within my heart; The Savior’s image let me bear;

Then bid me hence with joy depart, And angels’ bliss forever share.

Chapter 110

03.15-15. On the Design of the Gospel

15. On the Design of the Gospel

What a dreadful change sin has made in man! His heart, once the abode of peace and every heavenly disposition, is now the cage of every unclean and hateful bird; a den of wild beasts; a nest of vipers; a loathsome sepulcher.

How is the gold become dim - how is the fine gold changed! In this deplorable condition grace finds us, and from this state of wretchedness grace redeems us! The glorious design of the Gospel is to throw a luster around the Godhead, by affording a display to all intelligent beings of those infinite perfections, which harmonize at the cross of Christ; and by this sacred union of mercy and truth, righteousness and peace, to restore fallen man to the favor and image of his Creator.

Holiness is the glory and happiness of man. When he lost his holiness, he lost his happiness. Through the atoning blood of Jesus, we obtain the removal of our guilt; and by the power of the divine Spirit, the renewal of our nature. Being thus made holy, we become once more happy. A great spiritual change is effected - no less than a new creation; for if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature.

This, then, is the will of God, even our sanctification. Hence we find that the Gospel is designed to reveal to us, yes, to put us in possession of, the richest blessings: pardon of sin; justification of our person, by faith in Jesus; the renovation of our souls; adoption into the family of God; peace with God; access to God; union with Christ; communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, through him; victory over sin, Satan, and the world; consolation in trouble, light in darkness, life in death, assurance of future glory, and fruition of bliss in the world to come.

How little is the genuine nature and design of Christianity considered by the generality of professing Christians! How inadequately is its power felt, and its sweetness enjoyed, even by those who sustain the character of believers in Jesus! We live lamentably below our privileges. Oh! that a spirit of revival may be felt among us! "Lord, revive your work in the midst of our days. Revive it in my heart!"

Christ is the salvation of all his dear, believing people; they look to no other; they love no other; or, if they love others, it is Christ in them who is the chief object of their affection.

It is, therefore, evident, that the great design of God in the Gospel is to form a people unto himself, who shall show forth his praise; a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Here I behold a way of access opened to poor perishing sinners, through faith in the atonement of Jesus. "Lord, give me faith in your dear Son. Enable me to cast my soul without reserve upon your covenanted mercies in Christ Jesus. In him alone is eternal life. In him alone are treasured up grace, mercy, and peace. He that has the Son, has life; for this is eternal life, to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. Oh for a heart to believe unto righteousness! Blessed Lord, this heart you only can bestow. You know my wickedness and wretchedness; my

frailties and follies; my helplessness and total alienation of heart from you. You know from what height of happiness I am fallen through original sin, and into what depth of misery I am plunged through willful transgression. But, Oh sovereign love! Oh matchless grace! you have pitied me; you have sent your Son, your only Son, to save me. You have assured me that all who believe in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Yet, in the midst of all this profusion of mercy; examine yourself, Oh my soul, whether you be in the faith." Have I ever yet believed unto life? Have I that faith which is given to all the children of God, called by the apostle "the faith of God's elect," - a faith "according to godliness," - a faith which "works by love," - which " purifies the heart," - which "overcomes the world," - which "substantiates and evidences things not seen?" Jesus has said, "by their fruits you shall know them." "A tree is known by its fruits." Here, then, is an unerring standard, a sure criterion of judging; for men do not gather grapes from thorns bushes, nor figs of thistles.

What, then, are the fruits which I am daily bringing forth? What is the general tenor of my thoughts? If sinful thoughts arise, do I cherish them? Am I fond of retaining them? Or, have I obtained the mastery over my imaginations, so as to be able almost instantly to suppress them, when contrary to purity and holiness? Do I find delight in secret retirement, meditation, reading the Scriptures, and prayer? Am I careful with my words? Do I love to discourse about the things of God, in such a manner as to render my conversation profitable? Is Jesus, that endearing name, often upon my tongue; not from mere profession, or religious parade, but from a heart-felt love to him? What is the nature of my actions? Do they spring from a lively faith, that by them my faith may be known, as a tree by its fruits? Am I careful "to maintain good works," knowing that, if a child of God, I am created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that I should walk in them? By some people, this train of self-examination may be termed legal; but where these evidences of grace in the soul are lacking, all pretension to Gospel liberty is a device, a delusion of Satan. John has declared, "If we ask any thing according to the will of God, he hears us:" therefore, it follows as a consequence, that if we are not sanctified, it is because we do not in sincerity ask this blessing from our heavenly Father. We are not only to ask, as it respects the subject-matter of our prayers, what is agreeable to the will of God; but, to obtain the blessing, we must also ask in that spirit which he requires, and which he alone can impart. We must ask in faith; then comes the blessing: "whatever you ask in my name, believing," said the divine Redeemer, "you shall receive".

We have here the reason why so few are saved. Either they do not pray at all; or, if they pray, they do not ask in faith. Hence, the whole guilt lies upon the unbeliever. He has no desire to be sanctified, being destitute of true faith; and so his prayers are formal, heartless, and unanswered. But Oh! when we duly contemplate the grand design of the Gospel, what an encouragement is held out to the awakened sinner, who is crying out, "what must I do to be saved?" What an encouragement to know that God wills his salvation; and that if he ask according to the will of God, he shall assuredly obtain his request! He listens to this declaration of love: "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved;" and relying, through grace, on the merits of his Savior, and making mention of his righteousness only, he supplicates at the mercy-seat for pardon and purity, for peace and perseverance, and obtains all the riches of the everlasting covenant, to the praise and glory of God.

However disputants may marshal one part of divine truth against another, the glorious doctrines of the Gospel, like stones in a well built edifice, are firmly united together. No created power can separate them. Men may disagree in sentiment, but they cannot destroy the unity of truth. The word of the Lord endures forever. The Gospel of Christ, like the rivers in Eden, branches itself out into many fertilizing streams. Each truth makes glad the city of God, the church of the Most High. This sacred river shall continue to flow, with progressive increase of blessedness, until the whole earth shall be filled with spiritual beauty and gladness, through the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. When the rosy streaks of morning Flit across the darkened cloud: When the growing splendors brighten O’er the midnight’s sable shroud;

Then we know the sun, advancing, Will diffuse the genial ray, Until its beam, profusely pouring, Form the bright, the perfect day.

Thus the waiting saints, beholding, Midst the shades of mental night, Streaks of light, divinely shining, flail with joy the rapturous sight.

Now they know their Lord is coming;

Jesus’s praise they sweetly sing;

Hail! they cry, oh Son of glory, Rise with healing on your wing.

Nations wrapped in awful darkness, See the glorious light appear;

Deserts wild and barren places All the charms of Eden wear.

Truth, and love, and hope concord Bless the desolated earth;

Sighs, and tears, and bitter anguish Yield to joy and scared mirth.

Hasten on this happy period, Shine, blessed Savior, from above, Until each nation be your portion, Fruit of your redeeming love!

03.16-16. ON PERVERTED VIEWS OF THE GOSPEL

16. ON PERVERTED VIEWS OF THE GOSPEL

Men, in general, have awfully low conceptions of true religion. They neither understand its nature, nor desire to understand it. When we look into the nominally Christian world, it would almost seem as if the great bulk of professing Christians thought nothing about the holy design of the Christian dispensation, or of their own responsibility respecting it. Their views are alarmingly erroneous, on a subject of all others the most important. Taking their own wisdom for their guide, they go on stumbling in the dark, until either Sovereign Grace makes them wise unto salvation, or Infinite Justice allows them to reap the fruit of their own folly, in "the blackness of darkness forever."

Some consider the Gospel as a mitigated law, whereby the standard of holiness is lowered, and a door opened for the commission of venial offenses. Others imagine that mercy, by being ultimately extended to all, will triumph in the final judgment; though all may not reach that standard, which some over-righteous enthusiasts deem essential to salvation. Some view the plan of salvation as happily accommodated to the needs of sinners. Jesus they acknowledge as the only Savior, whose merits are apportioned to the deficiencies of each applicant for mercy; so that very moral people need less of the Savior’s merits than the profligate, as their own excellencies help to fill up the scale of righteousness. Thus Jesus becomes a mere additional weight in the balance of their good works. Oh the pride and blindness of the human heart!

Others blasphemously make Christ the minister of sin, declaring that nothing can hurt the privileged believer; no, not even the cherished evils of his own deluded heart. They assert that Christ has done all; and left him nothing to do but to rejoice, although unsubdued corruptions are continually breaking out in his life and conversation. They maintain that divine grace is the more glorified, by thus rising superior, in its gifts of mercy, to the infirmities and allowed sins of believers. Thus, the moral law is set aside, and holiness considered as a burden, from which they are happily freed.

How Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, the more effectually to allure and destroy! Awful delusions indeed! Such self-deceivers love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. Of divine truth, they are "willingly ignorant." How great is the change, when God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shines into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of his glory, in the face of Jesus Christ! By this divine process, we become new creatures, bear the image of the Savior, shine forth in the beauty of holiness, and live to his glory, who works all things after the counsel of his will. The redeemed sinner is a child of God. He is born from above, and resembles his heavenly Father in his imitable perfections. "God is love." Hence, every one that loves is born of God, and knows God. God is "glorious in holiness." His people are, therefore, a holy people; being called with a "holy calling." God is just. And his children are all righteous. They walk before him in uprightness, simplicity, and godly sincerity. God is eternal truth. His redeemed ones speak the truth from the heart. They abhor deceit and lies. God is almighty. His people "are strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;" and come off "more than

conquerors through him that loved them." God is "rich in mercy." His children are commanded to be merciful, even as their Father who is in heaven is merciful. God is wisdom. All his faithful servants are enlightened by his Spirit, guided into all truth, and made wise unto salvation. Thus, every communicable perfection which resides in the Deity, is reflected by the new creature to the praise of his glory, from whom comes every good and perfect gift. From this view, we perceive that the mere externals of religion will avail nothing unto salvation. There must be the accompanying power of godliness, and an inward experience of the truth upon the heart. Head-knowledge, without heart-work, is but a shadow, good for nothing. The gracious promise of our all-merciful God is sweetly proclaimed by the prophet Jeremiah: "I will give them a heart to know me that I am the Lord;" and Paul declares, that "with the heart man believes unto righteousness." "My son, give me your heart," is the paternal command of the Almighty, at once reasonable, loving, and delightful.

Now, let me ask myself seriously, as in the sight of the all-searching God: Am I reflecting the bright beams of his grace on my own soul? Do I love God, his people, and his ways? If I am a child, I must, of necessity, be filled with love; for God is love. Do I hate all sin, and walk in all the commandments of God; knowing that, without holiness, no man shall see the Lord? Am I just and equitable in all my dealings, remembering that God has declared his abhorrence of all unrighteousness of men? Are deceitful lies hateful to my soul? Do I love the truth, and practice it in all my intentions, words, and conduct? Am I ready to forgive, knowing how mercy shines forth in the covenant of grace, and how much I stand in need of divine mercy every moment of my life? Oh that I could feel more of the sweet influence of those graces in my heart!

"Lord, pity a poor sinful worm of the earth. Let me not be destitute of this sure and certain evidence of belonging to you, even that of bearing your holy image. Fill me with love; make me holy in all my life; just and true in all my ways; powerful in resisting evil; merciful to my offending brethren; and wise in all heavenly wisdom. Thus may my light shine before men to your glory, until, by your sovereign grace, I am admitted through the gates into the city, clothed with the righteousness of Jesus, and having the inward seal and witness by the Spirit, enabling me to exclaim "Abba, Father!" in the courts above.

Almighty God, to you belong The heart-felt praise, the grateful song; From you all joy and peace proceed, And grace to help your people’s need. Who can recount your mercies o’er, Or fathom that unbounded store Of love divine, which freely gave Your Son, rebellious man to save?

Here language fails, nor can express, The riches of redeeming grace. Its depth exceeds an angel’s ken; Its height, the feeble eye of men.

Behold its length, its breadth survey, Co-equal with eternity; For everlasting love alone, Could place a rebel on the throne. And is this love held forth to me?

Amazing thought! Ah! can it be?

Angelic tongue can never express The vastness of redeeming grace! For me, a rebel worm, he died! For me "my Lord was crucified!"

Away you sins - you lusts, begone;

I will be his, and his alone.

Almighty Jesus, make me thine;

Oh! wash me in your blood divine;

Preserve my soul from every sin, And reign the sovereign Lord within.

Oh! clothe me in that beauteous dress; The garment of your righteousness;

Then may I look towards your throne, And claim each promise as my own. With joy shall I appear among The blood-bought flock, the ransomed throng; And when you bid time be no more, Your grace in endless worlds adore!

03.17-17. ON THE NATURE OF CHRISTIANITY

17. ON THE NATURE OF CHRISTIANITY

Christianity is a religion of love. It flowed from the eternal love of God the Father; was published in lines of blood on the cross of God the Son; and is graciously revealed to every contrite soul through the power of God the Holy Spirit.

Christianity breathes nothing but love to the penitent sinner. It woos, it entreats, it invites all, without exception, to partake of its blessings, and live. It holds forth the free mercy of God through Christ; and offers pardon and acceptance even to the vilest, who come unto Jesus weary and heavy laden, as the Savior and friend of sinners. Can you, Oh! my soul, refuse such an offer as this? Can you reject so loving a Savior; so rich an offer of grace and mercy? "Blessed Jesus! behold a wretched sinner at the foot of your cross. Enable me to look unto you alone for salvation. Draw me, and I will run after you. Oh! may I daily live upon you, the true bread from heaven, by faith. Unite me to yourself, as the branch to the vine; the member to the head; and bring me in joyful triumph to your celestial kingdom. But what am I now asking? Blessings rich as heaven, and extensive as eternity. I am imploring blessings bought with blood - the blood of God incarnate! Amazing price! yet freely paid, to purchase heaven for me!"

Christianity spreads happiness around her path. True happiness can only be found in a covenant God in Christ, who has declared himself to be a just God, and yet a Savior; just, and yet the justifier of all who believe in Jesus; yes, faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Outside of Christ, when we contemplate the great Jehovah in his essential character, we behold every perfection in array against us, and demanding our everlasting punishment as rebel creatures. Infinite holiness and justice, truth and goodness, require that sin should be punished. Hence the Scriptures declare that "our God is a Consuming fire," "who will in no wise clear the guilty." But when we view God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself not imputing their trespasses unto them; when we behold the Eternal Word becoming flesh, and dwelling among us; when we see the babe of Bethlehem, Emanuel, God with us; then hope revives, and, leans with sweet, delightful confidence on the rock of ages; love kindles into a bright and ardent flame; faith contemplates with rapture the stupendous plan of mercy; while all our enraptured powers unite their efforts to adore the great Redeemer’s name.

Lord, what is man, that you are thus mindful of him; or the son of man, that you so regard him? Oh! how wonderful is the love of God towards lost rebellious sinners!

"Who is a God like unto you, that pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retains not his anger forever, because he delights in mercy. He will turn again; he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and you will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." The religion of Jesus is a religion of peace. The angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men," when they announced to the

wondering shepherds the glad tidings of the Savior's birth. Wherever the power of the Gospel is felt, there joy and peace reign. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as a rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing."

Christianity displays the wisdom of God. "Happy is the person who finds wisdom and gains understanding. For the profit of wisdom is better than silver, and her wages are better than gold. Wisdom is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. She offers you life in her right hand, and riches and honor in her left. She will guide you down delightful paths; all her ways are satisfying. Wisdom is a tree of life to those who embrace her; happy are those who hold her tightly." Pro 3:13-18

"Take, then, to yourself, Oh mighty Savior, your great power, and reign over all the earth! Fulfill your promise to your ancient Israel, and to the benighted millions of the heathen world. Let Satan no longer maintain his empire in the human heart. Hurl him from his seat. Dislodge him from his citadel. Command him into the deep; for you have said, 'All Israel shall be saved,' and 'the Lord shall be the King of the whole earth.' Adorable Emanuel, Prince of peace, Sovereign of souls! take away the veil from the heart of the poor Jews, who have so long been 'scattered and peeled;' 'without a king, without a prince, without a sacrifice.' Hear the prayers of gentile Christians on their behalf, that they may look upon you whom they have pierced; and mourn, until their sorrow, through your forgiving grace, shall be turned into joy. Open the eyes of the perishing heathen, that they may see the misery of their condition; the hard bondage under which they labor; the cruel tyrant whom they serve; and the awful doom which awaits them in another world. Oh! do you reveal to them, through the preaching of the Gospel, your agony and bloody sweat, your cross and passion; all the mysteries of Gethsemane and Calvary. Show them the crown of glory which you have purchased; the kingdom which you have prepared; the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, which is reserved for all who live a life of faith in you. Endue them with strength to renounce their sins, and to burst the chains which bind their captive spirits. Shed abroad your love in their hearts, and transform them into your own most holy image. And Oh, loving Savior, have mercy upon those thousands of nominal professors of the Gospel, who are by you esteemed the worst of sinners! These, Oh Lord, do unto you the greatest dishonor. They hear of you without emotion. They talk of you without affection. They know your Gospel, speculatively, but experience nothing of its power. They call you Lord, but do not obey you. They have the light shining around them, yet love darkness rather than light. They hear the sweet sound of grace, yet find no chord of unison within. They see the waters of life flowing on every side, yet never taste of their refreshing stream. They have a name that they live, and yet are dead. They profess that they know God, yet in works deny him. They have the form of godliness, yet deny the power thereof. They express a self-complaisant pity for the poor Jew and Gentile, while they themselves are in a far more wretched state than these objects of their commiseration. Oh! that the Spirit may be poured out from on high; that the wilderness may become a fruitful field; that every heart may experience the transforming power of your sovereign grace, and the whole earth be filled with your glory! You have said, 'Surely I come quickly - Amen, even so come, Lord Jesus.'"

Eternal God, your power display;

Chase all the shades of night away;

Let every foe before you fly, And bring each Gospel blessing nigh. Your dying love, Oh Lord, reveal, That love which melts the heart of steel;

Each stubborn will in mercy bow, And lay the rebel sinner low.

Arise, Oh Sun of righteousness, And all your waiting people bless;

Arise upon our hearts, and shine Until every heart be wholly thine.

Inflame our cold affections, Lord;

Renew them by your quickening word;

Bind every thought in willing chains, Until not a rebel thought remains.

03.18-18. ON NEGLECTING THE GOSPEL

18. ON NEGLECTING THE GOSPEL This declaration of the apostle, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" - is both a solemn question, and an awful conclusion. Those who hold infidel principles, who live in a total disregard of religious ordinances, and who persecute the followers of Jesus, despise the salvation of God. But there are other marks equally legible to the discerning eye, though often unseen by the people who bear them, on account of the blinding nature of sin, which point out the neglecters of salvation. The three following should excite alarm, and call forth the important exercise of strict self-examination.

1. If we are living in the allowed indulgence of one known sin, whether that sin be internal or external; whether it be cherished in the secret recesses of the heart; or whether it ripen into overt acts; we are neglecting the salvation of the Gospel. We may have knowledge, and zeal, and gifts of various kinds; we may do much in active exertion to promote the general cause of religion; we may associate with pious characters, and be ourselves esteemed pious; we may be regular at church; maintain family worship; and, like Herod, do "many things;" yet if; after all, we are living in the allowed indulgence of one known sin, we are neglecting this great salvation; and, dying in this state, must inevitably perish. Should we knock and say, "Lord, open unto us," Jesus would profess unto us, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of iniquity." How awful is this consideration, and yet how just! We may destroy all of the Amalekites; yet, if we preserve Agag and the rest of the flock alive; if we retain some beloved lust in the heart, we manifest a spirit in direct opposition to the will and command of God.

2. If we are building upon any other foundation, in whole or in part, than Jesus Christ and him crucified, we are neglecting his great salvation. To be saved from the dreadful consequences of sin, we must build simply and entirely on that foundation which God has laid in Zion, without daring to bring any of the materials of corrupt nature to mix with it. On this foundation we must pray for grace to build gold, silver, and precious stones. This must be done by adding to faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. If these things be in us, and abound; they make us that we shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; while an entrance shall be ministered to us abundantly into his heavenly kingdom.

3. If we are preferring any earthly object, of whatever kind, to Jesus Christ; if our affections are placed on any other being in opposition to him; or if we are seeking our delight in any created thing, as distinct from him and independent of him, we are neglecting his great salvation; yes, setting up idols in our hearts. We must love the adorable Savior with a supreme affection; and we must love other objects only for his sake. Our temporal blessings must be enjoyed as flowing from him; our friends and domestic comforts must be received as gifts coming to us through his redeeming grace. All we possess must be held at his disposal, and with a view to that account which we must one day give. Thus, Christ must be the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and

ending of all our desires and affections.

Oh! how strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leads unto life; and few there be that find it. May I never forget this unchangeable truth; that Jesus is the only way of escape from hell - and the only way of access to heaven. Lord, let your Holy Spirit guide me into this consecrated way. Hold me up, and I shall be safe.

It is truly awakening to reflect how far a person may go in the circumstantials and externals of religion, and yet be entirely destitute of the life of God in the soul. The holy Scriptures abound with declarations to this effect, which prove the deceitfulness of the human heart, and the danger of resting in mere outward forms and orthodox opinions. Thus, Job describes the character of the hypocrite: "What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he has gained, when God takes away his soul? Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he always call upon God?" evidently implying, that, not having the root of the matter in him, though he had gained the applause of men for his seeming piety, he would soon grow weary of the service of God.

David also shows, in awful colors, the wickedness of false teachers: "Unto the wicked, God says, what have you to do to declare my statutes, or that you should take my covenant in your mouth; seeing you hate instruction, and cast my words behind you?" Thus, wicked men may enter into the priestly office, preach the Gospel, and talk about that covenant, in the blessings of which they have no personal interest whatever. The prophet Isaiah, by the Spirit of God, sets forth the extreme hypocrisy of the Jews: "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of David their sins. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinances of their God. They ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God." Thus, their conduct was a strange mixture of apparent devotion and decided rebellion. The prophet Ezekiel was shown the true character of those who waited upon him. "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." Our divine Redeemer has painted the hypocrite in his true colors: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for you pay tithe of mint, anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for you make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess." "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for you are like unto whited sepulchers, which, indeed, appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and all uncleanness." "You serpents, you generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell!" When we consider that these men were held in the highest esteem and veneration among the Jews for their outward sanctity and devotion, we see how far people may go in the externals of religion, and yet be in the very gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. It was on this account that the apostle Paul so constantly warned the churches to whom he wrote against false profession, and receiving the grace of God in vain. He speaks of those who hold the truth, but who hold it in unrighteousness. The Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude, are full of warnings against false teachers, antichrists, and deceivers. The charges to the seven churches, in the book of Revelation, most awfully show the danger of declension, of leaving our first love, of becoming lukewarm, and, consequently, loathsome to an infinitely holy God.

Many, it is to be feared, have the reputation of being spiritually alive, whose souls, in the sight of God, are dead to all the vital influences of the Holy Spirit.

Oh, my soul, let not these solemn portions of God’s sacred word be lost upon you. Pray without ceasing for that grace, which can alone preserve you from falling, and, through the merits of Jesus, present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

"Almighty Savior! awaken my drowsy senses, and make me alive to my real condition. Allow me not to neglect your blessed Gospel; but draw me to yourself continually, for your grace is sufficient for me. Wash me in the cleansing fountain of your blood. Place me upon that foundation which can never be moved. Arm me for the spiritual combat; and at last make me more than conqueror, through the power of your might and the riches of your grace.

Why should I linger here below, When Jesus calls my heart above?

Why, Oh, my soul, the bliss forego, The joy of everlasting love?

I feel the weight of nature’s guilt, Beneath its ponderous load I groan;

Oh! may the blood on Calvary spilt For all my crimson sins atone!

Blest Jesus! speak the pardoning word;

Salvation to my spirit bring!

Then will your grace those joys afford, Which from your cross to sinners spring.

Redeemed from guilt and slavish fear, My soul shall wing its way to you!

While faith beholds her tide clear To blissful immortality.

03.19-19. ON INADEQUATE VIEWS OF HUMAN NATURE

19. ON INADEQUATE VIEWS OF HUMAN NATURE The world is full of mourning, lamentation, and woe. We see many dancing along in thoughtless gaiety, and sporting on the brink of perdition. But this lightness of spirit is transient; sorrow soon darkens the glare of human happiness, and leaves the soul in sad dejection and despair. This picture may be gloomy, yet it is true. Sin has defaced the moral excellence of man; yes, more, has converted him into whatever is base, polluted, and depraved. All his faculties and powers are now employed as weapons against his Maker; and the very plan of mercy, whereby alone he can be restored to holiness, happiness, and heaven, is opposed, neglected, or despised. And yet we talk of moral excellence in a fallen creature; of goodness in a heart which is desperately wicked; of righteousness in a condemned criminal; of amiable qualities in a mind at enmity against God; of strength in a helpless worm; of wisdom in a soul beclouded in all its powers.

Strange inconsistency! "What communion has light with darkness?" The word of God condemns such a motley character, and pronounces a woe on that which the world so much admires.

It is no uncommon thing to hear people talk about their good hearts and good intentions; when love to God, and a desire to please him, are utter strangers to their soul.

These self-admiring people consider as libelous every attempt to tear away the mask, and to expose the native vileness of the inner man. Thus, pride, vanity, self-love, and unbelief, the deadly roots from where all sin springs, conspire to keep us in a state of bondage, and enveloped in the mist of error.

It is quite compatible with the vanity of our fallen nature, to extol, as the highest excellence, those benevolent and patriotic feelings which often exist in a heart totally alienated from God. The Bible acknowledges no real excellence, but what arises from the regenerating work of grace upon the soul. An attentive reader of that Holy Book must be struck with the faithful delineations which it gives of the human heart. Man is there represented as he appears in the sight of God, when divested of all his meretricious ornaments.

What we call virtues, will be found, when analyzed, to be mere selfish principles; and human approbation to be the secret spring of many a splendid action. This disclosure is revolting to our pride. But proud man must be humbled. The Scripture has concluded all under sin. In this state, grace at first finds the sinner. There is naturally no movement of the soul towards God; no affection for him; no trust in him; no obedience to him. The first inclination of the heart to God is the sole operation of God’s own secret power, by such instruments or means as he, in his wisdom and sovereignty, is pleased to employ. The work, once begun, gradually, and sometimes, indeed, rapidly increases. The blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear, are of a longer or shorter period in their growth, as the principle is weaker or stronger; for there are mysteries in grace, as well as in nature. But in both kingdoms, the work is of God. He begins, carries on, and completes the vast design. All originates in his will, and all shall terminate in his glory. His language is, "I am God, and

besides me there is no Savior." "In the Lord, all the seed of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory."

Yet man is a responsible creature, a moral agent. In this work of grace, God does not force, but inclines the heart to seek him. He does not compel the sinner, with reluctant steps, to enter in at the strait gate; but, by enlightening his mind, and touching his heart, he sweetly constrains him to enter in, that he may be saved. His refusing to submit to the yoke of Jesus, and to accept of mercy on Gospel terms, is altogether the fruit and effect of his own depraved heart, and will justly be punished, if persisted in, with everlasting destruction. Thus, all the praise of our salvation is due to God alone; while all the guilt and final misery, flowing from our transgressions, are chargeable solely upon ourselves.

Men may now argue, and dispute, and cavil, about the truths of revelation; but a day is fast approaching, when "every mouth that is now opened against him, God will condemn." In that tremendous day of just judgment, the guilty conscience will speak in loudest thunder to the self-convicted soul; while notes of praise will forever ascend from hearts renewed by sovereign grace, to the fountain of eternal love.

We sin, and forget the sin. But God remembers all our wickedness. Awful, dreadful thought! Every impure imagination, every unhallowed affection, every sinful purpose, though unripened into action, every secret and unknown iniquity, is remembered by that omniscient God, who will judge the secrets of men’s hearts by Jesus Christ, and strictly render to every man according to his works. Oh what a day will that be, which plucks away the mask of hypocrisy from the face of sin! which rolls away the whitened stone from off the loathsome sepulcher; which discloses the impure chambers of imagery, and discovers all the hidden evils of a heart once admired, but now abhorred by an assembled world of saints and angels! In that day, the wicked will bewail, in bitter reproaches, their forgetfulness of God, and their love of sin; but this bitterness of soul, being utterly destitute of every gracious feeling, will only increase the sharpness of their torment, and give additional strength to the sting of that worm which never dies! Thus, their self-reproaches, and hatred of God, will be commensurate with eternity. Hating God - hating themselves - and hating the dreadful fiends who torment them, they will be wretched, beyond all conception, forever and ever!

Happy are they who receive the truth as little children. Lord, give me right views of the truth, as it is in Jesus; and right feelings and affections towards you, who are the God of my life and of my salvation. Put your fear into my heart, that I may not depart from you. Fill me with a reverential awe of your holy name. Let me never pry into the wisely-concealed purposes of your grace, but ever remember, and practically regard, this important declaration of Moses, "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." When I hear a sinner boasting Of the goodness of his heart, And how easy it is for mortals With their dearest sins to part;

Then, methinks, this man’s a stranger To the work of grace and faith All he speaks betrays his blindness, All is darkness that he says. Did he once, but feel the workings Of the Spirit’s mighty power, He would feel the flesh rebelling, From that highly favored hour.

Satan would not let him conquer, Without many battles fought; This the Lord permits, that sinners Their own vileness may be taught.

It is the traitor lodged within us Seeks to admit the foe without;

When, by grace divinely potent, Satan has been once cast out.

Inbred evils, dread corruptions, Natives of the human heart, League with Satan ’against the Savior, And determine not to part.

03.20-20. ON TWO COMMON ERRORS

20. ON TWO COMMON ERRORS

There are two fatal errors, which, it is to be feared, abound among professing Christians. The one, which considers divine grace as disrobed of its glory, by insisting upon the necessity of human endeavors in the great work of salvation. The other, which declares as injurious to morality, the emphasis that is laid upon the absolute necessity of divine grace to the production of every thing that is spiritually good in any man. The truth embraces both these propositions: that is, the absolute need of divine grace, without which "nothing is holy;" and the absolute necessity of human endeavors, since God works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Though salvation be all of grace, yet God is pleased to work by means. A Paul must plant, an Apollos water, while God gives the increase. The husbandman deposits his seed in the ground, yet God alone can crown his labors with an abundant harvest. To depend upon the divine blessing, without using the means which Infinite Wisdom has appointed, is enthusiasm. To use the means appointed, without an entire dependence upon the promised blessing, is impiety.

If a father, for instance, should pray for the conversion of his children, and yet allow them to run wild, without presenting any checks to their evils, under the impression that the Almighty in his good time will save them, if they are to be saved; and that if they are not among the elect, no blame can attach to him, should they finally perish; would he not, by such erroneous views of the plan of salvation, be actually aiding the cause of Satan, and the destruction of his unhappy offspring, under the false notion of glorifying the sovereignty of God and the freeness of divine grace?

So, on the other hand, if a father should endeavor to train up his children in virtuous habits, and be anxious to guard them against the seductions of the world; and yet draw all his hopes of success from his own exertions and paternal instructions, without once feeling the force of that all-important declaration of the Savior, "Without me, you can do nothing;" would he not, by such conduct, manifest great impiety? and might not the Almighty withhold his spiritual blessing, to show how easily he can blight the most powerful human endeavors? To trust God with all our hearts, in the diligent use of the appointed means, is the path which Infinite Wisdom has marked out for man, as a moral agent. To be enabled to do this in a right spirit, is the work of divine grace, and the way to obtain the divine blessing. The Bible, while it reveals the utter inability of man to do any thing that is good, by any natural power of his own, addresses him as a creature endued with rational powers, and of high responsibilities. Hence, the sacred volume abounds with exhortations to diligence, motives to obedience, and promises of grace and strength both to do and suffer the holy will.

Spiritual pride and spiritual sloth are alike condemned. He who says "I will not," and he who says "I can not," may be equally under the influence of a bad spirit. The latter, which has a show of humility, may spring from spiritual sloth, as the former does from spiritual pride. When grace really enlightens the mind and affects the heart, the sinner, though deeply conscious of his utter inability

to save himself; dares not make this an excuse for continuing in sin. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, he cries mightily to God, through Christ, for deliverance from the guilt and power of sin; and is graciously helped by him who never said to the seed of Jacob, "Seek me in vain." The Antinomian, and the self-righteous error, are both reprobated in the Scriptures of truth. While we would carefully avoid those metaphysical niceties which darken the simplicity of the Gospel, we should pray to discover those subtle webs which Satan weaves to catch the feet of the unwary. Divine truth is beautiful in its own simplicity - and grand in its own sublimity. Every human addition, like paint on the diamond, obscures its luster. An honest heart, and a sincere intention to please God in all things, will clear the path of duty from many a stumbling-block, which the pride of human reason has cast up; "for if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."

People, in general, are more ready to argue a point in theology, than to crucify a beloved lust. Those who are much acquainted with the religious world, will find many theological disputants for one self-denying follower of Jesus. The apostle was compelled to say in his day: "there are many unruly and vain talkers." And such characters have been found in every age of the church, to the annoyance of the humble Christian. The Bible is not given to us for disputation, but for edification; and its doctrines are designed to have a practical tendency on the mind and heart. If real Christians, who differ from each other on some abstruse points of theology, were to meet on the ground of our common Christianity, they would be surprised to find how nearly they approximate each other in genuine experience and practice. They would, with delightful feeling of joy, recognize a brother, where they expected to meet a foe. The weapons of controversy being thus laid aside, and agreeing to differ on points confessedly abstruse, and beyond the power of finite reason to solve, they would cheerfully hold out the right hand of fellowship, and exhibit to the world that charity which is the bond of perfectness, and the beauty of the church of Christ. This is a state of feeling devoutly to be wished. May this spirit of mutual love and affection abound more and more among the true followers of the Lamb. Then will each member of the church, by his holy walk and conversation, prove his election of God; and all the members of the mystical body, deriving daily nourishment and strength from their glorified head, be growing in a fitness for the "general assembly of the first-born," however they may differ in their views or some of those ’deep things of God’ which can only be unraveled in the world of light and glory. It is no small craftiness of Satan to engage the mind about non-essentials, and to beget among Christians a spirit of strife and contention. This crafty enemy has succeeded too well in all ages, to the grief of good men, to the weakening of the good cause, and to the joy of the enemies of the Gospel of Christ. All this only tends to confirm the Scripture doctrine of human corruption, and Satanical agency. It calls for great watchfulness, circumspection, and prayer; as well as humility and dependence on the Spirit of truth. The grand design of God, in his revelation of mercy, is the display of his own perfections in the salvation of his fallen creatures. Hence, the command to perishing sinners is: "Look unto me, all you ends of the earth, and be saved; for I am God, and there is none else, and besides me there is no Savior." While the exhortation to believers is: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

"Blessed Lord, give me that wisdom which is from above. Preserve me from falling into those errors, which would excuse spiritual sloth, or feed spiritual pride. Bestow upon me the spirit of prayer; and give me grace to live in the spirit of my prayers. Cause me to walk before you with a

humble, loving, obedient heart; that, living a life of faith in your beloved Son, I may work by you and for you, while it is called today, before the night comes when no man can work."

Wherever I turn my eyes within, What loads of guilt, what depths of sin, Like oceans deep, like mountains high, Call for the vengeance of the sky!

Deceit, ambition, lust, and pride, Within the human heart reside;

There Satan, seated on his throne, Claims the whole empire as his own. But Jesus comes! the mighty Lord!

He wields the bright celestial sword; The strong man armed is forced to fly, While angels chant the victory.

Glory to God in heaven above, On earth sweet peace and sacred love;

Good-will to men - the foe is foiled, And God and sinners reconciled.

Come, mighty conqueror of the heart, Subdue my soul in every part;

Ascend your long-usurped throne:

Oh, be my king, and reign alone.

03.21-21. ON THE CAUSE OF SKEPTICISM

21. ON THE CAUSE OF SKEPTICISM

What a multitude of opinions we find in the religious world! How many different sects and parties! each walling themselves round with their own peculiar tenets, and maintaining their own views of doctrine as the only standard of truth. But, in the midst of all this diversity of sentiment, how busy is the great enemy of souls in sowing the tares of uncharitableness, angry zeal, violent passions, and every unchristian temper in the Gospel field. The visible church has too long been the arena for combats which have ended in deluges of blood. Witness those many persecutions which have been carried on by Christians against Christians in almost every age.

"Oh Almighty God, look down upon your church, the vine which your own right hand has planted, that the boar out of the woods may not waste it, nor the wild beast of the field devour it. Return, we beseech you, Oh God of hosts; look down from heaven, behold, and visit this vine."

It may be useful to inquire, from where arises all this angry disputation in the professing Christian world? It arises, chiefly, from the pride of our hearts. To contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, is a duty; "to give place, no, not for an hour," to those who seek to destroy the foundation of our faith, is a duty. There is, however, an existing evil of great magnitude, and which springs from that pride of intellect, which seeks to be wise above what is written.

Man is not willing to act upon the plain, revealed command of Heaven. He must search and pry into the secret counsels of Jehovah. He wishes to ascertain why the Almighty issues such and such commands. He endeavors to bring every revelation from God to the rule and standard of his own peculiar mode of reasoning; and when two declarations present themselves before him, apparently opposed to each other, though practically leading to the same point, that is, the glory of God and the salvation of the soul; instead of humbly receiving both, as stated in the word of truth, and seeking to draw from each the practical improvement intended by them, he cannot rest until he has filled up the seeming chasm with his own confused ideas, thinking thereby to vindicate the ways of God to man!

Now, as each inquirer claims an equal right to fill up this chasm in his own way, and as very few will entirely submit to the system of another; so on this account it is, that the Christian world is filled with such heterodox opinions. Thus, leaving the sure path of revealed truth, men plunge into an ocean of inexplicable difficulties, and, by laboring to be wise above what is written, become very fools in divine things.

"Lord, grant that I may never exercise myself in matters which are too high for me; which you did never intend should be fully known in this present state; no, which I cannot comprehend, until the natural blindness of my understanding be wholly removed. In heaven, all darkness will be excluded. Here, I know but in part; there, if admitted by your grace, I shall know, even as also I am known. Make my soul then, Oh Lord, as a weaned child. Give me that simplicity of faith which cheerfully receives, as truth, all that you have revealed, though mystery surround me on every

side."

I find many plain and clear declarations, which nothing but a willful hatred of the truth can misrepresent and pervert. On these I would continually dwell; from them I would draw all the sweetness and comfort, wisdom and strength, which they were mercifully designed to convey. As a newborn babe, may I desire the sincere milk of the word, that I may grow thereby.

I find other declarations high and sublime; far surpassing man’s understanding. From these, I would learn humility. To these, I would submit my reason with humble reverence. By these, I would exercise my faith, and place implicit confidence in the word of truth, although many things therein be difficult to comprehend, and many past finding out.

While Peter acknowledges that, in the epistles of his beloved brother Paul, are some things hard to be understood; he also declares, that the unlearned and unstable twist them, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction. From these considerations, I perceive how wonderfully the holy Scriptures are calculated to instruct the humble believer, while they bewilder the proud skeptic. Like the cloud in the wilderness, they afford light to the Israel of God, while "the disputer of this world" is left in darkness. "Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them." Hos 14:9.

All theological and practical errors originate in the unbelief and pride of our hearts. We are continually pained with instances illustrative of this truth. Many who, to all outward appearance, set out well, holding the grand essentials of Christianity, and exhibiting the humble walk of the Christian, have, by degrees, got so high in doctrines, as to pass over the limits of the precepts, considering every enforcement of the moral law as derogatory to the freeness and liberty of the Gospel. The promises are to them like the manna for sweetness, while the precepts resemble the bitter waters of Marah. By this perverted view of the Gospel of grace, which makes provision for the holiness, as well as the acceptance, of the believer, they endeavor to disunite what God has inseparably joined together.

Advancing in their career of bold inquiry and daring investigation; leaving the precincts of the written word, and soaring into the interminable region of wild conjecture; they fall at length, giddy with their flight, into the fatal revelries of fanatical delusion, skeptical indifference, Socinian heresy, or deistical profaneness. Such wandering stars, leaving their proper orbit, afford an awful warning to the church of Christ; and happy is he who learns wisdom from their end, and thereby resists the first risings of pride and unhallowed speculation.

Some, indeed, are restored by that sovereign grace which they have abused; while others are left to the misery of their own delusions, according to Jude, who denominates them "wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." In the midst of surrounding darkness and abounding iniquity; in the midst of distracting opinions and guilty fears: Where must we look for saving help? To whom for refuge fly? Who dare presume to plead our cause Before the throne on high?

It is Jesus pleads his people’s cause, Before the eternal throne;

Presents the merit of his blood, And claims them for his own.

Oh! for a lively, vigorous faith, To feel this blessing mine;

Make me, Oh Lord, of saving grace A monument divine. On you, a helpless worm I fall, On you alone depend;

I'll trust your grace - 'tis infinite, And knows nor bound nor end.

Father! behold me in your Son;

Oh! send your Spirit down, To fit me for eternal joys, And seal me for your own.

03.22-22. THE ALMOST CHRISTIAN

22. THE ALMOST CHRISTIAN In this day of outward profession, it is most needful frequently to reflect how far a person may go in the way of religion, and yet prove nothing at the last but an ’almost Christian’. This will prove to us the importance of self-examination, since nothing is genuine that will not stand the test of Scripture- that only touchstone of real godliness. A person may have a clear knowledge of the Gospel way of salvation; be able to declare the truths of Christianity with interest and edification; have much fluency in prayer; he punctual in his attendance on the means of grace; engage actively in religious and benevolent institutions; maintain family worship; join the society of pious characters; abstain from worldly amusements, and all outward immoralities: and yet, with all these shining appendages, be only an almost Christian.

This, to many, may appear uncharitable, and lead them to exclaim with the disciples, "Who then can be saved?" The fact is, all these important gifts and talents may be possessed, and these active exertions may be made, upon the principles of our ’fallen nature’. A man may have a taste for scriptural studies, and a fondness for biblical criticism; he may have a natural fluency of discourse; his connections may be such as imperceptibly lead him to join the friends of religion in their activities, and, by degrees, influence him to establish family worship, to separate himself from worldly amusements and worldly associates; and yet there may be a total destitution of evangelical principles. ’Faith working by love’ may be a stranger to his heart. The Gospel declares, that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his;" that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature;" that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The work of grace being altogether ’spiritual and internal’, its operations must be felt and experienced in the heart. This work consists in a deep humiliation on account of sin, both original and actual, whether of omission or commission; in a deep sense and feeling of spiritual helplessness and wretchedness; in a hearty reception of Jesus Christ, as revealed and offered in the Gospel to perishing sinners; in a supreme love of Him who died to save the vilest who come unto him in a childlike obedience to his will and commands, however self-denying.

If these things be lacking, all else is nothing but dross in the sight of God. All short of this divine work in the soul is only ’almost Christianity’. It is painful to the friends of Jesus to behold many droop and wither, who have given promising hopes of future excellence, and almost confirmed the expectations of pious friends concerning their religious sincerity.

These hopeful professors walk well for a season, but at length they begin to draw back, by slow degrees, it may be, at the first; but, increasing in their speed as they advance in the path of declension, they finally plunge into the world, and thus verify the true proverb, "the dog is turned to his vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." With uneasy consciences, they endeavor to justify their return, by slandering the lives of professors, and speaking evil of those things with which they were never savingly acquainted. Such people, if they die in their apostasy, give every reason to believe that they never knew the grace of God in truth;

that they never received the truth in the love of it. Hence the apostle John, speaking of such characters, plainly says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be manifest that they were not all of us."

We may equally presume that they never tasted the inward blessedness of true religion- peace with God and joy in the Holy Spirit, arising from a believing, self-appropriating view of the atonement of Jesus.

When, therefore, their new mode of thinking and acting subsided; when prosperity gilded their path, or persecution covered it with thorns; not having root in themselves, and being destitute of saving faith, they became weary of a service, in which their whole soul was never engaged. They cast off a yoke, to them galling and grievous, and ran back again with delight into the secretly beloved pastures of the world. "Demas has forsaken me," said the sorrowing apostle, "having loved this present evil world." Where is the congregation of professing Christians, which does not from time to time afford melancholy proofs of this hollowness of character, this emptiness of profession, this influence of the world, to the grief of its faithful pastor, and the pious part of his flock? Such awful characters may be considered as spies, "pretending themselves to be just men," whom Satan sends into the camp of the true Israel of God, in order to discover the failings and infirmities of real Christians. These they traitorously expose to the derision of an ungodly world, hoping thereby to bring discredit upon the Gospel of Christ, and keep men more quietly in their sins. God can indeed overrule all for good, but woe unto them by whom these offenses come.

It is, then, both awakening and alarming to reflect how far a person may go in outward profession, and yet be a hypocrite with God; an almost Christian; "a castaway." If the new creature in Christ Jesus can be so counterfeited, as to deceive for a time the children of God, whose judgment is always guided by that charity which hopes all things; how ought I to examine into the principles, motives, and springs of my own actions, lest, after having made a profession before men, I should be rejected as "reprobate silver" in that day, when "the fire shall try every man’s work, of what sort it is!" Oh what need there is for sifting ourselves!

"Blessed Lord, make me an humble, sincere disciple. Let me not covet after gifts, so much as graces; and after divine gifts, only that I may be useful to others, and glorify you. I may live in the bustle of religious institutions, while devoid of religious affections. I may be able to advocate the cause of Christ, while destitute of a saving interest in his blood. I may mingle in the companies of the pious, and yet be an utter stranger to their spirit and experience."

Nothing will stand the test of the great day, but faith which works by love. My soul must be united to Christ by a living faith, before my works can be acceptable to a holy God. Out of Christ, I am a dead branch. In Christ, I become fruitful, through the skill of the heavenly husbandman, who prunes the living branches, that they may bring forth more fruit to the glory of his grace. This blessed receiving of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, will be accompanied by a gradual renewal of the soul into his image; and this divine transformation will be productive of works of faith, labors of love, and patience of hope. My heart will become the abode of peace and purity. High and holy principles will be implanted in richer abundance. I shall live for Christ. His glory will be my chief aim, his law my soul’s delight. Holy love will guide my movements, and become the unceasing spring of holy actions. All my desires will be to him who loved me, and gave himself for

me. This is true Christianity. "Oh that I may feel the power of this sacred truth Lord, save me from insincerity and hypocrisy, from declension and apostasy. Let me not be satisfied with barren knowledge and outward profession; but let your love rule in my heart, and shine forth in my daily words and actions, until I am translated, through grace, to those pure regions of unsullied happiness, where all your redeemed people shall shine forth, as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, forever and ever.

Dear Jesus, fill my soul With holiness and peace;

Arise with healing in your wings, You Sun of righteousness. May all beneath the sky Usurp my heart no more; May you be my first, my chief delight, My soul’s unbounded store. In you all treasures lie, From you all blessings flow;

You are the bliss of saints above, The joy of saints below.

Oh come and make me yours, A sinner saved by grace;

Then shall I sing with loudest strains In heaven, your dwelling-place. When standing round the throne, Amid the ransomed throng, Your praise shall be my sweet employ, While love inspires my Song of Solomon

03.23-23. ON CONVERSION

23. ON CONVERSION

Wherever we look, we behold some part of God’s works; some remembrancer of his power and goodness. Then, why are our thoughts so seldom led "through nature, up to nature’s God?" Here we discover the influence of sin, which so fills our hearts with the love of the creature, as to leave no room for the love of the Creator. When the Savior was born into the world, there was no room for him in the inn. Just so it is with our depraved hearts. Yet, wonderful condescension! Jesus stands at the door and knocks, saying, "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." And does not every heart fly open to receive the heavenly visitant? Alas, no! Satan puts on the threefold bar of unbelief, pride, and prejudice; while inbred sin, afraid of losing its darling gratifications, opposes every effort to admit so kind a friend. The flesh pleads hard for self-indulgence; the world spreads its painted baubles, its deceitful riches, its empty honors, its intoxicating pleasures; and thus the sinner is held in vassalage to the powers of darkness.

Is, then, the heart forever barred against the Prince of peace? Forever barred it would be, did not sovereign grace, by its almighty power, drive out the strong man armed, crucify each rebellious lust, and bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. When grace opens the sinner’s heart, all the powers of the soul are made willing to admit the conquering Savior, and to acknowledge him to be the Lord. Old favorite sins now become hateful; darling lusts appear like inbred vipers. Satan is beheld in all his horrors, and vice in its true deformity. The world loses its charms. Heaven opens on the enraptured eye of faith. Holiness captivates the heart by its celestial beauties. Jesus is beheld with rising admiration, and becomes each day more precious to the soul. Such is the wonderful change wrought in the conversion of a sinner, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Unbelief gives way to faith; pride to humility; anger to meekness; impatience to resignation; hatred to love and sin to universal holiness. The idol, self, falls prostrate before Jesus Christ; and nothing is extolled, or trusted in, or pleaded before the throne of God, but the precious blood and righteousness of Emanuel. All glory is now given to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and the Triune God is ALL in ALL.

It is to be feared that thousands, who call themselves Christians, will never be acknowledged as such in that great day, when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, and the real character of every professor of godliness distinctly known. Too many, it is to be feared, substitute a general acknowledgment of the truths of the Bible, for that faith in those truths which purifies the heart, and assimilates the soul to the image of Jesus.

It is no difficult thing to say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord;" But, to feel all the love, reverence, and obedience, which, as creatures and redeemed sinners, we owe to our God and Savior, is not so easy to fallen nature.

It is no way contrary to our carnal heart to profess, and even strenuously to contend for, those truths which we have been taught from our infancy to consider as sacred; or to extol that church, in whose bosom we have grown up from earliest years.

But, to exhibit the fruit of those doctrines, and to act agreeably to the spiritual formularies of our venerable establishment, is not so congenial to the natural state of our depraved hearts. So long as thousands, who bear the Christian name, live in all the gayeties and follies of the world; neglecting the Gospel, and manifesting a spirit in direct opposition to it; we cannot wonder that such multitudes, carried away by the potent stream of public example, rest satisfied with a faith which passes current in the world, which attaches no transformation to the character, which requires no self-denial, no painful sacrifices on the part of its possessors.

Many, no doubt, rejoice that they are preserved from such delusions as they suppose the people of God labor under, who debar themselves from what they term the innocent gayeties of life, and the delights of fashionable extravagance. These people pride themselves on their superior wisdom in being able to grasp both worlds at once; to acknowledge the importance of Christianity, and yet to enjoy those carnal gratifications which give such a zest to their existence. Thus they go on, like the rich man in the parable, faring sumptuously every day; and never find out their dreadful mistake, until, like him, they open their eyes in hell, being in torments!

How awfully blinded is the soul of man, until illuminated by the Holy Spirit of truth! Until his glorious light irradiate our minds, we can form no accurate ideas either of God or of ourselves. All is chaos and confusion. We do not even see men as trees walking. We are in a state of complete blindness, and all our conceptions are erroneous. We grope in the dark. We stumble even at noonday.

How different from that cold assent of the understanding to the general truths of the Gospel, which satisfies an unbelieving world, is the faith which the Spirit of God works in the hearts of his people. The believer in Jesus is the new creation of God. His mind is enlightened from above. His heart is made to feel its guilt and misery. He reads the word of God with an interest unfelt before. He reads it as a revelation of love from the God of mercy, proclaiming pardon to the guilty, peace to the miserable, and purity to the polluted. Every declaration bears, to his mind, the stamp of truth. He requires no other sanction than "thus says the Lord;" and, finding this, he reads with reverence, and seeks for grace to receive with all meekness the engrafted word which is able to save his soul. He finds his own character exactly portrayed in its sacred pages. He looks within, and is able to trace sin through the dark recesses and secret windings of his heart. He discovers those latent seeds of evil, those bitter springs of misery, unbelief, and pride and lust, and covetousness, which are continually pouring forth their deadly streams into his outward life. He traces all this evil to the fall of man, and finds that the deadly poison has contaminated the whole posterity of Adam. He owns himself a sinner, both by nature and practice. He justifies the righteous judgment of God, whose law he has broken, and whose tremendous curse he has so awfully incurred. He no longer tries to palliate his offenses, or invent soft names whereby to varnish over the deformity of sin. He frankly and fully confesses himself a rebel, guilty of death, and deserving of nothing less than eternal damnation.

Into this humble, broken, contrite state of heart, he is brought by the deep convictions of that Holy Spirit, whose office it is "to convince the world of sin." But does this divine agent leave him in this

awakened state of agony and despair? Ah, no! How good, how gracious, how merciful is God! He wounds in order to heal; he kills in order to make alive! When a person labors under a violent fever, every expedient is tried to reduce the wasting malady. The means used, seem, for a time, to increase the weakness and debility of the patient: but he is thus weakened only that he may eventually become strong. No sooner is the consuming fever abated, than cordials and restoratives are freely administered, which, given before, would have augmented the dangerous symptoms, and thus have hastened on the fatal consequences of the disease. Thus, our heavenly Physician humbles and subdues the proud heart of the sinner, and destroys the feverish thirst and burning desire after sinful gratifications, before he imparts the reviving cordials of pardon and peace to restore the sin-sick soul to spiritual strength and vigor.

Then the bloom of health begins to appear in the sweet tints of peace and joy, of love and humility, of meekness and heavenly-mindedness, which beautify the soul, and cause the believer to shine in the image of his divine Redeemer. The happy believer now knows his malady and his remedy. He takes with gratitude those medicines which Infinite Wisdom prescribes. He daily feeds upon Christ by faith, and daily derives strength from this gracious source of blessedness. He feels his own weakness, and experiences the power of Jesus. He loathes himself and truly loves his Savior, in whose righteousness he appears all lovely in the eyes of his heavenly Father. As a pilgrim, he journeys onwards under the guidance of that Holy Spirit who dwells in him as in a temple, and who has promised to keep him by his mighty power through faith unto salvation. The world fascinates no longer. The mask falls from its face, and he beholds the idol in its natural deformity. He sees the emptiness of human applause; the madness of ambition; the deceitfulness of riches; the folly of extravagance. Every thing beneath the sun assumes its true character while he views it through the medium of God’s holy word.

He learns to form a proper estimate of temporal things. He prays for grace to use the world as not abusing it; to be moderate in the enjoyment of all created good; knowing that the fashion of this world passes away. Has the believer no enjoyment of life? Is he destitute of all rational delights because he makes the Lord his portion? It would be an impeachment of the goodness of God, to suppose his service a mere Egyptian bondage. The true believer in Jesus has the sweetest enjoyment of life. He can eat his food with singleness of heart, praising God. He can taste the sweets of Christian friendship and domestic life; he can enjoy all the endearing charities of husband, father, brother; he can feel his heart expanding towards the poor; and find his joy in pouring the balm of consolation into the troubled breast; he can delight in all the beauties of natural scenery, and relish all the charms of sound philosophy; he can rejoice in every opening prospect for the extension of the Redeemer’s kingdom, through institutions devised by Christian wisdom and conducted in Christian simplicity; he can weep in his best moments over the ruins of the fall, not only as felt in his own heart, but as beheld in the abject condition of the millions of mankind; he can rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Say, then, can such a man be miserable? can such a man be destitute of sources of real enjoyment? He lives by faith; he longs for heaven; he desires to be daily conformed to Jesus, and to glorify him more, whether it be by life or death. To him, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Such is the character of the converted sinner. Oh how precious, how divine, how rare a character!

"Lord, impart this grace unto me, who am less than the least of all your mercies, until faith shall end in the glorious fruition of yourself in your everlasting kingdom of light and glory."

Blest Savior, condescend To dwell within my heart;

Oh, be my advocate and friend;

Bid every sin depart.

Incline my soul to love The path of life divine; In concord let my passions move, Let all my heart be thine.

Preserve me by your care;

Protect me, lest I stray;

Keep me from Satan’s’ deadly snare, From every devious way.

Let angel-guards surround, And shield my soul from ill;

While traveling over temptation’s ground, To Zion’s holy hill. When death the message brings To call me hence away, O may I stretch my joyful wings To heaven’s eternal day!

03.24-24. ON THE NEW CREATURE

24. ON THE NEW CREATURE The heart cannot be too deeply impressed with the absolute necessity of regenerating grace, nor seek to earnestly for the promised blessing. If the value of one immortal soul exceeds in amount all the wealth of the globe, yes, of millions of material worlds, how strange that men should barter their souls for trifles light as air, and empty as vanity itself! Awful infatuation! By many people, faith is considered as the cheapest commodity, and of the most easy attainment; forgetting that the eternal Son of God paid the price of his own most precious blood, that we might receive this heavenly grace, and be made partakers of everlasting glory.

Faith is the gift of God; and, if any man be in Christ, or, in other words, if any man possess this gift of faith, he is a new creature; with him, old things have passed away; and behold, all things have become new. Ah! how little is this delightful, yet solemn truth, considered by the great bulk of professing Christians! Solemn indeed, when viewed in reference to Christians in general; delightful, when contemplated in connection with the present holiness and future happiness of the new creation of God. To be made new creatures, two important changes must pass upon us. We must be renewed in the spirit of our mind; and we must walk before God in newness of life.

He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, must shine into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ, before we can walk in the light, as he is in the light. When thus enlightened, we shall walk circumspectly; watch ourselves closely; feel our own helplessness; lament our depravity; cast ourselves on Jesus unreservedly; plead his merits; implore his mediation; pray without ceasing; delight in the Scriptures; love the people of God; shun carnal pleasures; delight in labor for Christ and souls; stem the torrent of general impiety, and seek to abound in every good word and work. If this be a faithful miniature of the new creature, we must, while looking at unconverted man, exclaim, "What has God wrought!" The true believer has been justly compared to a little flame miraculously burning in the midst of mighty waters. There is every thing around him and within him that is calculated to extinguish the holy fire. Satan, the prince of the powers of the air, is constantly agitating these troubled waters. The world is dashing its surges against it; and the flesh, with its mire and dirt, is laboring to smother the sacred flame. But all is vain. He who kindled it, is Almighty; he who has promised that it shall never go out, is Almighty.

Oh, then, let not the afflicted, tempest-tossed believer be dismayed, but rather rejoice, inasmuch as the power and grace of Jesus are glorified by those very trials, which tend to increase the graces of his redeemed people. John has declared, that "he that believes on the Son of God has the witness in himself." If, then, we are new creatures in Christ Jesus, we shall have the following indubitable evidence of regeneration in our souls. Our perceptions will be new. A divine light will break in upon our minds. The darkness of error, which obscured the truth from our view, will be dissipated. We shall see with unveiled face, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, and shall be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. In his light, we

shall see light; and, following Jesus, who is the light of the world, we shall become the children of the light and of the day. Our principles will be new. We shall act from pure, holy, unselfish motives. Faith working by love will be the grand moving principle. Self will no longer be the pivot on which we turn, but Jesus will be our all in all. Our practice will be new. We shall live no longer according to the sinful customs of the world, or the powerful solicitations of the flesh, but according to the holy precepts of the everlasting Gospel. We shall delight in the law of God after the inward man. It will be our food and drink to do the will of our Father which is in heaven. Our plans will be new. We shall dedicate ourselves, and all we have and are, to the service of that divine Savior who loved us, and gave himself for us. We shall not be daily occupied in forming plans for worldly pleasure, or projecting schemes for the acquisition of worldly profit; but in devising means for carrying on the cause of truth, and for spreading the knowledge of a crucified Redeemer throughout the earth. Our prospects will be new. The darkness being past, and the true light now shining, we shall see the distant radiance of the heavenly Zion, and behold, with the telescopic eye of faith, the land which is very far off. Our privileges will be new. God will be now our reconciled Father; Jesus, our elder brother, Savior, and friend; the Holy Spirit, our sanctifier and comforter; angels, our ministering spirits; and heaven, our eternal home. Our portion will be new. All those exceeding great and precious promises, which in Christ are yes, and in him amen, to the praise and glory of God, will be ours. We shall be heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. We shall be the citizens of the New Jerusalem, and inherit that kingdom which is incorruptible and undefiled, prepared for all the new creatures in Christ Jesus, before the foundation of the world. To sum up all this blessedness, we shall experience in this world a progression in holiness, and in the world to come, a perpetuity of bliss.

"Blessed Lord! my soul longs for this rich grace, this unspeakably glorious state. O allow me not to lie a moment longer in nature’s darkness; but speak the word, and light shall start into existence. Then shall the lineaments of the new creature, formed to your glory, be daily unfolding themselves in greater likeness to yourself, until the happy hour shall arrive, when every remnant of corruption shall be forever destroyed, and my soul be made perfect in your everlasting kingdom."

Lord, what I want, and still implore, Is grace to love you more and more; A heart renewed - set free from sin, And filled with heavenly light within.

Oh could I reach this blissful state! For this, my longing soul shall wait, Until sovereign love, with mighty power, Shall on my soul the blessing shower.

Then, when the sacred drops descend From Jesus, my almighty friend, The fruits of joy and peace shall grow, And all the garden spices flow. With holy love and humble joy Shall grace my every power employ, Until, far removed from sin and shame, My soul shall ever bless your name.

03.25-25. ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

25. ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

We read much in the New Testament about Christian unity. The strength and beauty of the church consists in the oneness between Christ and his people. How powerful were the pleadings of our great Advocate for the unity of his redeemed people "Holy Father, keep through your own name, those whom you have given me, that they may be one, as we are;" "that they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that you have sent me. And the glory which you gave me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and you in me, that they may be made perfect in unity; and that the world may know that you have sent me, and have loved them, as you have loved me."

Paul also dwells much on this important subject, "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body - and have all been made to drink into one spirit." "Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind." "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you: but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus; that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." From our Lord’s intercessory prayer, we learn that all who are the subjects of grace, are the gift of the Father to the Son; that to such the Son gives eternal life; that the beginning of this eternal life is to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent; that this knowledge is imparted by Jesus Christ through the teaching of the Spirit of truth, the Comforter; that this knowledge is of a sanctifying nature; that it leads to a separation from the world, and a union to each other; that these happy souls are kept from the evil that is in the world, and preserved unto eternal glory.

Hence, all strife, divisions, and contentions, disfigure the beauty and tarnish the glory of the church of God. Paul sharply reproves the Corinthian church for their lack of unity: "You are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men?" While to the Ephesian converts he gives this beautiful exhortation: "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation with which you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith; one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

It may be asked, "Is it possible that all who profess to believe in the truths of the Bible, will ever be brought to see everything in the same light, and to follow, in every minute particular, the same track of thinking and acting?" This unity may, and ought to be maintained, in the grand essentials of the Gospel. And a beautiful union of faith and practice, of sentiment and feeling, does exist among real Christians of all denominations, however they may differ about the terms and explications of some abstruse doctrines, or respecting the outward forms and modes of church

government: "for the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power?" "It is not food and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." When these holy characters freely unbosom their hearts to each other, and discourse together on experimental and practical subjects, they find themselves standing on one common ground - connected by one common tie - united in one common cause - and drinking into one and the self-same spirit.

They all mourn over, and are deeply humbled, on account of the corruption of their nature and the sin of their lives. They all feel the plague of their own hearts, and so groan, being burdened. They all are conscious of their utter inability to save themselves. They all know that they are naturally without strength. They are all enabled, through grace, to look unto Jesus, the eternal Son of God, as their only Savior, whose blood cleanses them from all sin; whose merits, received and applied by faith, form their only justifying righteousness; whose intercession for them prevails with God; whose promised gift, the Spirit of truth, dwells in their hearts, causing them to cry with filial love and confidence, Abba, Father.

They all know and feel that they thus become the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus; and, enjoying the presence and grace of their heavenly Father through the Son of his love, they are all enabled to resist the devil, to crucify the flesh, to renounce the world, and gradually to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

They all confess how low their highest efforts fall beneath the elevated standard of Gospel holiness; yet, forgetting the things which are behind, they press forward towards those things which are before, and long for that happy period, when, having laid down their bodies of sin and death, they shall shine in spotless purity in the courts above. With these feelings and impressions, they all confess themselves to be pilgrims and strangers upon earth. Their hearts are set upon things above. They sympathize with each other’s sorrows, and gladden with each other’s joy. They love to bear each other’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. As they all believe in the glorious doctrine of the Trinity in Unity, and in the divine and human nature of Jesus Christ, so they unitedly confess themselves to be sinners saved by grace through faith in a crucified Redeemer, and ascribe all their salvation, from first to last, to the free, unmerited mercy of God in Christ. Thus, while they acknowledge the justice of that sentence which condemns them, as sinners, to everlasting misery, they extol the vastness of that love which so freely saves them from the wrath to come. With these holy views of the truth, they can each say from the heart, "My power is lost - the fault is wholly mine;

Yet bid me live - the glory shall be thine."

Now, if every faithful follower of Jesus can subscribe to these common points of Christian doctrine and experience, what is it that divides and separates the true family of Christ? Is it not the remaining corruption of our nature, the remaining darkness of our mind, and the subtle enemy of our souls? These are the foes which disturb the peace of the Church, and destroy much of her purity and spiritual prosperity.

Oh! that the Holy Spirit may purge away this old leaven of malice and wickedness, and fill us with sincerity and truth; that we may become a new lump; be all new creatures in Christ Jesus; shine as lights in the world; and so advance that kingdom of holiness upon earth, which is criminally impeded in its progress, and marred in its beauty, by the disfiguring contentions, strifes, and

divisions of those who call themselves the followers of the Lamb. In the ’revelation of mercy’, as in the visible works of creation, there are mysteries which our finite minds cannot fathom; for what is man that he should be wise as his Maker? And yet how many dare to reject the oracles of God, because they cannot comprehend their elevated truths, or square their seemingly discordant statements with their preconceived systematic opinions. The word of God is "as a city which is at unity with itself." All is plain and clear to the divine Mind, who sees the end from the beginning, and who knows the infinitely varied movements of his own vast design. We see but a small part of his ways. Many a wheel enters into those darknesses of his impenetrable counsel, which we cannot trace. But still it is moving onward in direct progression towards that glorious period, when the whole stupendous work of mercy shall be displayed to the Church triumphant in heaven, and call forth her eternal songs of praise. There, in that bright world, those saints of God who differed here below respecting some mysterious points of deep concealment, will see with one vision. The darkness being gone, the veil being withdrawn, and the truth standing fully revealed to their enraptured souls in all its beauty, symmetry, and perfection, they will then utter no jarring sentiment; feel no uncharitable emotion; experience no shyness of approach; but, wrapped in holy admiration and humble reverence before the throne of God, every feeling will be love, and every view of the truth in perfect accordance with the mind and will of their Creator. There, with one heart and mouth, they will glorify God and the Lamb, join in the same song, delight in the same work; being, in every sense, one in the presence of Him who, when upon earth, interceded for his people: "The glory which you gave me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are One. I in them, and you in me, that they may be made perfect in unity." Well, then, might the apostle say to the Corinthians, when lamenting their unhappy dissensions, "Are you not carnal and walk as men;" as people unconverted, as men destitute of the Spirit of Christ?

While we remain in the body, differences of opinion on points confessedly mysterious must be expected; but may not this be designed by Infinite Wisdom, for the exercise of charity and patience towards each other, provided the great essentials of genuine Christianity are maintained and practically believed? This incapacity of our minds to grasp the mighty design of everlasting love towards creatures helpless in themselves, and unable to come to God, (John 6:44,) and yet chargeable with the guilt of not coming to him, (John 5:40,) should teach us humility and entire dependence on the Spirit of truth, to direct us aright in the way of life and salvation. The more we know ourselves, the more we shall learn to renounce our own reasonings, and to follow simply the direction of that blessed word which is given us to be a light unto our feet and a lamp unto our path. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "Walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walks in darkness, knows not where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be the children of light."

"Merciful Lord, be pleased to, ’cast your bright beams of light upon your church,’ that all your people, being enlightened by the doctrines of your word, may so walk in the light of your truth, that at length they may attain to everlasting life. Preserve me, your unworthy servant, from that unhallowed curiosity which would presumptuously pry into those deep things around which you have thrown an impenetrable veil. Give me a mind enlightened to discover the truth as it is in Jesus; and a heart to love and practice the truth, as it is revealed to my soul in the fullness of Christian charity, enable me to say, ’grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in

sincerity;' and to call every one a brother who bears your holy image, takes up his cross, and follows you."

Sweet is the joy of those possessed, Who know and love the Lord; No guilty fears disturb their rest, While leaning on his word.

Amid the ruffling scenes of life, They trust a covenant God;

While all the angry sons of strife Despise his chastening rod.

Jesus to them his peace imparts, To them his presence gives;

He dwells by faith in all their hearts, And all their needs relieves.

Thus, holy Lord, may I be blessed With graces from above;

Until peace and joy reign in my breast, The fruit of dying love.

03.26-26. ON FOLLOWING THE LORD FULLY

26. ON FOLLOWING THE LORD FULLY

True humility is a sweet and blessed grace. It is the product of Almighty power. How calm is the humble soul! While storms and tempests rage with unrelenting fury among the proud and haughty of mankind, a serene and lovely sky smiles over those who are clothed with humility. To promote this desirable state of heart, it is very useful to study those characters on which Infinite Truth has stamped a worth which revolving ages cannot diminish nor impair. Such are Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Job, David, Daniel, and many others, who shine like stars in the book of God.

We cannot but be struck, while taking this survey, with the blessed testimony which God gave to Caleb; Num 14:24. He is there said to be a man "of another spirit" from the unbelieving Israelites around him; and "to have followed the Lord fully," at a time when the most awful defection took place among the professed people of God. To follow the Lord fully, is, indeed, a great work; and yet, nothing less than this will bring us to heaven. The work is the Lord’s. "By grace are you saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." The unbelief of the Israelites was their sin, for which they suffered, not being permitted to enter into the promised land. The faith of Caleb was the gift of God; and his privilege of being favored with a fruitful possession in the land of Canaan, in consequence of it, was of grace and not of debt. This strictly applies to me in a spiritual sense. Oh! for more self-condemnation and self-abasement, when I see and feel the awful unbelief which dwells in my evil heart. And yet, if I have any reason to hope that the Lord has given me another spirit from the carnal world around me, or from what I once had, and if this new spirit evidences itself by an obedience to his holy command, and a delight in his will, to him be all the undivided praise! To follow the Lord fully, I must have a lively faith in the promises of God made to me in Jesus Christ; I must experience the love of God shed abroad in my heart through the Holy Spirit given unto me; I must have a good hope through grace, a hope full of immortality: I must feel the sweet drawings of the Spirit, uniting me closer to Jesus in heart and affection: I must renounce all self-dependence and all creature dependence: I must renounce both my sins and my own supposed righteousness: I must abandon the flattering vanities of the world, and labor to subdue the lusts of the flesh: I must be willing to bear the cross, to deny myself, and to do anything for Christ: I must submit to the righteousness of God; yes, esteem it so inestimably precious, as to count all things else in comparison of it but dung and dross: I must have my will swallowed up in the holy, sovereign will of God: I must lie passive in his hand, while actively engaged in his service, being ever desirous, with childlike simplicity, to do and suffer, at all times and in all places, the will of my heavenly Father. If this be to follow the Lord fully, then, Oh my soul, lie prostrate at his feet in shame and confusion of face.

God will not accept of a divided heart. To follow him fully, I must follow him only. The language of the church is: "Other lords besides you have had dominion over me; but by you only, will I make mention of your name." "Whom have I in heaven but you, and there is none upon earth I desire besides you." "The Lord is my portion, says my soul." Oh that this may be the language of my

heart! I can never know true peace, until Jesus reign the unrivaled Sovereign of my affections. Blessed Savior! be my only Savior. Let me not trust in any thing but you. Let me love nothing but you, or for your sake. May I love you supremely, and love all your people, because they belong to you. To follow the Lord fully, I must follow him at all times; not only when the sun shines, but when the tempest comes. This often puts faith and love to the severest trial, when the line of duty runs through rugged paths and hostile foes. Yet, if I draw back in the day of trouble, I cannot follow the Lord fully. I must not choose my path, but "run with patience the race which is set before me." I must still keep in the narrow way, however few there be who walk in it, or however unfashionable this path may be among the rich and learned of the earth; ever remembering that the promise of eternal life is made to those only who are found in the King’s highway of holiness. If through fear of man, or love of ease, I deviate into bye-paths and crooked ways, to avoid the difficulties of the road, I shall assuredly find them multiply upon me, without one sustaining promise; for, thus says the Lord, "if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." To follow the Lord fully, I must confess him with courage and constancy before an unbelieving world. A cowardly believer dishonors his heavenly King, and betrays the cause of truth. I say a cowardly believer; for such was Peter when left to himself. Caleb was "valiant for the truth." He believed in God, and dared to confess his faith and allegiance in the face of the whole congregation, when "they would stone him with stones," like another Stephen. Thus he experienced the blessedness of this divine declaration: "Those who honor me, I will honor."

But, through the deceitfulness of sin, I am in danger of falling into two extremes- vain-glory, and the fear of man. Our beloved Redeemer, however, has given me an exact direction how to avoid both these evils. "Take heed that you do not give your alms before men, to be seen by them: otherwise you have no reward of your Father who is in heaven." "Let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven." By observing the first precept, I shall avoid vain-glory, which is the evil forbidden; by observing the second, I shall maintain a holy courage in exhibiting the power of godliness to the glory of God, which is the duty enjoined. To follow the Lord fully, I must cleave to him in seasons of general defection. Here Caleb proved that he was a man of another spirit from those around him, by cleaving steadfastly to God. Thus did the apostles, when, on many forsaking Jesus, he said to them, "And will you also go away?" Peter replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? you have the words of eternal life." This entire surrender of the heart to God, is the work of the Spirit; for "a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven." Nothing short of this will bring us to glory. Nothing short of this can give true assurance, peace, and joy. I can never taste the real comforts of religion, until I follow the Lord fully. It is the lack of this undivided state of heart, which causes so much unsteadiness in the walk, and so much uncomfortableness in the experience of many professors; who, separating what God has joined together, maintain with warmth the high doctrines of grace, while they esteem of small importance the social and relative duties of the Gospel. Such people seem to forget, that "to be really holy, is to be relatively holy;" and that no truth can do us any personal good, but as it influences and purifies our heart and life. What can we think of those professors, who, while they appear saints abroad, are fiends at home? Can it be a matter of surprise, that they should feel no real satisfaction either in religion or in the world? They profess so much religion, as to render them the objects of the world’s derision; and yet, they possess too little of its power to enable them to taste the sweets of genuine piety. Hence, they grow morose in their temper, and uncharitable in their spirit. They are quick-sighted in discovering the mote in a brother’s eye, while utter strangers

to the beam in their own. They are spots and blemishes in the visible church, and verify the declaration of the prophet: "there is no peace, says my God, to the wicked." But how great is the happiness of the true follower of Jesus! His sins are blotted out. His soul is beautified with salvation. He has no double aims. All his intentions are simple and single; his one desire is to promote the glory of his God and Savior. His heart is the abode of peace. His house the dwelling-place of joy and gladness. He has his conflicts, and he has his comforts. He has his sorrow, and he has his support. God is his Father. Angels minister to him, and all things work together for his good. He may be hated of men, but he is beloved of God. He may have to pass through deep waters, but underneath are the everlasting arms. He may often groan, being burdened; but in heaven all his tears shall be wiped away. He shall there follow the Lamb wherever he goes. He shall there experience the eternal blessedness of that glorious promise: "He that overcomes, shall inherit all things: I will be his God, and he shall be my son."

Oh blessed Redeemer, fill my soul With love and grace divine;

Subdue the power of every sin, And make me wholly thine. In you, oh Christ, may I be found From every blemish free;

Though vile and worthless in myself, Yet all complete in thee.

Oh, send your Holy Spirit, Lord, In larger portions down, To witness with my waiting heart, And seal me for your own. May holiness my life adorn; May all my soul be love; May every wish be formed by you, And placed on things above.

Thus will a holy evidence Confirm that I am thine; And faith, by works made manifest, Shall prove the work divine.

03.27-27. ON THE TWO GREAT INSTRUMENTS IN THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS

27. ON THE TWO GREAT INSTRUMENTS IN THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS The written word of God is one of the sacred instruments in the hands of the eternal Spirit for the regeneration of sinners. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." The preaching of the Gospel is another instituted means for awakening dead souls, and leading them to Jesus Christ, through the accompanying power of the Holy Spirit; for "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

All men, without exception, are by nature dead in trespasses and sins. Multitudes, however, are quickened to a life of faith and holiness.

But, how are they quickened? how are they born again? As God is pleased to work by means, what instruments does he employ in this great work of bringing dead souls to spiritual life and vigor? Our blessed Lord himself has told us, when he said, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live." This voice is heard, when the Gospel is preached; and wonderful is the effect produced by it. That our Lord meant dead souls, is evident from his mentioning another hour, when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and come forth to judgment. Those preachers of the Gospel must therefore be very defective in their views, who will not exhort sinners, under the idea of its being useless to speak to the dead; making no difference between those who are naturally and those who are spiritually dead. The hour is indeed coming, when the former shall be aroused from their slumber by the voice of the archangel and the trump of God: but the hour now is, when the latter are awakened, through grace, by the sweet sound of the trumpet of the Gospel of peace. When Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy in the valley of dry bones, and was asked, "Son of man, can these bones live?" he modestly replied, "Oh Lord God, you know." Without reasoning upon the subject, or objecting to the work of prophesying to dry bones, he implicitly obeyed the divine command; and immediately there was a shaking, and the bones came together, and the sinews and flesh came upon them. Then he was again commanded to prophesy unto the wind, and the breath came into them, and they lived. So also when the apostles went forth at the command of Jesus, to preach the Word of life to thousands "dead in trespasses and sins," an agitation was felt wherever they came; and multitudes were turned unto the Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul writes thus to the Ephesian church: "In whom you also trusted, after that you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation;" also to the Thessalonians, "Our Gospel came not unto you in word only," (like Ezekiel’s first prophesying,) "but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance." A quickening influence accompanied the word; and souls, before dead in sins, were quickened and saved by almighty grace. "For this cause," says the apostle, "we thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God, which you heard of us, you received it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually works

also in you who believe."

James, in like manner, plainly declares, "of his own will he begat us with the word of truth." Peter, again, fully confirms this doctrine: "Being born not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible seed, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever." "The word of the Lord endures forever; and this is the word, which by the Gospel is preached unto you." Surely, then, may the Messenger of peace say to a ruined world, "Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." His duty is to preach the word. The promise of God is, "it shall not return unto me void." Our blessed Lord, in his beautiful parable of the sower, compares the word of God to seed sown on various grounds.

There is the hard-beaten pathway, which cannot receive the seed: it lies on the surface, and is devoured by the fowls of the air. There is the rocky ground, lightly covered with earth, which admits indeed the seed; but, affording from its shallowness no moisture, in seasons of heat and drought the plant withers away. There is the thorny ground, so covered with weeds and brambles, that the seed, if it spring up at all, can bring no fruit to perfection. There is the good ground, which being ploughed and broken up, is brought into a proper state to admit the scattered grain from the sower’s hand, and plentifully rewards his toil.

Wherever the Gospel is faithfully preached, there the good seed of the word is sown. The soil is the human heart. Careless hearers receive no good whatever from the most faithful preaching of the Gospel. Mere carnal excitements are of short duration, while the stony heart remains unchanged. Worldly riches, cares, and pleasures check the growth of the Gospel in the soul.

One soil, and only one, is good; that is, a heart prepared by divine grace; a heart deeply impressed with the command of God; "break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns, lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it;" a heart groaning under the burden of conscious guilt, and crying out, "what must I do to be saved?" Such a heart, like soil that has been ploughed and broken up, is prepared to receive the precious seed of Gospel grace; those glad tidings of great joy which proclaim pardon and peace through a crucified Redeemer.

According to the strength of faith, is the produce which this blessed soul yields, in some thirty, in some sixty, in some a hundred fold. Fruit is invariably produced by such a soil in a greater or less degree; it is "the ground which the Lord has blessed." Happy is he who abounds in the fruits of righteousness, for Jesus has declared, "herein is my father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be my disciples."

Now, if the word of God, or the great truths drawn from that word, be the instrument of our regeneration; if a spiritual change be thus effected by spiritual means; how invaluable are the two great blessings which a God of mercy has bestowed upon mankind, that is, "the Scriptures of the prophets," and "the preaching of Jesus Christ." Paul knew their value when he wrote, "Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him- to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen." Rom 16:25-27.

Thus the wisdom, as well as the grace of God, is manifested in appointing the Holy Scriptures and a preached Gospel, as the two grand instruments in the hands of the eternal Spirit, for the bringing

of all nations to the obedience of faith. If such be the great authority, and such the sure foundation, on which Bible and Missionary societies are established, what must we think of those who, professing to be guardians of the truth, labor to paralyze the exertions, or suppress the endeavors, of the zealous servants of Christ, whose only aim is to extend the knowledge of salvation among the perishing millions of mankind, by those very means which infinite love has ordained for our present and future happiness? From lack of due consideration, some people confound the regeneration of the soul with the rite of baptism, and suppose that every person baptized is invariably born again, during the celebration of that sacred ordinance. A man cannot be born twice in a spiritual, any more than in a natural sense. If an infant be truly regenerated in baptism, (and who dare limit the Holy One of Israel?) he will, no doubt, manifest the change by corresponding fruits, at least in childhood, before the influence of bad example has unhappily corrupted his renewed nature. But does not the painful experience of almost every family testify, that infants in general unfold the sinful powers of their souls, without manifesting one genuine fruit of the Holy Spirit? Lies, dissimulation, and perverseness in childhood - frivolity and licentiousness in youth - ambition and love of the world, in manhood - covetousness and peevishness, in old age: awfully prove the soul to be dead in sin, and an heir of hell. Should the Almighty transform a child after the holy image of its Savior, when presented to him in baptism, this would only evidence the sovereign mercy and grace of a compassionate God, but does not disprove the former statement of facts. Man, under the Christian economy, as under the Jewish economy, is not necessarily and invariably changed by the outward rite either of baptism or circumcision: for Paul expressly declares, "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God."

Thousands, however, are turned from darkness unto light, through the grace of God, accompanying the faithful preaching of the Gospel. Those who have been baptized, and have grown up in the visible Church in the commission of every crime, have been converted from the error of their way, and made the humble, holy followers of Jesus, through the word of his grace. The change produced by the Spirit, when thus bringing the truth to the heart, is radical and universal. They become, in every sense, new creatures. They are quite different from what they were before. Surely, then, all must confess, that the Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, when wielded by the Almighty Spirit, through the instrumentality of men appointed to preach to a world of sinners the unsearchable riches of Christ. So invaluable to fallen man is the Gospel of salvation, that the apostle exhorted the Thessalonians to pray for himself and his fellow-laborers, "that the word of the Lord might have free course, and be glorified." There is something peculiarly impressive in the object of the petition - "have free course." When the Gospel was first preached, it met with continual opposition. Yet, like some mighty river, checked in its progress by opposing rocks, it forced its way, and fertilized all the regions through which it bent its course. The Gospel still flows onwards, and shall continue to flow, until the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. This prayer is always needful, because the enmity of the human heart is in every age the same. In the first family, we find a Cain opposing the work of faith and love. The same spirit continues to manifest itself, wherever the worship of the true God is established. The Israelites misused their prophets who spoke to them the word of the Lord, "stoning some and killing sone." The pagan powers, as well as the Jewish rulers, set themselves against the Lord and against his anointed.

The holy apostles of our Lord were called to perpetual sufferings, while they spread abroad, through a preached Gospel, a Savior's dying love. Papal Rome has long carried on the work of slaughter among the sheep of Christ, checking, by fire, tortures, and anathemas, the progress of genuine Christianity, lest the pure, unadulterated word of God should have free course and be glorified. No wonder, then, that the thunders of the Vatican are heard to roar against the most blessed of all human institutions, the British and Foreign Bible Society. But the Gospel has other enemies, who labor to check its progress. Infidelity directs the shafts of ridicule against its holy mysteries. Socinianism, under the specious name of rational Christianity, seeks to rob the Gospel of its brightest jewel, "God manifest in the flesh." Indifference, worldly-mindedness, formality, and hypocrisy, while they render the mere nominal professors of Christianity barren as the sand, tend more to check the spread of the truth, than all the united attacks of its most hostile foes.

There is, however, a goodly company of faithful Christians who delight in the Gospel of Christ, and whose lives are devoted to advance its progress throughout the earth. These are the happy servants of the Lord, who pray in secret, and are willing to spend and be spent, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. They meet with a double hindrance; the one outward, from the enmity of the world; the other inward, from the sin which dwells in them. Yet they are enabled, through grace, to press forward, and to help forward the work of the Lord. Oh that my station may ever be among this blessed flock! Lord, make me one of the humble laborers in your vineyard. Give me a heart to receive the truth in the love of it, and to feel its power. Teach me to pray with holy fervor, "Your kingdom come;" and to rejoice in every opening prospect of that blessed period, when the earth shall be filled with your glory. Even now, the morning streaks begin to appear on the distant mountains: even now, the Sun of righteousness is arising with healing in his beams.

Oh what glorious times are dawning On a dark and ruined world!

It is the long-expected morning;

Satan from his seat is hurled.

Hallelujah - Amen.

Hark! the jubilee horn is sounding, Gladsome notes are echoed round;

Every heart, with joy resounding, Hails the Gospel's welcome sound.

Hallelujah - Amen As the light is still advancing, Backward shrinks the hellish foe;

Faith, through future ages glancing, Views another Eden glow.

Hallelujah - Amen.

Idols now - the spell discovered - Dashed as potters' vessels, fall;

Slaves, from Pagan chains recovered, Own Messiah Lord of all.

Hallelujah - Amen.

Hasten, Lord, the joyful season;

Claim the heathen as your own;

Break the pride of human reason;

Reign as Sovereign Lord alone.

Hallelujah - Amen.

03.28-28. THE TWO SOURCES

28. THE TWO SOURCES

While men of philosophic minds are busily employed in tracing effects to their causes, and others, of a more adventurous spirit, in traversing unknown regions, to trace some mighty river to its source; how few, considering the magnitude of the object, are employed in discovering the two most important of all sources - the source of misery, and the source of mercy. This discovery, so essential to our happiness, and, without an experimental knowledge of which, we must forever remain in a state of spiritual death, is but little regarded by the great bulk of mankind.

Human wisdom and philosophy have been laboring for ages to find out the origin of moral evil, and a remedy against it; but they have failed in the attempt. The world, by wisdom, knows not God, for darkness has covered the earth, and gross darkness the people.

We need only to pursue the fabled absurdities of heathen mythology; to witness the self-inflicted tortures of the Hindu devotee; to behold the superstitious penances imposed by the Church of Rome; yes, all the errors and evils which have abounded among Christians, Jews, Muhammadans, and Pagans, in every age; to be convinced that man can never, by any effort of his unassisted reason, discover the true source either of misery or of mercy. The Bible alone reveals them both. There I learn that the sin of Adam is the source of human misery. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." "In Adam all die." From this fountain issue ten thousand poisonous streams, which embitter life, fill the world with wretchedness, and carry unnumbered millions on their boisterous waves, until they are plunged into endless perdition.

There I learn, that God in Christ is the only source of mercy. "God, in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." "Beside me," says Jehovah, "there is no Savior." "There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." All good, in time and in eternity, flows from him who is goodness itself. When man had destroyed himself, and was justly reaping the fruit of his doings, it pleased Almighty God, of his own free mercy and grace, to reveal the wondrous plan of salvation, by declaring, "that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head." This declaration of grace was unasked for and unexpected; and therefore proves to us fallen creatures, that God is the only source of mercy; that God is love; for he so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. As God is the source of mercy, so the channel through which this grace descends, is all of mercy. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor. By this stupendous sacrifice, divine justice is satisfied, the holy law is magnified, the holiness of Jehovah is unsullied, and eternal truth remains inviolate; yes, by this amazing sacrifice all the divine perfections receive additional luster in the eyes of saints and angels. The whole volume of inspiration is occupied with tracing the various streams which flow from these sources of misery and of mercy, in opening the nature and effects of sin, and in revealing the nature and operations of infinite love. To understand these aright, through the teaching of the Spirit, is to

understand the Scriptures. To have an inward practical knowledge of them in the heart, is to be made wise unto salvation. The excellent Archbishop Leighton thus beautifully describes this stream of mercy, flowing from the Fountain of eternal love: "The spring of these waters of salvation, hid in the councils of God before time began, was opened immediately after the fall, and began to flow in a small but reviving brook. Increasing by degrees, and, from the very beginning, making every place it passed through fertile and pleasant, it soon became a large stream. At length the main current of the Gospel flowed in, and now it rolls on full of water, greatly enriching the earth, a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal; the streams whereof make glad the city of God, and shall do so, until this river empties itself into the ocean of eternity." It is truly interesting to trace the windings of this sacred stream, sometimes blessing one country and sometimes another, according to the purpose and grace of Him who directs its course with wise and unerring skill.

What cause for gratitude, that this river of the of life flows in every direction through this highly favored island. But oh! how delightful to taste its sweetness, and to feel, through faith, its purifying and refreshing virtues. "Blessed Lord! be pleased to open my understanding, that I may understand the Scriptures. Give me the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that I may know myself as a helpless sinner, and you as my only Savior. Let me never cavil at the deep mysteries of your holy word; but make me as a little child, humble, teachable, and submissive to your righteous will. May the knowledge of my ruined state, through original and actual transgression, fill me with shame and self-abhorrence. May the knowledge of your sovereign grace and purposes of mercy, through a crucified Redeemer, fill me with gratitude and adoring praise. Make me more and more acquainted with the deceitfulness of sin, that I may watch against its subtle workings; and make me more and more acquainted with you, my Almighty Savior, that I may daily rejoice in your salvation, be exalted in your righteousness, and live to your glory."

Oh that I felt my soul upborne On pure devotion’s wings;

Far above earth’s deceitful joys And sublunary things! Where you, blessed Savior, sit enthroned In everlasting light; The glory of the angelic host, The source of their delight.

There, in your blissful presence, reigns Immortal joy serene; No wintry storms are heard to roar, Nor desolation seen.

Around you flow unmixed delights, Like rivers deep and wide;

While, from the ocean of your love, Proceeds an endless tide. Can such a sinful creature, Lord, Partake this wondrous grace, To dwell with you in heavenly bliss, And view your glorious face?

Ah! then, let sin and earth usurp My wayward heart no more;

Oh be, through life, my all in all, My soul’s unbounded store.

03.29-29. THE TWO PILLARS

29. THE TWO PILLARS

"The religion of a sinner," as good Mr. Newton used to say, "stands upon two pillars: what Christ has done for us in the flesh; and what he does in us by his Spirit." Christ dying for us; and Christ living in us, is the very ground and pillar of the truth. Come, Oh my soul! retire from a busy, thoughtless world; collect your scattered powers; explore the sacred volume, and examine with delight these glorious pillars, which support the fabric of your hopes, and point to realms on high. Consider what Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, has done for you, when he became incarnate. And may the review of this stupendous mercy kindle such a flame of love, as never, never will expire! The mighty God graciously made himself of no reputation, but took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (Php 2:7-8.) And why did the ever-blessed Jesus thus humble himself? Oh! mystery of love! It was to save his people from their sins. (Mat 1:21.) It was that he, who knew no sin, might be made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him; (2Co 5:21.) It was to finish the transgression; to make an end of sins; to make reconciliation for iniquity; and to bring in everlasting righteousness; (Dan 9:24.)

Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; (1Co 15:3.) He has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God; (1Pe 3:18.) He bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes we are healed; (1Pe 2:24.) He was once offered to bear the sins of many; (Heb 9:28.) He is the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world; (John 1:29.)

Jesus, the beloved of the Father, was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil; (1Jn 3:8;) that we might live through him; (1Jn 4:9;) that he might be the propitiation for our sins; (1Jn 4:10;) that he might be the Savior of the world; (1Jn 4:14.) He gave himself for us, that he might deliver us from this present evil world; (Gal 1:4;) from the wrath to come; (1Th 1:10;) and that, through death, he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; (Heb 2:14.)

These are some of the glorious things which Jesus has done for us in the flesh; and, that none may despair of salvation on account of their multiplied transgressions, it is further declared in the everlasting Gospel, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; (1Ti 1:15;) that he came to seek and to save that which was lost; (Luk 19:10;) that he died for the ungodly; (Rom 5:6;) that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us; (Rom 5:8;) that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin; (1Jn 1:7) by which precious blood we are redeemed; (1Pe 1:19) and justified; (Rom. V2 9;) and by which we, who were sometimes far off, are made near; (Eph 2:13;) and obtain the forgiveness of sins; (Eph 1:7.)

Jesus is further declared in Scripture to be our peace, (Eph 2:14;) our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, (1Co 1:30;) the one Mediator between God and man, (1Ti 2:5;) our Advocate with the Father, (1Jn 2:1;) our compassionate High priest, (Heb 4:15;) our all-prevailing

intercessor, (Heb 7:25;) who gave himself a ransom for all, (1Ti 2:6;) and who tasted death for every man, (Heb 2:9.) Therefore, says the apostle, Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us; (1Co 5:7.) Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; (Gal 3:13.) And the Lord himself declared, that he came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill; (Mat 5:17.)

Oh! the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable is his wisdom, who can be just, and yet the justifier of him who believes in Jesus; (Rom 3:26.) A door of hope is now opened to perishing sinners; for, through Jesus, we have access by one Spirit unto the Father; (Eph 2:18.) He is the only Savior; (Acts 4:12;) the only foundation; (1Co 3:11;) the only way - for no man comes unto the Father but by him; (John 14:6.) This is the record, that God has given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son; (1Jn 5:11-12.) To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whoever believes in him shall receive remission of sins. For him has God, with his right hand, exalted to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance unto Israel and forgiveness of sins; (Acts 5:31.) And through him is preached the forgiveness of sins; and by him all who believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses; (Acts 13:38-39.)

Much, very much more is revealed in the Scriptures of truth, concerning the freeness, fullness, and all-sufficiency of this great salvation wrought out for us by the blood of Jesus, when he took upon him our nature, and stood in the place of sinners. But ah! my soul, enough is here written to raise your warmest notes of grateful adoration. May every succeeding meditation on the love of your Redeemer, drawn from the sacred fountain of revealed truth, add fresh fervor to your praise, and constrain you to live more to his glory, who loved you and gave himself for you. "Blessed Savior! increase my faith, while I consider what you are now doing in the hearts of your people, through the influence and agency of the Holy Spirit."

Man, through the fall, was not only excluded from the kingdom of heaven, but was very far gone, gone as far as possible, from original righteousness. The image of God was gone from him; and the image of the evil one was stamped upon him. He became a guilty and polluted creature, unable either to satisfy offended justice, or to perform one single act of acceptable obedience. By the fall, he lost all title to the heavenly inheritance, and all fitness for the mansions of celestial glory; and thus became an outcast - an heir of misery and death. To deliver fallen man from this state of condemnation, God sent his only begotten Son into the world, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. (Gal 4:6.) And in order to prepare and make us fit for the inheritance of the saints in light, God sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, enabling us to cry Abba, Father. (Gal 4:6.) At the creation, God said, "Let there be light, and there was light." So in the new creation, he shines into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory, in the face of Jesus Christ. The first work of the Holy Spirit is to enlighten the eyes of our understanding, (Eph 1:18,) to convince us of sin, (John 16:8,) to show us the spirituality of the law, (Rom 7:9,) and the purity of the divine nature, (1Pe 2:16,) to bring us into an intimate acquaintance of our own hearts, that by this knowledge of our own corruption (Jer 17:9) and helplessness, (2Co 3:5,) we may be deeply humbled, (Job 42:6,) and led to seek for deliverance from these evils by the aid of some power greater than our own. (Isa 41:10.) Being thus emptied of all self-righteous notions and proud conceptions of our own strength, and groaning under the guilt of sin, through a spiritual application of the divine law to our consciences, we are prepared for the joyful reception of the Gospel, where

pardon is freely offered to every coming sinner, and grace, mercy, and peace extended to the weary and heavy-laden soul.

Thus the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth. (John 16:13.) He testifies of Christ. (John 16:14.) He gives us an inward witness of his power and mercy, in the conversion of our souls. (Rom 8:16.) He makes us the trophies of his victory over sin and death, and, finally, the precious jewels in the Redeemer’s crown. The Spirit carries on the great work of salvation, which Jesus began in the days of his flesh, when he gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works; by renewing us in the spirit of our mind, (Eph 4:23;) by making us new creatures, (2Co 5:17;) by sanctifying us wholly in body, soul, and spirit, (1Th 5:23;) by consecrating us as temples of the Lord Almighty, (2Co 6:16,) and filling us with those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God. (Php 1:11.)

Being, through the operation of the Spirit, united by faith to Jesus Christ, as branches to the vine, (John 15:5,) and members to the head, (Eph 4:16,) we receive out of his fullness grace for grace. (John 1:16.) We can do all things through Christ, who strengthens us, (Php 4:13,) and are made more than conquerors, through him that has loved us, and given himself for us. (Rom 8:37.) We are enabled to crucify the flesh, (Gal 5:24,) to resist the devil, (Jas 4:7,) to renounce the world, to mortify the corrupt affections, (Col 3:5,) to walk in newness of life, (Rom 6:4,) and to glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are his; knowing that we are not our own, being bought with a price, (1Co 6:20,) even with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot; (1Pe 1:19.) Thus the love of Christ constrains us to obedience. (2Co 5:14.) The patience of God leads us to repentance. (2Pe 3:15.) And by all the tender mercies of God, we are sweetly influenced through the Spirit of grace, to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service. (Rom 12:1.) This part of that glorious work of redemption, which Christ performs in us by his Spirit, is so essential, that, without it, all our views of Gospel truths, however orthodox, and all our trust in his atonement, however consoling, are mere delusions; for "whom he justifies, them he also glorified." (Rom 8:30.) Sanctification is as essential to our enjoyment of heaven, as justification is to our admittance into it. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. (Heb 11:6.) Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. (Heb 12:14.) Happy, then, is the man whose hopes of heaven rest upon these two adamantine pillars; without either of which, the fabric cannot stand.

"Blessed Jesus! may my hope be fixed wholly upon you. Be my rock, my only confidence, my soul’s unbounded trust. While simply resting on your great atonement, may I daily feel this inward work of grace, that so your living care may perfect what your dying love began."

Great God of mercy, hail! To you I lift my voice; Your comforts never fail The faithful to rejoice.

What matchless wonders shine In rich, redeeming love; Where attributes divine In sweetest concord move.

Stern Justice smiles content, And lays his thunders by, Since Jesus underwent The death of Calvary. The trembling sinner now Can boldly plead with God: And mercy can bestow The pardon bought with blood. Your truth, which never fails, A blessed assurance gives; For Christ the Lord prevails, And high in glory lives.

He lives, to intercede; To send the Spirit down To help his people’s need, And all his mercies crown.

What depth of sovereign love, What breadth, before me lies! Its height is heaven above, Its length exceeds the skies. An ocean deep and wide, Where angel minds are lost; An ever-swelling tide Refreshing every coast.

How rich the prospect glows Beyond this vale of tears; Where crystal water flows, And verdure crowns the years.

Oh blessed Spirit! come, Conduct me, by your grace, To that eternal home Where I shall see your face.

You happy saints, rejoice, Who feel the Spirit’s power;

Lift up your grateful voice, And wait the joyful hour.

’Twill soon arrive, with smile; With healing on its wing; To bear us far from toils, To Christ our heavenly king.

03.30-30. ON THE TWO WAYS

30. ON THE TWO WAYS

"Unto this people you shall say, thus says the Lord: behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death." (Jer 21:8.) These important words were spoken to the Jews, when the king of Babylon was drawing near to besiege the city of Jerusalem. Those who went to the Chaldeans should find the way of life; while those who remained in the city should be in the way of death. But these expressive words may be addressed to all, in every age; and more especially to those who live in Gospel times. The commission given by our Lord to his apostles, just before his ascension into heaven, speaks the same language: "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature; he that believes, and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believes not, shall be damned." Thus, faith in Jesus is the way of life; rejection of him is the way of death. The Gospel, therefore, sets before us life and death. Hence, John says, "he that has the Son, has life; and he that has not the Son of God, has not life." In conformity with which truth, John the Baptist declared, when bearing witness to the divinity and Messiahship of Jesus: "he that believes on the Son, has everlasting life; and he that believes not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." Our Lord declares also respecting himself, in terms too plain to be misunderstood, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes unto the Father but by me."

All, then, who receive the Lord Jesus Christ; by a true and living faith, are in the way of life. They draw near to God by that new and living way which he has consecrated for us; and, persevering in this way, shall reach the heavenly Zion, and have right to enter by the gates into the city. This way of life our blessed Lord represents as difficult to fallen nature. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leads unto life, and few there be that find it." This difficulty arises not from the road itself, but from the nature of those who walk in it. The first entrance is truly difficult to the awakened sinner, owing to the abounding evils of his heart, all rising up against the strait, self-denying, flesh-crucifying gate by which he must enter. Grace, however enables him to overcome these workings of corruption, and to pass, by deep repentance and humble faith, through the strait gate. This is a blessed step towards eternal felicity. But when in the way of life, he finds it narrow; for his desires, being sadly mixed with evil, too often wander after those gratifications which lie beyond the limits of the way in which he is to walk. This grieves the Holy Spirit, wounds his conscience, and occasions that warfare with his corrupt inclinations which constitutes no small part of the fight of faith. He labors to keep his heart within the boundary of the narrow way, and to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. But still, when he would do good, evil is present with him. The law in his members wars against the law of his mind, and compels him to cry out, "Oh! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" Yet, this painful consciousness of evil is mercifully overruled for good, by driving him continually to the strong for strength, - to the Savior for salvation. By experience, he learns that his sufficiency is of God; that under all exigencies, the grace of Jesus is sufficient for him; that when he is weak, then he is strong. The Christian has to journey to the heavenly Canaan, through the wilderness of this world; therefore, like the Israelites of old, his soul is sometimes discouraged because of the difficulty of the way. The world frowns -

Satan assaults - providences darken - corruptions harass. All these things produce, for a season, much discouragement. Like Peter, he looks at the raging waves, instead of the omnipotent Savior; and then he begins to sink into despondency, and would be overwhelmed in the depths of mental affliction, did not the compassionate Jesus stretch out the hand of mercy, and uphold him by his mighty power.

He now learns the evil of unbelief and mistrust of a Savior's love. He is much in prayer for the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit, by whose sacred influence and direction he is enabled to look unto Jesus under every trial, and to walk before him in love and childlike obedience. Thus, to every humble pilgrim, strength is imparted; realizing views of the faithfulness of Emanuel are granted; and he is made to rise superior to every discouragement, and to walk, with increasing alacrity and joy, along the narrow way which leads unto life eternal.

How awful is the condition of those who, entering by the wide gate into the broad way, "enlarge their desires as hell;" until, having filled up the measure of their iniquity, they come, as vessels fitted for destruction by their own willful transgressions, into the place of everlasting torment.

What a painful consideration, that, respecting the narrow way, "few there be that find it;" while of the wide gate, our Lord has said, "many there be which go in there at." I am a dying creature, walking on the verge of an awful eternity. Heaven and hell lie before me; to one of these places I am, at the close of every day, advanced a day's journey. This day may bring me to my eternal abode of happiness or misery. The sleep which I take this night may be the sleep of death - and should it be so - where would my spirit, dislodged from earth, find itself? Oh! my soul, ask yourself, with all the solemnity which becomes so awful a question, where am I going? Soon I must be called into the presence of my Judge; but, what reception shall I meet with there? What award does conscience now make? Have I believed with the heart unto righteousness? Is the life which I now live, a life of faith in the Son of God? I find, from the word of God, that two roads lie through the wilderness of this world. The one, at its beginning, is pleasant to carnal nature, being strewed with forbidden pleasures, sensual delights, and materialistic gratifications; but, growing darker, and more crooked and thorny as it advances, it ends abruptly in eternal misery. The other, difficult at the entrance, requires many sacrifices, and much self-denial; but, gradually increasing in light and beauty, it terminates in the blissful regions of immortal glory. In which of these roads am I now walking?

"Oh my beloved Savior! you know my heart; you are acquainted with every thought, affection, and desire that rises within me. You know that I would follow you along the narrow way. Lead me in the paths of righteousness - draw me, and I will run after you. You are yourself the way to heavenly glory. When I find a cross laid before me, help me not to turn aside, but give me strength to take it up and follow after you. When the travelers in the broad road, with specious arguments and smiling faces, though with aching hearts, would labor to entice me from the path of life, let me not be deceived by their sophistry, or ensnared by their wiles. When the clouds of adversity darken my prospects, and the night of sorrow obscures my way, then, Oh! blessed Jesus, support my fainting steps, cheer my drooping soul with your celestial promises, and give me strength and courage equal to my day. When Satan tempts and harasses my soul; when inbred evils rise within me and rebel: then, gracious Savior, put forth your mighty arm in my defense, lest I fall, through manifold temptations, from the heavenly road. You alone are my strength. In you I am strong. Increase my

faith, that I may be daily united more closely to yourself. Wean me from the vanities of the world. Screen me from the enticements of sin. Guard me from the fiery darts of Satan. Thus may I walk, Oh! blessed Emanuel, in close communion with you, in the consolations of your Spirit, in the enjoyment of your love, in peace of conscience, and serenity of mind, until I arrive at the gates of death, where some appointed herald of glory may be stationed to conduct my disembodied spirit into your blissful presence, there to dwell with you, and gaze on your glories with rapture and delight forever!

Oh! could I feel the sweet transforming power, The holy influence of my heavenly Friend;

Then should I hail the last dissolving hour, When sin and sorrow would forever end. A pilgrim journeying through a land of woe, I daily need the Shepherd’s guardian care;

It is he alone my every grief can know, It is he alone can break the fatal snare.

Blessed Savior, look in pity on my soul, Enfold me in your arms of boundless love;

Permit a traveler on your strength to roll That burden, which you only can remove.

Oh give me faith, to reach the blissful place Where joyful hope shall to fruition grow; Where Zion’s pilgrims shall behold your face, And ever dwell where living waters flow!

03.31-31. MERCY REJOICING AGAINST JUDGMENT

31. MERCY REJOICING AGAINST JUDGMENT The promises of God, which in Christ are yes, and in him amen, shine with resplendent luster in the pages of eternal truth. Nothing but unbelief can prevent the soul from enjoying the sweetness, or experiencing the purifying efficacy, of those exceeding great and precious promises of grace and mercy. The manner in which many of them are introduced by the prophets, must have filled the ancient believers with astonishment. When the prophet, in the name of Jehovah, had been declaring to his rebellious people their multiplied transgressions, we might naturally expect to find the catalogue of their crimes dosed by a denunciation of deserved vengeance and final abandonment. But, how great is our surprise, to behold mercy rejoicing against judgment; to find, that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. The following striking passages will fully verify this assertion. In Isa 1:1-31, the Jews are called "a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters." The Almighty declares his aversion to "their solemn meeting;" that when they spread forth their hands, he would hide his face from them; when they made many prayers, he would not hear. And then, instead of threatened destruction, the prophet adds, "Wash, make yourself clean; put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well: seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." In Isa 30:1-33, the sinfulness of the Jews is proclaimed, in forsaking the Lord, and trusting in the shadows of Egypt. The awful consequences of this departure are declared; "One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall you flee, until you be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on a hill. And therefore" - mark the surprising termination - "and therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you; and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment, blessed are all those who wait for him."

Thus we behold the lovely character of our God. Vengeance is his strange work, while mercy is his delight. "As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Again, in the thirty-second chapter, the prophet declares: "Many days and years shall you be troubled, you careless women; upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briars; the palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left; the forts and towers shall be for dens forever, a joy of wild donkeys, a pasture for flocks." How long shall this desolation continue? Is the prospect of misery boundless? Ah, no! for thus only shall it be, "until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field; and the fruitful field be counted for a forest: then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field, and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever."

Mercy promised, forbids despair. Patience leads to repentance. How touchingly beautiful is the following display of judgment and mercy! "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in his ways, neither

were they obedient unto his law. Therefore he has poured upon him the fury of his anger and the strength of battle; and it has set him on fire round about, yet he knew it not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart. But now, thus says the Lord that created you, Oh Jacob, and he that formed you, Oh Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine. 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." (Isa 42:1-25; Isa 43:1-28.) The Almighty Creator, taking, as it were, a survey of his moral creatures, says of his chosen people, (Isa 43:1-28 :)

"I have made Israel for myself, and they will someday honor me before the whole world. But, my dear people, you refuse to ask for my help. You have grown tired of me! You have not brought me lambs for burnt offerings. You have not honored me with sacrifices, though I have not burdened and wearied you with my requests for grain offerings and incense. You have not brought me fragrant incense or pleased me with the fat from sacrifices. Instead, you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your faults." Isa 43:21-24. Surely now the deserved vengeance will be pronounced. Oh my soul! read with holy admiration these accents of mercy. "I - yes, I alone - am the one who blots out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again." Isa 43:25.

Must we not exclaim with David, "There is mercy with you, that you may be feared?" Must we not acknowledge the force of John’s declaration, "We love him, because he first loved us?" Must we not confess with Paul, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he has saved us?" How precious are the Scriptures of truth! They are full of the loving-kindness of the Lord, of the goodness of our God. The few specimens here given will serve to show the extraordinary manner in which the promises are often introduced. The prophet first declares the guilt of God’s professing people, in order to humble their hearts, and convince them of sin. He then proclaims the divine mercy on their true faith and repentance, as is strikingly shown in the first chapter of Isaiah. Well may we join the holy prophet, and say, "Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done this wondrous thing. Shout, O earth! Break forth into song, O mountains and forests and every tree! For the Lord has redeemed Jacob and is glorified in Israel." Isa 44:23.

Surely mercy rejoices against judgment, while it exclaims, in accents of redeeming love, "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom." (Job 33:24.) "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "Come, and let us return unto the Lord, for he has torn, and he will heal us; he has smitten, and he will bind us up. Truly, in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains; truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel. Behold, we come unto you, for you are the Lord our God."

"Bless the Lord, Oh my soul! and all that is within me bless his holy name; for he is a just God and a Savior; just, and yet the justifier of him that believes in Jesus." "God is love." "Blessed is the man that trusts in him." My soul, in grateful strains record The love of your redeeming Lord; To all around his praises tell, Who snatched you from the verge of hell.

Why should Jehovah condescend To call himself the sinner’s friend? Or why in terms so sweet proclaim His mercy in a Father’s name?

Blessed Savior, in your work I see Why God is merciful to me;

How he a rebel can receive;

How he can all my sins forgive.

’Tis faith in your atoning blood Averts of wrath the angry flood;

’Tis faith in righteousness divine Makes all your saving merits mine.

Descend, blessed Spirit, from above, In all the energy of love; To me your heavenly gifts impart, And seal salvation to my heart.

Then, in those sweet abodes of peace, Where grateful accents never cease, A living monument of grace, I’ll strive to sing your loudest praise.

03.32-32. ON INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL LIGHT

32. ON INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL LIGHT The whole world lies in wickedness, in a state of spiritual darkness. Out of this darkness, sinners are called by the Gospel; and when, through grace, they arise and depart out of this valley of the shadow of death, they are admitted into the marvelous light of the everlasting covenant, and become the children of light and of the day. Thus they who once were not a people, become the people of God; and they are called beloved, who were once not beloved. Those who were afar off are made near by the blood of Christ; and those who were strangers and foreigners, are made fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. Thus grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hence a most important and vital distinction must be made between mere intellectual light and the divine illumination of the Holy Spirit; a distinction which, like a powerful scythe, will cut down many a fair herb, many a beautiful flower, in the garden of nature. Natural light, improved by human instruction and study, is confined altogether to the head.

Spiritual light, derived from above, enlightens the understanding, while it renews and purifies the heart. History furnishes us with many instances of men endowed with all the riches of science, whose hearts were full of enmity against God; though some happy exceptions have, through grace, blessed and benefited the world.

Intellectual light may soften the character, and improve the morals; but experience testifies that nothing but the power of the Holy Spirit can newly create the soul. God works by his word. Hence the Scriptural exhortation to sinners is, "Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light;" and when divine power accompanies the command, the dead soul arises to spiritual life and action. To believers, the command is, "Arise, shine; for your light has come; the glory of the Lord has risen upon you:" and then new vigor and energy is felt in these seasons of refreshing, when Jesus arises on his people with healing in his wings. Spiritual light, thus descending from "the Sun of righteousness," is received through the medium of the Holy Scriptures, read with prayer: and through the instrumentality of the Gospel, faithfully preached, and heard in a spirit of faith. But through whatever channel it is received, it is always communicated by the Holy Spirit, and is known by its sanctifying effects on the mind, conscience, and heart.

All who do not possess this spiritual light are in a state of darkness, however bright and luminous their intellectual light may be. How frequently do we find men of science and deep research completely blinded, with respect to the divine science of living to God!

And, what is still more painful, how often do we meet with people, in this day of Gospel light, who have very clear views of the truth; who are able to speak, not only fluently upon the mysteries of grace, but even to delight and edify those who hear them: and yet, who are themselves destitute of true humility, genuine love to the Savior, and that spiritual-mindedness which is life and peace. Thus, however illuminated their understandings may be, they are, in the eye of a heart-searching

God, in a state of spiritual blindness.

Surely, then, the above distinction is most important. How many bright professors does it involve in darkness! how many shining candles does it put out! "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." "Though I understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have not charity, I am nothing." "The world, by wisdom, knows not God." "Oh! that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always." "Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my father which is in heaven." "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them." These, and many other passages which might be adduced, prove the immense difference between head knowledge and heart religion. The former is the pride of the hypocrite; the latter is the portion of the humble penitent.

Oh! my soul, examine well into your real state and condition before God. Do not be satisfied with how much you know, but see what effect the knowledge which you have attained has upon the heart and life! Are you acquainted with your fallen state by nature, and your added wretchedness through actual transgression? If this awful truth has been admitted into your understanding, so far it is well. But rest not here. This is merely intellectual light, if its rays extend no further. Search and see whether its piercing beams have reached your conscience, and, like forked lightning in the midst of Sinai’s thunder, struck you with conviction and dismay. Like Saul of Tarsus, has it struck you to the ground, and laid you low in the dust of deep humiliation?

Without this self-abasing experience of the total corruption of your nature, and this heart-humbling sense of your own extreme depravity, all your knowledge is merely human, "taught by the precept of men," and leaves you in a state of spiritual insensibility; the more dangerous, because the more liable to make you contented with the barren knowledge of your condition, and to substitute the shadow for the substance. With respect to all the other great and glorious doctrines of grace, the same important questions must be put to the heart; for faith, without works, is dead. The Christians, to whom Peter wrote, were called "out of darkness into marvelous light." Have I been thus called by sovereign grace, by almighty love, into a light which may be denominated "marvelous?" The mere reception of divine truth into the mind does not deserve this appellation. But, when the light of truth discovers to myself the hidden evils of my heart; when it shows me the deformity of sin, the vileness of my nature, and thus fills me with shame and self-abhorrence, it is, indeed, a "marvelous light." When the light of truth reveals to my soul the blessed Jesus in the essential dignity of his person; the suitableness of his glorious offices in the covenant of redemption; the greatness, freeness, and extent of his love in becoming man, and expiring on the cross, that he might save rebellious sinners; and, when this view of a loving Savior fills my soul with love, admiration, delight, and joy, it may well be called a "marvelous light." When the light of truth takes away the false glare of the world, and shows me its real worth; that all is vanity and vexation of spirit; when every thing is placed in its true light, and seen through a clear medium; and when this view sobers my expectations, and weans my affections from the world: then it is truly a "marvelous light." When the light of truth unveils the world of spirits, and opens to my wondering sight the unutterable glories of eternity; when I behold the blissful seats, the happy mansions, and the peaceful abodes of the redeemed; when I contemplate the fulness of their joy in being forever with their Lord, and like their Lord; and when this prospect, of the saints felicity

makes holiness more lovely, and my breathings for the Spirit of grace more ardent; when it makes me long and labor after an admittance, through faith in Jesus, into those bright abodes: then it is a "marvelous light"

Oh, glorious Sun of righteousness, Oh, light of the world! shine into my heart, that I may be light in the Lord; and walk as a child of light, shining, by reflection, to your praise and glory. Oh! preserve me from resting in outward forms, or barren speculations. Let nothing satisfy my soul but the possession of yourself, dwelling in my heart by faith, and filling me with peace and joy, blended with holy fear. Oh! grant that I may ever prefer you to everything in earth or heaven; for you, blessed Jesus, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, three persons in one Jehovah, are alone worthy of all love, adoration, and praise. Everlasting praises shall be given unto you by men and angels. Oh my soul, begin now the eternal anthem. However feeble the string, yet let it vibrate to the praise of your God. However weak your notes, yet let them ascend, in grateful adorations, to Him who has loved you, and washed you from your sins in his own blood. To Him be all honor, glory, and power, ascribed by every tongue, henceforth and forever. Amen and Amen."

Oh you, from whom all blessings spring, Accept the offering which I bring: A grateful tribute - heartfelt praise, For all the riches of your grace. Shall I enjoy your bounty, Lord, And not your boundless love record?

Oh! let me tell to all around What joys in Jesus’ name abound.

Jesus! your saving name contains Eternal glories - endless gains; The sinner, pardoned by your grace, Is made your chosen dwelling-place.

Bless the Lord, my soul, and sing Unceasing praises to your King, Whose love through all his counsels shine, Transcendent, matchless, and divine.

03.33-33. ON KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

33. ON KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

What can be more agreeable to the dictates of true wisdom, than that a creature should love and obey its Creator, when that creature is endued with faculties capable of loving and obeying the Author of its existence? The reverse of this constitutes the grossest impiety. No man of reflection, however carried away by his passions, or perverted in his views of divine revelation, can help allowing, that to love the supreme good, is the truest wisdom; and to obey the supreme governor, the highest duty.

Yet men, who pass for philosophers, who can unfold the beauties of nature, and even expatiate on the charms of virtue, not infrequently are the slaves of sensual pleasure, and enemies to the Gospel of Christ: thus proving, that human knowledge, however refined, can never reduce the rebel state of the affections to the love and fear of God; or convert the wild, tumultuous passions to spiritual order and peace.

Men may talk wisely about worldly matters; for our blessed Lord has declared, that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light;" but the wisest worldly character can never, by any natural effort of the understanding, think and act wisely about spiritual and eternal things.

Orthodox notions of the truth may indeed be imbibed, while the heart continues under the influence of evil; for we read of people "holding the truth in unrighteousness." But true wisdom consists not in the bare knowledge of what is good, but in reducing that knowledge to practice. Thus, I may know that it is my duty to love and obey God; but I am only wise, when I really do love and obey him.

If I had to cross a river in winter, which was frozen over, and were told, that, owing to a current in the middle of the stream, the ice would be too weak to bear my weight; this knowledge would only prove beneficial, in case I had wisdom enough to desist from the hazardous attempt. Should I, after this knowledge of the state of the ice, still persist in crossing the river, my conduct would be termed recklessness; and, if drowned, men would condemn my folly. This distinction runs through all the transactions of political, civil, and commercial life. The truth is too obvious to need further illustration; it must therefore be apparent, that "Knowledge and wisdom, far from being one, Have oftentimes no connection."

Job, with beautiful clearness, points out to us the nature of true wisdom. It is not the knowledge of natural objects; neither can created things impart it. "The depth says, It is not in me; and the sea says, It is not in me." "God understands the way thereof, and he knows the place thereof." "Unto man he said, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding."

There is in all men a natural desire after happiness. All are anxiously in quest of it. The inquiry is, "Who will show us any good?"

Man, having lost his way through the fall, is now stumbling upon the dark mountains of vanity, in search of that treasure, which he never can find in earthly things. He needs to be happy. To obtain this blessing, he is willing to forego many present enjoyments.

Some brave the billows of the ocean; others dare the cannon’s mouth; multitudes rise early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness, in order to accumulate those golden stores, which they fondly hope will purchase happiness. Riches perchance increase, but cares and vexatious anxieties grow up together with them. Happiness, like a flying phantom, still eludes their eager grasp, until, compelled at length to give up the chase, they exclaim with Solomon, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit."

Here we may ask, why is man thus restless after an imaginary good? why does every possession lose its value, and every enjoyment its zest, while that certain something, still desired, yet unpossessed, fastens on the mind, and renders all other earthly pleasures comparatively insipid? Is it not that man was originally created for nobler ends, than those which he is now pursuing? He resembles a noble temple in ruins. We see the fragments of ancient grandeur; but they are so mutilated and destroyed, that no feeling is excited but that of pain, while viewing the desolation. The Gospel, like a guardian angel, points out to man the way to happiness. Here he may know how to obtain felicity; and here, through grace, he may be made wise unto salvation. Is he anxious to be rich? The Gospel unfolds to his view the unsearchable riches; while the Spirit is freely offered, to enable him, like the wise merchantman in the parable, to sell all and buy this treasure. Is he thirsting after glory? The Gospel reveals to him that honor which comes from God only; and that glory which is prepared for the righteous in a future world. Is he desirous to obtain a name? The Gospel assures him that, if a believer, his name is written in heaven; for the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance. Is he panting after pleasure? The Gospel tells him of joy unspeakable; of a peace which passes understanding; of rivers of pleasure, which flow at God’s right hand for evermore.

Thus the Gospel of grace discovers to fallen man, not only the nature of true happiness, but the way to obtain it. It shows him the source of all misery - the fall of our first parents; and conducts him to the fountain of all blessedness - God manifest in the flesh.

Through faith in this gracious deliverer, the soul is saved from the guilt and power of sin. The world and all its vanities, like the retiring tide, recede from the heart; while the joys of God’s salvation flow in, and fill the soul with substantial and satisfying delights. The sinner made thus wise unto salvation by the eternal Spirit, finds the way of peace, and becomes at length - what worldlings can never be - truly happy.

Oh blessed Jesus! you in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, make me wise unto salvation. Preserve me from being satisfied with the false glare of human knowledge, which possesses only the name, but nothing of the qualities of wisdom.

Come, Oh divine Redeemer, with all your full salvation, into my longing heart. Without you, I cannot be happy; with you, I cannot be miserable. The world may smile; but if you frown, I must be wretched. The world may frown; but if you smile, I am blessed. Let me no longer seek my comforts from creatures, however fair and excellent. "All my fresh springs are in you." Oh, be my all in all, in adverse days and pleasant seasons. Oh! let your grace be in me as a well of water, springing up

into everlasting life. Then I shall be holy and happy. All will be serene within, the sweet presage of eternal rest!

Touched by the power of love divine, To you, my gracious Lord, I come; Your Spirit speaks - I hear the call:

Dear Savior, make my heart your home.

Too long, alas! a wandering sheep, Far from your blessed fold I strayed; But now my hopes on you are fixed; On you my grateful soul is staid.

You are my refuge and my rest, Sweet peace in you I now may find; The richest streams of heavenly grace, To soothe and calm my troubled mind.

Oh! may I never from you roam; Or feel a single wish to stray;

Since you have led my wandering feet To Christ, the true, the living way.

03.34-34. ON PASSIVE IMPRESSIONS AND ACTIVE HABITS

34. ON PASSIVE IMPRESSIONS AND ACTIVE HABITS

It is very important to distinguish rightly between passive impressions and active habits. We are continually liable to receive impressions of one kind or another - impressions of love and aversion; joy and grief; hope and fear. A pleasing representation of a person produces a favorable impression upon the mind, bordering upon love. How common to hear it said, "Your description makes me quite love him;" and yet this is often but a mere impression. The description and the feeling are soon lost in the succeeding objects which crowd upon the mind. Thus, many people are deeply impressed by awful representations of the day of judgment and the horrors of hell, who yet never break off from their sins, or turn truly to God.

We often hear of an impressive sermon; a sermon calculated deeply to affect the mind and heart of the congregation. And yet, how seldom do we hear of conversions, which are the consequences of abiding impressions, producing active habits. It is a truth, that impressions, if only passive, and forming no active habits in the soul, lose their power by repetition.

Hence many people, who were much affected when first they heard the Gospel, and, in consequence, made some considerable profession; yet, owing to this impression being simply passive, and not leading to the formation of gracious habits in the soul, have become, by degrees, so Gospel-hardened, that the sharpest rebuke, as well as the most affectionate entreaty, has lost its edge and influence on their minds: they hear as though they heard not. This view of the subject may lead us to distinguish between what is the operation of natural causes, and what is the operation of the Spirit of God.

Impressions, however strong at the time, if merely the result of lively description upon the imagination, will soon wear away, as the imagination loses the vivid coloring which fascinated it; just as the beautiful tints of an evening sky gradually disappear, as the sun retires beneath the horizon. But the impressions made on the soul by the Spirit of God, being of a nature peculiar to themselves, produce an immediate change (though apparently small at first) on the views and feelings of the person affected; which, deepening by repetition, form those active habits that give a new character to the whole man.

Hatred of sin; a holy fear of God; love to the Savior; joy in the Holy Spirit; delight in holiness; patience under suffering; and deadness to the world, are the result of those saving, quickening impressions, which are made on the heart by the almighty energy of the Divine Spirit. When this is the case, the same subjects which at first impressed, continue to impress. The habits of the soul become more active and holy. Faith waxes stronger; love abounds yet more and more; hope becomes more lively; and obedience in heart and life more regular and delightful. But the same subjects are heard with complete indifference after a time, when the impressions are passive, and occasioned by the simple effect of natural eloquence on the mind. This proves that no oratory, however fascinating; can truly reach the heart, or produce gracious habits in the soul if

unaccompanied by a divine power. The understanding may be convinced, the conscience may tremble; but the affections can never be firmly fixed upon God, through the power of human eloquence, or the arts of moral persuasion.

"A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you," is both the promise and work of almighty love. Popular ministers of the Gospel, who gather crowds of admiring auditors around them, may learn from this subject both humility and dependance. No eloquence of language, no force of expression, no pathetic appeals to the emotions, can produce one saving impression upon that adamant rock which lies within the human breast. He who commanded Moses to strike the rock, must graciously accompany the stroke with his supernatural power, or the waters of true contrition will never flow. The humble and comparatively weak instrument may from hence take encouragement; knowing that it is not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord, that Satan is dislodged from his stronghold, and the sinner saved. The weakest instrument becomes effective, in proportion to the skill and power of him who wields it. Hence, Infinite Wisdom is pleased, in general, to employ the weak things of the world, to confound the things that are mighty, that no flesh may glory in his presence.

Instances not infrequently occur, in the experience of faithful ministers, of sermons, which they had rejected for their supposed lack of good style and arrangement, but which they afterwards preached, for lack of time to write better, being made the blessed instruments of fastening conviction on the conscience, and leading the sinner to the cross of Christ; while many an elaborate discourse, on which they had bestowed hours of thought, and from which they expected great results, produced no other effect than that of drawing forth flattering commendation or critical remarks.

We are taught in the word of God not to despise the day of small things, nor to lean unto our own understanding, nor trust to an arm of flesh. Those holy precepts operated powerfully on the mind and practice of the great apostle to the gentiles. "I came not," said he to the Corinthians, "with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God; for I determined not to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ and him crucified. My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God!" And again, to the Thessalonians he writes, "As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God which tries our hearts; for neither at any time used we flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak of covetousness, God is witness." And while declaring that the Gospel came not unto them in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance, he rejoiced that they received the word, which they heard of him, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually works in those who believe.

Thus I am taught, that while the ambassadors of Christ are willing to spend and be spent in the blessed work of proclaiming the Gospel of peace; it is God alone who can give efficacy to the word of his grace, according to the purpose of his own will; for his counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure.

Let me then learn to cease from depending on man. May all my expectations be from God, whose power change the heart, and who can form a people unto himself; who shall show forth his praise. "Lord, preserve me from transient feelings and momentary impressions. Give me a deep and an

abiding conviction of the evil of sin; a growing love for the blessed Savior; and an increasing relish for holy duties. May I be rooted and grounded in love; established and built up in Christ: and thus enabled to hold the beginning of my confidence steadfast unto the end. The habitual frame of my heart, and the daily tenor of my life, will then prove the genuineness of my faith, and keep me, through the power of the indwelling Spirit, from those awful falls, which bring such misery on false professors, and cause so many to stumble, and forsake the right way of the Lord.

Give me, Oh Lord, that holy fear, That constant dread of sin; The brightest evidence of grace, Of light and love within.

Guide me along the narrow way, Conduct me by your grace To Jesus, my almighty friend, The sinner’s hiding-place.

Oh! for a seraph’s tongue to speak The praises of my God;

Lord, fit my heart to sing your praise In heaven, your blest abode.

Until then, I would in lisping notes Chant forth your matchless love;

Adore you in the church below Then join the church above.

03.35-35. ON UNION TO CHRIST

35. ON UNION TO CHRIST

How beautiful is our Savior’s parable of the vine! It illustrates in the most convincing manner this great truth, that "he who has the Son, has life; and he who has not the Son of God, has not life." We have in this parable a striking view of the true Church of Christ, which grows out of Jesus the true vine; hangs upon him; and derives all its nourishment and fruitfulness from him, just as the branches do from the parent stem.

Until the soul be united to Christ by faith, it cannot produce one fruit of the Spirit; any more than a branch can bear fruit of itself when severed from the vine. A soul out of Christ, and a branch cut off from the parent stein, must be alike barren and withered.

Hence it is evident, that before the great act of justification by faith, that spiritual ingrafting of the soul into Christ, there can be no holy fruits in the heart or life. By this gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, the sinner becomes a living branch in the true vine; a part of Christ’s mystical body, and immediately receives spiritual nourishment and strength; for "without me," says Christ, "you can do nothing." But we read of barren branches in him, which are taken away. These are nominal professors of the Gospel, which abound in the visible church. They become members of the outward church, by the ordinance of baptism; but being destitute of true faith, they yield none of the fruits of righteousness to the glory of God. These characters form the great bulk of the people in nations denominated Christian.

They may be called branches in Christ, considering the church in its present condition, as represented by fruitful and barren branches, by wheat and tares, by good and bad fishes, by wise and foolish virgins, in the several parables of our blessed Lord. These barren branches easily fall off in time of temptation. Being only attached to Christ by the slender thread of an outward profession, they are soon blown away by the stormy winds of persecution. Like Demas, they forsake Christ, either through the fear of man, or the love of this present evil world. But what says our blessed Lord? "Every branch in me, that bears not fruit, he takes away." The Almighty Husbandman at length cuts them off in his providence, by the hand of death. But, ah! where are they cast? "Into the fire of hell, to be burned!"

Oh! how should this awaken all my fears and apprehensions, lest I should be found at the last to have been only a barren branch: full indeed of the leaves of profession, and the worthless fruit of head-knowledge and party zeal; but destitute of those heavenly graces of humility, love, and purity, which prove the reality of a union to Jesus.

"Every branch in me," said our divine Savior, "that bears fruit, he purges it, that it may bear more fruit." Thus, the pruning-knife of affliction is applied to the true branches, to cut off all their exuberances, and to render them more abundant in the fruits of holiness.

Hence it is worthy of remark, that the very trials which take away the unfruitful branches, do, by a skillful operation of spiritual husbandry, promote the fertility of those branches which derive their nourishment by a vital union to the parent stem. This blessedness is closely connected with perseverance. "Abide in me, and I in you." There must be a constant abiding in Christ, until the hour of death; otherwise there can be no perpetuity of fruitfulness. Let a branch be in a vine for a hundred years, and every year be loaded with fruit, yet if it be severed at the last, it must wither and die. So our union to Christ must be perpetual. Being once in him, we must abide in him, or all our fruitfulness will be at an end. "He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit; for without me, (or severed from me,) you can do nothing."

How careful, then, I ought to be, lest I am deceiving myself with mere temporary feelings and impressions. Nothing will abide but true faith. Nothing but true grace can endure unto the end. What sweet privileges are connected with this union and this fruitfulness.

"Herein is my father glorified, that you bear much fruit." Thus the more fruit we bear, the more God is glorified. What wonderful condescension!

"So shall you be my disciples." This fruitfulness proves us to be the genuine disciples of the Lord Jesus.

"You shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." Our prayers will then be graciously heard and answered.

"As the father has loved me, so have I loved you." Thus, if fruitful believers, we shall through eternity enjoy the Savior’s constant love.

These beautiful sayings of Jesus are closed by an exhortation to perseverance; "Continue you in my love."

Thus Christ is all and in all to his believing people. He is the true vine, from which proceeds all the grace, which, flowing through the branches, produces fertility and beauty. He is also the sun of righteousness, whose bright and nourishing beams cause the trees of righteousness to abound in fruitfulness.

Every image is thus used by the divine Spirit, when guiding the pen of inspiration, to set forth the all-sufficiency both of the power and grace of Jesus. As there is no spiritual life separate from him, so without him there is no blessedness in time or eternity. In him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." In him "dwells the fulness of the godhead bodily." Are any chosen unto salvation? "They are chosen in him before the foundation of the world, that they, should be holy and without blame before Him in love." Are any adopted into the family of God? It is "by Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will." Do any receive pardon? It is "through his blood, according to the riches of his grace."

How great, then, is the love of God, in thus giving his well-beloved Son to die for us: that through his precious death upon the cross, he might save us from sin and hell.

But, Oh my soul, how great soever the love of God to perishing sinners may be - how rich soever the promises of mercy - how glorious soever the inheritance of the saints; what will all this avail, if you are destitute of that faith, without which it is impossible to please God; and of that holiness,

without which no man shall see the Lord? I would ask myself, with all seriousness, as in the presence of that God, who searches the heart and tries the thoughts; have I received the Lord Jesus into my heart by a humble loving faith? His name is as ointment poured forth, healing the wounded conscience, and shedding a rich fragrance through the soul. But have I felt the deadly wound which sin has made? Have I with joy received the atonement, and thus obtained peace through believing? I may have a knowledge of the way of salvation, but have I been brought into this way by the Spirit of truth, and am I walking therein by faith? Do I now experience the power of the cross, in the crucifixion of my lusts, and the mortification of every sinful desire? Do I know Christ in the rower of his resurrection; being raised from a death in sin, to a life of righteousness?

"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Am I daily led by the Spirit, through the light of the revealed word, into a saving acquaintance with Jesus Christ, as my wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption?

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." Have I experienced a spiritual change in my understanding, will, and affections? Are my views, purposes, motives, desires, inclinations, and pursuits quite different from what they once were? Can it be said, in the strong language of Scripture, that "I am born again?" Is the change visible to others? Is it felt by myself?

Am I devoted to the service of God, ardent in my love to the Savior, and anxious for the happiness of all around me? Are my religious views and feelings thus influential, pervading, like the hidden sap, all the branches of personal and relative duties? The doctrines of the Gospel are practical in their tendency. They at once humble and elevate. Like rays emanating from the sun, they enlighten, warm, cheer, and fructify. Shine, then, blessed Savior, with your bright beams of grace into my heart. Preserve me from everything that is false and insincere. Let your work be deep and abiding. Nothing can uphold me but your sustaining grace. Without you, I am like the chaff before the wind; like a withered branch, ready to be carried away by every blast. Abide in me, blessed Lord, that I may abide in you. Unite me to yourself, and never leave me nor forsake me; then shall I praise you with unceasing hallelujahs, when my happy spirit shall be transplanted to the Paradise above.

Jesus, true and living vine, Unite my soul to thee;

Oh! let my barren, withered heart, A fruitful scion be.

Too long, alas! my guilty soul A fruitless branch has been;

Fit fuel for the eternal fire, The slave of lust and sin.

Oh! may I now, through sovereign grace, This blessed union know, From where all peace and pardon too, And endless glories grow.

Grafted by faith, my joyful heart Shall be forever thine;

While clustering fruits of heavenly growth Will prove the work divine.

Come, Holy Spirit, you Lord of life, Make all these blessings mine;

Make me a fruitful living branch In Christ, the living vine.

03.36-36. ON THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

36. ON THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER The beatitudes with which our Lord begins his sermon on the mount most strikingly show what is the inward state and outward conduct of true believers, as well as the general reception which such characters meet with from the world. Their inward state is described by poverty of spirit, mourning for sin, hungering and thirsting after righteousness and purity of heart. Their outward conduct, by meekness, mercifulness, and peaceableness. Their general reception from an unbelieving world is declared to be persecution, reviling, and slander. The promises made to the various branches of the Christian character are most encouraging. The poor in spirit, who are humble on account of sin, who are emptied of all self-righteousness, and who feel their constant need of Jesus, are made the happy partakers of every Gospel blessing. Receiving Christ into their hearts by faith, they daily grow in grace, and in a fitness for the heavenly inheritance. The Savior comforts these mourners in Zion, binds up their broken hearts, and gives them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. While hungering and thirsting after righteousness, the good Shepherd leads them into green pastures, and nourishes their souls unto eternal life. They receive the desire of their hearts, even the presence and image of God in their souls. Being justified by faith, they are accepted in the beloved; and, being made the temples of the Holy Spirit, they become vessels unto honor; sanctified for the master’s use.

Sincerity and uprightness mark their character. Purity of intention, a hatred of sin, and a love of holiness, flowing from that faith which purifies the heart, prepare them for present manifestations of God in Christ, as revealed in the Gospel, and for brighter visions of his glory in the world to come. With these internal principles and affections, they show forth, by their daily walk and conversation, the praises of him who has called them out of darkness into marvelous light. They are meek in their words and actions. The law of kindness dwells upon their tongue. They are patient; bearing with one another in love. Thus they avoid many troubles which those endure whose spirits are violent, and whose actions are unkind.

They glide along the stream of life upon the still waters of meekness and gentleness, while the contentious and petulant are ever struggling with the rough surges of their own creating. Being firm in purpose, as well as mild in spirit, they cannot always escape the storm; but while they "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints," when duty calls them so to do, they labor to "possess their souls in patience," and strive "in meekness to instruct those who oppose themselves." When they are reviled, they revile not again; when they suffer, they threaten not: but, committing themselves unto him who judges righteously, and who will one day vindicate the cause of his people, they are kept "in perfect peace," and, in the truest sense of the promise, "inherit the earth."

They are merciful, when opportunities offer for the exercise of mercy, whether it be in acts of forgiveness or benevolence, Like their heavenly Father, they delight in mercy. Having been much forgiven, they are ready to forgive much; considering that the greatest possible injury done to

themselves, when compared with their offenses against God, is but like the hundred pence to the ten thousand talents. They pray for grace to resemble their beneficent Creator, who makes his sun to arise on the evil and on the good, and who causes his rain to descend on the just and on the unjust.

They love to do good unto all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith; remembering that Gospel precept, "Do not be overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." They love peace; and study, as far as is consistent with the truth of the Gospel and a good conscience, to live peaceably with all men. They delight in pouring the balm of consolation into the troubled breast, and in smoothing the rigors of angry feeling, wherever their influence extends.

These are the lineaments of that beautiful character which is formed by the Holy Spirit, and called by our blessed Savior "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world;" preserving it from universal corruption and total darkness. This character is the great preparative for the enjoyment of heavenly glory; and yet, though beloved of God, this is the character which is despised, persecuted, reviled, and slandered by an unbelieving world. No real Christian, bearing this exalted character, need droop or despond; for he is assured by eternal truth itself that great shall be his reward in heaven. But is this the character of all the Lord’s people, without exception? It is. All do not, indeed, attain to the same degree of holy conformity to Jesus, but all must and do bear this divine image; since it is expressly said, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." All true believers possess these inward principles of holiness - all have these outward marks of true discipleship - all have to encounter the world’s derision; though, like the good seed in the parable, there may be in some thirty, in some sixty, and in some a hundred fold.

Let none of the children of God, then, startle at the sight of the cross; for "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Rather let them rejoice, since it is recorded by the pen of inspiration, "if we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him."

Happy, indeed, are they who most resemble the Savior, and suffer the most cheerfully for his sake. I learn from these beatitudes, that all the graces which our divine Redeemer pronounces blessed, meet, like the radii of a circle, in one common center - the heart of the true believer. These graces do not form so many distinct characters, but unitedly they form one character - the child of God. Some of God’s children have shone brighter in one grace, and some in another; but each possesses the whole.

Abraham is exhibited to us as a pattern for faith; Job, for patience; Joseph, for purity; Moses, for meekness; Samuel, for integrity; David, for contrition and spiritual-mindedness; Daniel, for devotion; Peter, for zeal; John, for tenderness; Paul, for contempt of the world, and delight in the cross: yet all were filled with love; all were clothed with humility; for humility and love are the characteristic features of genuine excellence. The angels are humble; as standing before the throne of God, they veil their faces with their wings. The glorified saints are humble; when high in bliss, they cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus, exclaiming, "Worthy is the Lamb."

But, Oh amazing thought! even the great Jehovah, who humbles himself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth, condescended to empty himself of all but love, and, in infinite compassion, to take upon him the nature of man, and to bleed upon the accursed tree! And for

whom did he die? For his rebellious creatures, whom he could in a moment have annihilated, and whose place he could have supplied by myriads of holy beings. This almighty Savior, who inhabits eternity, even now condescends to dwell in the humble and contrite heart, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. Oh for faith to contemplate this great sight! Oh for a heart to feel the power of this grace, and to taste the sweetness of this redeeming love! Lord! come with all your full salvation to my soul, that all my powers may be wholly consecrated unto you.

Here I behold humility exhibited in its divinest form. Shall we, then, boast of our humility, and extol the lowly bendings of a sinful worm? Ah! how little do our most abased feelings deserve the name of humility, when contrasted with the inconceivable abasement of the Eternal Word, when he was made flesh and dwelt among us!

Look and gaze, Oh my soul, on your condescending Savior, until you are laid prostrate in the dust of humiliation at the foot of the cross; and there drink deep into that spirit which will assimilate you to the Friend of sinners, and prepare you for the bliss of heaven. Oh how should I loathe myself! He, so humble; and I, so proud: He, so pure; and I, so polluted! The thirsty traveler sees a cistern at a distance, and labors hard to reach it; but when he comes with longing desire to quench his thirst, he finds it broken. Thus earth disappoints all who trust in its supplies. It is a broken cistern. I look for its refreshing streams, but find none. Where, then, must I turn? To the Fountain of living waters. Jesus is this fountain of life and glory. To him I would now hasten. In him I shall ever find a never-failing stream of grace and comfort. He can delight and refresh my soul; and, coming unto him by faith, I shall never be disappointed. From these considerations I learn, that to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness is the highest wisdom of man; for, while so doing, all other needful things shall be added unto me. I also learn, that Jesus has made an inseparable connection between the precepts and promises of the Gospel, between the character and the privileges of his people.

If I am renewed in the spirit of my mind, and thus made humble, contrite, meek, spiritually-minded, pure, and peaceable, I shall enjoy his presence and love while journeying through this valley of tears, and his everlasting glory in the world above.

Then why should the souls of the faithful be "discouraged because of the hardness of the way," seeing that the way of the cross is the way to the crown? The world may light up its fires; friends may betray us to death; Satan may roar like a lion; the flesh may cry out for indulgence, and tempt us to yield to our foes: yet, if Jesus be the God of our hearts, he will raise us above every temptation; he will strengthen us for every assault; and, at length, make us more than conquerors, to the praise and glory of his grace.

Oh! love without compare, Oh! love beyond degree; That he, whom cherubim adore, Should bleed and die for me! For me, a wretch so vile, For me, a rebel worm, His love its sacred power displayed, In its divinest form.

It is Jesus died to save, It is Jesus lives to bless; On high he dwells - the sinner’s friend, The Lord, our righteousness.

Then, Oh my soul, rejoice, Extol your Savior’s name;

Make mention of his dying love, And celebrate his fame.

He claims your heart, your love;

He claims you for his own;

Oh cast yourself in willing bonds Before his heavenly throne.

03.37-37. ON CHRISTIAN MOTIVES

37. ON CHRISTIAN MOTIVES

Christianity has justly been called a religion of motives; and yet, alas! how little are those sublime motives to action, which the Gospel inspires, considered by the great mass of professing Christians!

Men carry out their worldly concerns under the powerful influence of some constraining motive, which impels them forward with unabating ardor. But in the affairs of eternity, they commonly act at random, without any fixed purpose whatever. Education, or custom, gives the coloring to their religion; and if they are asked to give a reason of the hope that is in them, a total absence of motive or purpose will soon be discovered.

They think as the world thinks - and they act as the world acts. Treading in the steps of their forefathers, they retain the impression of early habits. And finding little leisure amid the accumulating engagements of life, to investigate the claims of eternity, they are satisfied with the observance of outward ordinances, and a few crude notions of the Christian religion.

They pity those who are so weak as to prefer future to present enjoyments; and can scarcely conceive any rational motive sufficiently powerful to induce men to pass by the flattering prospects of the world, for the unseen possessions of futurity. Hence they condemn such people as visionary and enthusiastic; while they applaud the wisdom of those who endeavor to make sure of present profit and advantage. To secure the main prospect, is their standard of wisdom; their highest object of pursuit.

This, we may fear, is but too faithful a picture of thousands who call themselves Christians; but who possess nothing beyond the name. Esteeming themselves wise, they become fools; and will, except they repent, eternally bewail their folly.

It is of immense importance to examine well into the motives of our actions, for "whatever is not of faith, is sin."

Saul of Tarsus in his blind zeal conceived that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth: but when his understanding was enlightened, he saw himself to have been a persecutor, a blasphemer, and injurious. When Abraham went to offer up his beloved Isaac, it was an eminent instance of faith. He acted on this trying occasion from a good motive; in simple compliance with a divine command, though an apparent frustration of a divine promise. Yet he believed God, and cheerfully obeyed his will. This childlike reliance on the truth and faithfulness of Jehovah, was honored by a rich promise of abundant blessings. But when the Israelites, on the contrary, caused their children to pass through the fire to Moloch, it was an awful instance of human depravity. Their conduct sprang from a bad motive, being in direct violation of a divine prohibition, and was therefore quickly followed by heavy judgments upon the nation. The command to Abraham was designed by the Almighty to be a trial of his faith; a test of his

obedience; a proof of his love. But more especially to he a signal representation of his own unspeakable love, in not withholding his own - his well-beloved Son from us, when he gave him to be a sacrifice for sin, on one of those very mountains of Moriah.

Now, can anyone for a moment suppose that these two actions shall receive the same recompense of reward? We shudder while we contemplate the unnatural infatuation of the idolatrous Israelites. We feel humbled while we meditate on the astonishing exercise of faith, obedience, and self-denial which was exhibited in the case of Abraham. Their motives were as widely distant as the east is from the west; as distant as holy faith is from rebellions unbelief.

Some actions are criminal in their very nature, while others may be good or bad according to the motive from where they spring. The hypocrites, whom Jesus condemns in his sermon on the mount, gave alms, and prayed, and fasted. But when they distributed their charities, they sounded a trumpet before them; when they prayed, they stood in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets; when they fasted, they disfigured their faces; thus making their religious performance as public as possible. And why did they take such pains to be seen? Our Lord tells us: "that they might have glory from men." They obtained that which was the governing motive of their actions, and consequently they had their reward. Our blessed Savior exhorts his people to the performance of the same duties, but from a far different motive. Secrecy in giving - retirement in devotion - and unostentatiousness in fasting, are opposed to 'pharisaical display'. Duties, thus performed from a principle of faith and love, and directed simply to the glory of God, will be approved of by Him who sees in secret, and who will graciously reward them openly.

We hear of a man extolled for his charity and benevolence to the poor. His name appears in the list of benefactors to almost every laudable institution; but if to be extolled is the secret motive of his actions, this man has his reward.

Another is very regular in his attendance on public ordinances. His seat is never vacant. He talks much about doctrines, and seeks the society of religious people. Hence he obtains the appellation of pious. If to be so esteemed is the moving spring of his conduct, truly he has his reward.

All this is equitable. Those who act from no higher motive than human approbation, on receiving such commendation, have their coveted reward.

They may speak with the tongues of men and of angels; they may understand all mysteries and all knowledge; they may bestow all their goods to feed the poor; - yes, in a season of fiery persecution they may even give their bodies to be burned: and yet, if faith working by love is not their principle of action, all these splendid gifts and costly sacrifices will profit them nothing. In the day of judgment, they will be found no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal; while the widow's mite, and the cup of cold water given to the least of the brethren of Jesus, out of love to his name, shall in no way lose its reward.

How important then is self-examination! How necessary to ascertain the motives of our actions, lest self-seeking, vain glory, and the desire of human applause, should render them odious in the sight of God.

Oh! that I may never forget this Gospel truth, that no work is accounted good in the judgment of heaven, but what springs from faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, until I am united to Christ by faith,

and justified through his righteousness, all my boasted moral virtues, are nothing but "splendid sins." Brought to this touchstone, how many actions, highly esteemed and far-famed among men, will be rejected as "reprobate silver" by that holy Being who searches the heart and tries the reins. For lack of due consideration in time, many thousands, it is to be feared, will reap the fruit of their criminal indifference through an awful eternity. From this view of the subject, I learn that where there is a desire to serve God, it is accepted according to that a man has, and not according to that he has not. The holy purpose will be recognized, even when circumstances prevent the performance. Nathan, when informed of David’s purpose to build a house for the God of Israel, said, "Go and do all that is in your heart; for the Lord is with you."

David, though not permitted to erect the temple, received the most gracious assurance of the divine approbation: which Solomon took special notice of, in his beautiful prayer at its dedication: "The Lord said to David my father, forasmuch as it was in your heart to build an house for my name; you did well in that it was in your heart nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son which shall come forth out of your loins, he shall build the house for my name."

Let no one then despise the day of small things, since the inward ardent desire to promote the cause of Christ in the earth, may be accomplished through the "good hand of our God upon us," by our children, and our children’s children.

Blessed Lord! be pleased to give me the precious grace of simplicity and godly sincerity. May all my desires be to you, and to the glory of your name. Reign in my heart the Lord of every motion there. Purify my motives. Elevate my purposes. Preserve me from seeking the applause of men Guard me from the poisonous influence of flattery and self-love. Clothe me with humility; and whatever I do in word or deed, may I do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Assist your servant, Lord, to pray;

Illuminate my mind;

Oh! guide me in that heavenly way, Where sinners comfort find. In mercy, Lord, your ear incline To every fervent prayer;

Let rays of love, and grace divine, My soul for heaven prepare.

Reveal your great salvation, Lord, Dispel each rising doubt;

Oh! speak that soul-enlivening word, "Your sins are blotted out."

Then shall I raise the cheerful song. To my redeeming God; And join the raptured choral throng, In Zion’s blest abode.

03.38-38. ON CHRISTIAN CONVERSATION

38. ON CHRISTIAN CONVERSATION The spirit in which Christian speech should be conducted, is delineated with peculiar accuracy in the word of God. How delightful would be the society of professing Christians, if the humble, loving, gracious, improving spirit, so much enforced in the holy Scriptures, filled every circle. How needful, then, at all times is the prayer of David: "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips." Psa 141:3 The true believer is a new creature. He is surrounded by a holy atmosphere, in which the trifler cannot live. As his motives are elevated, so his conversation is pure. The giddy and the vain avoid his society, not because he is repulsive in manner, but because his views and feelings are so spiritual and heavenly. He is ridiculed as "the saint," and taxed with pride and self-conceit. But his heart is known unto God, with whom he holds sweet converse in the midst of an ungodly world. Such is the Christian. His character is little understood by the thoughtless multitude, whose time is occupied and whose affections are absorbed in the trifles of the day. But before long he shall shine, as the sun, in the kingdom of his Father. The following suggestions may tend to improve our fellowship with each other.

We ought never to speak unfavorably, not even by insinuation, of absent people, except when duty positively requires it; and even then, there should be a marked and sincere regret that the occasion calls for such an exposure of character.

We must guard against attributing wrong motives to the actions of others, even when appearances might favor such a conclusion; remembering that God alone knows the heart; and who are we, that we should judge our brother?

We should avoid every thing that borders upon flattering adulation, especially towards those who are present; knowing how pernicious praise is to a fallen creature, and how few are able to withstand its influence. This does not exclude a proper commendation, or a suitable encouragement, when dictated by Christian simplicity and prudence.

We must not indulge in those exaggerations, those strong hyperboles, those embellished representations, which seem to give force to conversation, but which actually destroy its delicacy and beauty. This mode of speaking, by stretching out too far, touches upon the confines of falsehood. Truth appears most beautiful in its own native simplicity.

Christian conversation is marked by love, humility, and purity. These are the peculiar features by which it is known. Although so attractive from its nature and excellence, yet how few know how to appreciate or relish its charms.

Love leads us to converse with delight on all subjects connected with the glory of God and the good of man. Humility draws a veil over her own graces, and delicately discovers the excellencies of others. It frankly confesses our own faults, and carefully conceals the failings of our brethren. Purity, like the refreshing rose, sheds a fragrance peculiarly its own over our whole conversation; and, like that lovely flower, leaves its reviving scent when we are gone.

How different from the conversation of the wicked, whose throat is compared in Scripture to an open sepulcher, loathsome and offensive, disgusting and pestilential.

We naturally love to discourse on subjects which lie nearest our heart. No wonder, then, if real Christians, who feel the love of Christ constraining them, delight to talk together on the most glorious of all subjects - the love of God in the gift of his Son. May not believers now say with the disciples of old, "Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way?"

But, alas! how little is there of this spiritual discourse among us! The men of the world, when they meet together; can enter with enthusiastic ardor on their various objects of pursuit, whether political, commercial, or philosophical. The warrior recounts his battles, the sportsman his pleasures, the merchant his adventures, the politician his schemes, the philosopher his discovery; the worldling his excesses, with a feeling and animation which demonstrate at once that their soul is engaged in the subject. And shall Christians be less alive, when they meet together for the avowed purpose of strengthening each other's hearts, and kindling each other's devotion? If our faith and love were stronger, our communion would be more profitable and delightful. In this our day of outward prosperity and religious liberty, there is a great danger of imbibing a worldly spirit, and of allowing our fellowship to degenerate into religious trifling and religious gossiping. The conversation of too many, although it may be technically called religious, resembles the cloud, and the well without water, so strongly reprobated by Jude. When such people separate from each other, they feel no real good derived to their souls. And why? Because their conversation was destitute of that "unction from the Holy One," which is life and peace.

Jesus and his salvation - heart experience and genuine godliness, as felt and exhibited in the soul and conduct of the believer - were not the subject matter of discourse. The head, and not the heart, was called into exercise. Some religious publication - some popular preacher - some recent occurrence - some commonplace remarks filled up the hour; and no wonder if the mind, at parting, retained its usual flatness and leanness, after such an insubstantial meal.

If it be asked, must our conversation be altogether confined to evangelical subjects? we answer, our conversation must always be in the spirit of the Gospel. If our hearts be right, we shall always have one end in view - the glory of God and the edification of our neighbor. With this aim constantly before us, we shall not wander far from true Christian discourse. The danger arises from entering on religious conversation without religious motives and religious affections; from having a desire to talk, merely for the sake of talking. The apostolic injunction, "whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus," if duly obeyed, would cut off every idle and unprofitable word.

How pertinent is Malachi on this point: "Then those who feared the Lord spoke often one to another and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for those who feared the Lord and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, says the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spares his own son that serves him." From the whole tenor of this beautiful passage, we may be assured, that what these believers spoke so often one to another was highly pleasing to the Lord of Hosts. He was their theme. Their delight was in him. They feared the Lord, and thought upon his name. The following portions of Scripture may serve to show the nature and spirit of godly conversation -

Hear, Oh Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words, which I command you this day, shall be in your heart. And you shall teach them diligently unto your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. (Deu 6:4-7.) My tongue shall speak of your righteousness and of your praise, all the day long. (Psa 35:28.) I will meditate of all your work, and talk of your doings. (Psa 77:12.) My tongue shall speak of your word, for all your commandments are righteous. (Psa 119:172.) The mouth of the righteous man is a well of life. In the lips of him that has understanding, wisdom is found. The tongue of the just is as choice silver. The lips of the righteous feed many. The mouth of the just brings forth wisdom. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable. The lips of the wise disperse knowledge. (Pro 15:7.) The lips of knowledge are a precious jewel. (Pro 20:15.) A good man out of the good treasure of the heart brings forth good things. (Mat 12:35.) Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Eph 4:29.) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Col 3:16-17.) Let your speech be aways with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer every man. (Col 4:6.) Comfort yourselves together, and edify one another. (1Th 5:11.) Speak evil of no man. (Tit 3:2.) Exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. (Heb 3:13.) The blessed Jesus, who will shortly come in the clouds of heaven to judge the world, has solemnly declared, that "every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment; for, by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned." (Mat 12:36-37.) Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven. (Mat 7:21.) Why call you me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luk 6:46.) If you love me, keep my commandments. (John 14:15.)

"Blessed Savior! be pleased to touch my lips with a live coal from your altar. Preserve me from a vain and trifling spirit. Solemnize my mind. Spiritualize my affections. Give me to feel the importance of eternal things. Shed abroad your love in my heart, and may the law of kindness dwell upon my tongue. Make me an instrument in your hands of good to others. While laboring to promote the cause of truth by spiritual conversation, may I feel the blessedness of your Gospel in my own soul. Keep me from self-seeking and from slavish fear. Enable me to speak and act for you, and never to dread the frowns of dying worms. With increasing fervor may I love the society of your people, and find my happiness in sweet communion with you, my Savior and my God."

How sweet to bless the Lord, And in his praises join; With saints his goodness to record, And hymn his power divine!

These seasons of delight, This soul-refreshing gleam, These rays of pure eternal light, Demand the grateful theme.

Oh blessed Jesus! pour Your quickening spirit down; That I, from this delightful hour, Your work of grace may crown. May every waiting heart His faithful witness prove; And know its own eternal part In your redeeming love.

Oh! blest assurance this, Bright beam of heavenly day;

Sweet earnest of eternal bliss, To cheer the pilgrim’s way.

Thus will our joys increase, Our love more ardent grow;

While all the fruits of faith and peace Refresh our souls below. But oh! the bliss sublime, When joy shall be complete; In that unclouded, glorious clime, Where all your servants meet.

There shall the ransomed throng A Savior’s love record; And shout, in everlasting song, Salvation to the Lord!

03.39-39. ON CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE

39. ON CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE

Under the old dispensation, many of the great privileges of the church of God were veiled under emblems and figures drawn from natural objects. The Psalms of David, and the writings of the Prophets, abound with the most beautiful images, to describe the power, faithfulness, and love of Jehovah.

Under the new dispensation the veil is removed, and they are revealed in all their glory and beauty to the eye of faith. Life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel. But, as in former ages, so now, the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned; yes, they are foolishness unto him. Hence the Gospel is to those who perish, foolishness; but to those who are saved, it is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Happy are they who are thus taught of God; for the secret of the Lord is with those who fear him, and he will show them his covenant.

Man is naturally blind to his real condition, as a guilty, condemned sinner. Enjoying the pleasures of time, he never inquires after those of eternity. Satisfied with earth, he feels no desire for heaven, except as it presents to his mind an exemption from pain and suffering.

All men naturally prefer ease to pain. Hence heaven on this account is preferable to hell. Such is the estimate which wretched fallen man forms of heavenly bliss! Ignorant of himself, and ignorant of God, he is led captive by Satan at his will, until sovereign grace redeems him out of the hand of the enemy. The first truth which the divine Spirit discloses to the awakened conscience is our lost and undone state by nature. This discovery is attended with the deepest self-abasement; with brokenness of heart; with anxious desires after salvation; a salvation from present sin, as well as from future punishment. The convinced sinner, made sensible of the guilt and burden of transgression, now longs for heaven, as a state of rest from sin, as well as a state of rest from suffering. But, alas! feeling his inability to think a good thought, and overwhelmed with the view of his iniquities, he anxiously inquires, "How shall man be just with God?" What must I do to be saved?

Another precious truth, hidden from the natural man, is revealed to his opening mind by the same Spirit, who so graciously implanted in his heart that fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom. Jesus, as exhibited in the Gospel to a dying world, is savingly manifested to the humble, trembling, believing sinner, in all his glorious offices of prophet, priest, and king. How kind is God! how full of mercy and love! When he implants a holy fear, he imparts also a principle of saving faith.

Jesus is now beheld and apprehended as the sinner’s only atonement, righteousness, and refuge; as the only way to the Father: and the only advocate with him. He is viewed by the eye of faith, as the chief among ten thousand. He is esteemed precious, above all earthly or heavenly objects. Angels and men, as his creatures, sink into the shade, while the glories of Emanuel, God with us,

are now seen to fill heaven and earth with their resplendent brightness. The next great secret which the Spirit reveals to those who truly fear God, is the fitness of Jesus to meet all the needs of his people. Being delighted with the perfections of the Savior, the believer is filled with admiration and gratitude at the view of their suitableness to his own personal necessities.

He now loves to contemplate his gracious Redeemer, in his two-fold character - what he is in himself - and what he is to his people. He knows how to appreciate and to apply, through the teaching of the Spirit, the excellencies of Jesus to his own soul. He comes to him daily for wisdom, righteousness, and strength. He leans wholly upon his supporting arm. He lives upon the promises of his grace, and rejoices in hope of the glory of God. He delights in this way of access by faith to a mercy-seat; obtains through Jesus the blessings he needs; and thus finds him at all times his all in all. This is happiness. This is the King’s highway to heaven. This is the way in which the flock of Christ have trod in every age. Lord, lead me forth by the footsteps of the flock. Make me a follower of them, who through faith and patience are inheriting the promises. But this is not all. The sinner is not only made to see his lost estate by nature; the glories of the Redeemer; and the Savior’s fitness to all his necessities but another gracious truth is unfolded to him. He is enabled to know and to rejoice in his own personal interest in all the blessedness of his purchased inheritance. He can say with the church of old, "This is my beloved!, and this is my friend." "This God is my God." "God has become my salvation." "I know whom I have believed." How sweet is this secret of the Lord! It begets humility, gratitude, zeal, and obedience. It quickens love, and animates faith. It increases watchfulness and holy living. It lays the soul prostrate at the foot of the cross, while it elevates the affections to the pure regions where Christ sits at the right hand of God. This glorious revelation is vouchsafed to those who truly fear God; not always in equal measure, but in such a degree, and at such times, as Infinite Love and Wisdom deems best. All the children of God should strive after this blessed assurance of faith. It is not the presumption, but the exalted privilege, of the obedient believer. Those have low views of Christian privilege, who deem it arrogant to expect the knowledge of the forgiveness of our sins.

All who believe with the heart unto righteousness; all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; all who walk humbly with their God, may know assuredly that their sins are blotted out; for he pardons and absolves all those who truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel.

"Lord, be graciously pleased to give me a holy, filial fear; a humble, loving, obedient spirit; a deadness to the world; and a devotedness of heart to you; a renunciation of self, and a cordial reception of Christ, in all his saving merits and mercies. Thus, blessed Savior! let me lie passive in your hands, waiting your presence, and desirous only that your will may be accomplished in me, until it please you to call me to your kingdom above, where all darkness and doubt shall forever flee away."

Amid all these riches of grace, another secret is unfolded: that "all things shall work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose." Man is naturally anxious about tomorrow. He sees all dark before him, and imagination conjures up a thousand fears. He suffers more from imagined, than from real evils. He creates a world of misery to himself, by dire forebodings and anxious glances into future days. Not so when faith, love, and filial confidence in God, his heavenly Father, fill his breast. This gracious promise is then fulfilled: "You shall keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you."

Calmly he leaves events with God. He studiously performs the present duties, and leaves the consequences with him who has said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you."

Such is the life of faith in the Son of God. It is a life of holiness and happiness.

Many, indeed, are the afflictions of the righteous; afflictions peculiar to themselves, as well as afflictions endured in common with their fellow-men; but many, also, are their supports and consolations. These are truly peculiar to themselves; unknown and unfelt by a suffering, unbelieving world. Even here, while sojourning through a valley of tears, they partake of the "hidden manna," and draw many a refreshing draught from the fountain of living waters. But their blessedness does not end here. The glorious secret, which gladdens their hearts under all their sorrows, is their future destination. They shall be "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." They shall "sit down with Christ on his throne," and "reign with him forever and ever." What heart can conceive the felicity of the redeemed, when all terrestrial things shall have passed away!

"Lord, make me a tree of righteousness, and then I shall experience your heavenly beams of love! Should the rough wind of persecution, or needful trials, shake my branches, or even tear away many valued comforts, yet may I, under every bereavement, repose on your faithfulness and rejoice in your love." As God in Christ is the fountain of all felicity, infinitely happy in himself, and the source of true felicity to his creatures; so their blessedness is founded on his truth, secured by his oath, and sealed by his blood; for "God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. So God has given us both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can take new courage, for we can hold on to his promise with confidence. This confidence is like a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain of heaven into God’s inner sanctuary. Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the line of Melchizedek." Heb 6:17-20.

Oh! what rich discoveries are these, which are experimentally and practically made known to all who fear God! Such happy souls may well join with the enraptured prophet, and say, "I will praise you, O Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me." "Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also has become my salvation. Therefore, with joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation."

"Blessed Lord! reveal your truth, so full of grace and glory to my heart, in all its saving influence. Warm, yes, inflame my soul with the pure celestial fire of love. Illuminate my mind, and transform me daily more and more into your image, until, awaking up after your likeness, I shall be eternally satisfied with it."

Blessed Jesus, look upon me With a smile of heavenly love;

Draw my heart and fix it on thee, Never let it thence remove.

Lord, I feel a sinful nature Tending downwards to the earth;

Save a lost and ruined creature, Save me through the second birth.

Come, Oh great Eternal Spirit, Pour your influence over my soul;

Let me now your peace inherit, Make a wounded sinner whole.

Put your holy fear within me, Make your gracious secrets known, Daily may I know and love thee, Daily all your mercies own.

Jesus! plead my cause in heaven; Be my advocate on high, All the praise to you be given, Through a vast eternity.

03.40-40. AGREEMENT NECESSARY TO COMMUNION

40. AGREEMENT NECESSARY TO COMMUNION The question of Amos is of practical importance: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" There can be no real communion or pleasing communion, without a similarity of views and disposition.

What can be more opposite than the carnal and the spiritual mind? A spiritually-minded man delights in heavenly things. He views the world through the sacred medium of divine revelation; and beholds it as the abode of sin, as a place of trial, as the valley of the shadow of death. While, therefore, he blesses his heavenly Father for every undeserved mercy, and receives with gratitude the bounties of his providence, he longs for that glorious rest from sin and sorrow, which remains to the people of God. His treasure and heart are in heaven, where joy and happiness fill every ransomed soul in the beatific presence of God and the Lamb. Being born from above, he loves his heavenly Father; being united to Christ by faith, he derives all his strength from him; being under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, he is led into all truth, and made a new creature in Christ Jesus. As he loves God, so he loves all the children of God. He delights in the company, and sedulously cultivates the friendship of genuine Christians. He can say with David, "I am a companion of those who fear you." "My delight is in the excellent of the earth, and in such as excel in virtue." With expanded views and enlarged heart, he can love all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, though all may not agree with him on minor points of difference. All who follow Christ in simplicity of spirit, and adorn the doctrine of God their Savior, by the purity of their hearts and the holiness of their lives, are hailed by him as brethren, traveling to the heavenly Zion. The unconverted man is the opposite of all this. He cannot endure to bear religion discoursed upon in his presence. By a frown, a sarcasm, or a significant silence, he soon manifests his displeasure. The people of God are offensive to him. Should some unhappy characters, by their inconsistency or misconduct, dishonor the holy religion of Jesus, he ceases not to hold them up as patterns of the whole fraternity of professing Christians; thus putting the stamp of hypocrisy upon all, without exception. His manner evidences the exquisitely malignant pleasure which he finds in having so plausible an opportunity of traducing the Gospel, whose pure and self-denying principles his soul abhors. To him, the world is everything. All his thoughts are exercised either upon the best mode of acquiring wealth, or the most delightful way of spending it. Is he a man of fortune? Much of his time is occupied in ornamenting his grounds, or in the chase. The pleasures of the field, the intricate mazes of political events, the passing news of the day, or the still more uncertain nature of the weather, form his most edifying topics of discourse, except he have a taste for literature; and then, men and books are occasionally canvassed and reviewed. Is he a man of business? His conversation is filled with subjects connected with his calling, mixed up with all those little incidents of life which compose each passing day. And well would it be, if language awfully pernicious never stained his lips! But, in these worldly circles of business and of pleasure, the value of the soul, the dying love of Jesus, the work of grace upon the heart, all the rich and varied subjects of redemption, are never heard, unless it be to bear the lash of ridicule or the laugh of scorn. How, then, can two such opposite characters walk cordially together? It is impossible. Hence arises the

danger of real Christians associating with the people of the world.

Courtesy and kindness are Christian duties to be exercised towards all; but friendship with the world is decidedly repugnant to the spirit of the Gospel. In order to walk amicably together, that is, to enjoy each other's company in any tolerable degree, one party must give way to the other, at least to a certain extent. The religious man, whose soul is supremely occupied with heavenly things, cannot help making occasional reflections on those topics which so deeply interest his heart. The carnal man, who cannot bear such conversation, must either hear him patiently, and even with seeming complacency; or a disagreement must ensue, which would in a moment destroy all pleasing communion. But as the men of the world are, in general, the most true to their master, they seldom fail to insinuate that such reflections are unpleasant, and little better than preaching. They think it bearable, because customary, to hear them once a week from the pulpit; but quite intolerable to have such sermons forced upon them in common conversation. Consequently, they endeavor to turn the discourse to subjects more congenial with their taste and inclination.

Here the Christian must either give way, or go away as soon as decorum will permit; since he finds that either he must be in continual dispute, or else be continually making compliances to the injury of his soul.

If, then, it be evident that two cannot walk comfortably and profitably together, except they be agreed on the most important of all subjects - the salvation of the soul, through faith in a crucified Redeemer; what must we think of those professors of the Gospel, who are constantly mixing with the world, not so much from duty as from choice; not so much through necessity, as for pleasure? Are they never tempted to make sinful compliances, that they and their party may be agreed? Do they never sit for hours to listen to the vainest and most trifling discourse, while the dread of putting the salutary check to such idle words seals up their lips in silence? Have they never encouraged by a smile some witty jest upon religious characters; or felt the blush of sinful shame glowing on their cheeks, when sarcastically called a Methodist or a saint? Let conscience give the right answer. The end of too many such unguarded professors lamentably proves, that they have fallen into these snares of the devil. Rushing into temptation, without a call of duty arising from filial or conjugal relationship, they grieve the Holy Spirit, wound their own consciences, imbibe by degrees the spirit of the world, get more and more assimilated to its taste and manners, until at last they lose all relish for spiritual enjoyments, and, like the apostate Julian, sit down in the seat of the scornful. "Remember Lot's wife," is the warning voice of Jesus. "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present evil world," is the lamentation of Paul.

Some may condemn these cautionary remarks as uncharitable; but those who take Scripture for their guide, and experience for their teacher, well know the truth of these assertions. Surely, then, we may say with David, "Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law he does meditate day and night." There are many fearful passages in the word of God to guard Christians against the love, the deceits, and the allurements of the world.

We are, alas! too apt, even after we know better things, to be carried away by material objects. Any little trifle can divert the attention, even when the mind is engaged about heavenly things, without great watchfulness and self government; and these holy habits are only to be attained by

frequent and fervent prayer. The world, and the things of the world, press upon us at all points. Our daily avocations, yes, our most lawful enjoyments, have need to be narrowly watched, lest they insensibly steal upon our affections, and draw away our hearts from God. A true Christian living in the world is like a ship sailing on the ocean. It is not the ship being in the water which will sink it, but the water getting into the ship. So, in like manner, the Christian is not ruined by living in the world, which he must necessarily do while he remains in the body; but by the world living in him. The world in the heart has ruined millions of immortal souls. How careful are mariners in guarding against leakage, lest the water, entering into the vessel, should by imperceptible degrees cause it to sink. And ought not the Christian to watch and pray, lest Satan and the world should find some unguarded inlet to his heart; and thus, by entering in, bring him to destruction both of body and soul?

Let no one dare to be negligent, because salvation is all of grace; since this very salvation consists in no small degree in a deliverance from pride, carelessness, and presumption; and in the implantation of holy fear, circumspection, and humility. The voice of wisdom says, "He that despises small things, shall fall by little and little." "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation." But why give such exhortations, if no danger is to be dreaded? Every caution, every warning of Scripture, inculcates the necessity of godly fear. Thus I learn from the word of truth and from daily experience, that "no man can serve God and money;" that there can be no fellowship between righteousness and unrighteousness; no agreement between the temple of God and idols; that a believer has no part with an infidel; and, consequently, that the children of God must not be unequally yoked with unbelievers: how, then, can two walk together except they be agreed? The blessed Savior gave himself for us to deliver us from this present evil world. He declared to his disciples, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

Hence it follows, that "they who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution;" for, said our Lord, "if they have hated me, they will also hate you." And so we find it; for, as he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. There must, therefore, of necessity, be drawn a broad line of separation between the true church of Christ and the world; this distinction must be plain and visible; not by needless singularity of dress or manner; not by sanctimonious looks or drawling tones; but by humility of mind; by kindness of spirit; by purity of conversation; by unwearied efforts to do good, even to the evil and unthankful; in a word, by a faithful exhibition of the Spirit of Christ in all the holy fruits of righteousness, goodness, and truth.

Thus true Christians must come out and are separate from the world in its principles, spirit, and practice; for the word of God unequivocally declares, that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

"Oh blessed Savior! preserve my heart from the pollutions of the world; from the influence and example of worldly men. Defend and shield me by your grace from sinful compliances; stop all the avenues to evil. May holy affections and heavenly desires fill my soul, that worldly desires may have no room to enter in. While I am in the world, Oh! grant that I may not be of the world. While my hands are employed about the necessary affairs of this life, may my heart be fully fixed on the next. While I use the world, preserve me from abusing it; and through the riches of your grace

enable me to live in such a weanedness from it, and nonconformity to it, that when death shall bear me hence, I may walk with you in white in your kingdom of light and glory."

Sing, Oh you saints, in sweet accord, The wonders of your dying Lord;

While journeying homeward, sweetly sing The praises of your heavenly King. To you the scepter he extends; To you a willing audience tends; For you he died - for you he bled, And dwelt in lodgings of the dead. With joy his work of love survey, As you approach the eternal day;

Behold the beauties of his face;

Admiring, own his matchless grace.

Though angry storms should seem to lower, And over your head the deluge pour;

Yet Jesus, by one gracious smile, Can even the darkest hour beguile.

Soon shall your painful conflicts cease, Soon shall you reach the realms of peace, Where Jesus will his people own; Where storms and tempests are unknown.

03.41-41. ON SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD

41. ON SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD

How little is the genuine nature of Christianity considered by the generality of professing Christians! The declaration of our Savior, "My kingdom is not of this world;" and the character of his followers, "you are not of the world, even as I am not of the world," seem to be words of no import with thousands who call themselves Christians. Immersed in all the businesses and pleasures of life, they act as though no such declaration had been made, or any such character been drawn by the Savior of mankind. The commands of Scripture are most striking and clear on the duty of separation from the world. "Arise you and depart, for this is not your rest, because it is polluted; it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction." "Come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust thereof; but he that does the will of God abides forever." "Know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, he is the enemy of God." To a soul happily delivered from this present evil world, through faith in Jesus, the exhortations of Scripture are most encouraging. They breathe that holy resignation to the divine will, and that cheerful contentment with the divine disposals, which, when obeyed, must cause the believer to rejoice at all times, and in everything to give thanks. He is assured by the voice of infallible Wisdom, that "A man’s life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses." Hence he is warned to "take heed and beware of covetousness."

While carnal minds are panting after worldly riches, the believer is thus admonished by the lowly Savior: "Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat; neither for the body, what you shall put on." "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn, and God feeds them: how much are you better than the birds!" "Consider the lilies, how they grow; they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." "If then, God so clothe the grass which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, Oh you of little faith!" "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself: sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." "Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you."

Paul, who once possessed what the world admires, knowledge and influence, counted them but loss for Christ. His knowledge, imbibed at the feet of Gamaliel; and his influence, derived from the authority of the High Priest, were renounced without reserve when Jesus revealed himself to his soul. Separated from a world which lies in wickedness, he could say, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and

every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." From this sweet experience of true religion, and this knowledge of the emptiness of all earthly things, he declared to Timothy, "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness." The Hebrew converts he exhorted to the duty of divine contentment: "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

These interesting portions from the word of God show what are the character and spirit of true believers. They are a peculiar people, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Their citizenship is in heaven. They are pilgrims and strangers upon earth; the temples of the Holy Spirit; the lights of the world; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. On earth they bear the holy image of their Savior; and in heaven they shall shine as the sun, with everlasting glory. The world is crucified unto them, and they unto the world. Its fascinating charms have passed away; and they themselves are no longer the delight of carnal company. Their holy walk and speech is now the subject of derision. The holy image of Jesus is beheld with aversion. They have become to their once admiring associates as a crucified body, loathsome and disgusting.

All this discordancy springs from that unalterable distinction which must ever exist between the people of God and the people of the world. This distinction is so plain, that he who runs may read the living characters. The one are born from above; the other from beneath. The one are quickened by grace; the other are dead in trespasses and sins. The one are governed by the Spirit of God; the other are under the dominion of Satan. The one consult the glory of God, and cheerfully forsake all for Christ; the other make self the center round which they move. The one, in seasons of general defection, can say with Nehemiah, "So did not I, because of the fear of God;" the other, like Pharaoh, when called to bow to the scepter of Jehovah exclaiming, "Who is the Lord that I should obey him?" No wonder, then, if such a disagreement render a separation necessary; for what concord has light with darkness; what agreement has Christ with Belial? If Christians would be safe, they must separate from the world. To enforce this truth, the Bible is full of cautions, both historical and preceptive.

Before the flood we beheld the dreadful consequences which ensued from the sons of God being captivated by the daughters of men, (how strikingly the' distinction' is here preserved!) and taking unto themselves wives of all whom they chose, without any regard either to principle or practice. From these unnatural alliances sprung giants in wickedness as well as in stature, until the flood came and swept them all away. The history of the Israelites teaches us, by examples the most awful, the danger of sinful connections. The following may serve as a specimen of the whole. "So Israel lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, and they intermarried with them. Israelite sons married their daughters, and Israelite daughters were given in marriage to their sons. And the Israelites worshiped their gods. The Israelites did what was evil

in the Lord’s sight. They forgot about the Lord their God, and they worshiped the images of Baal and the Asherah poles. Then the Lord burned with anger against Israel." Jdg 3:5-8.

Let us then, beware of compromising our principles. Let us beware of conceding to the practices of the world, from a mistaken notion of conciliating the prejudices, or winning over the ungodly to religion. Such conduct will only excite the contempt of the world and provoke the Almighty to hide his face from us. No - we must be singular if we would be holy; we must be consistent if we would be useful. If we are faithful, we must indeed expect reproach; if we boldly confess Christ before men, and steadily maintain that marked distinction which forms the line of separation between the church and the world, we must submit to have our names cast out as evil. But true Christians ought never to shrink from the cross. Like Caleb, they should follow the Lord fully, when all others forsake him; and like Joshua, they should declare, with humility and integrity of heart, in the face of a sneering world, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

We must let men see the foundation of our practice, and why we cannot do as others do. We must make them acquainted with our principles, and let them know what are those secret springs of action, which cause us to move in a direction so opposed to theirs. This frank and ingenuous conduct may open the minds and touch the hearts of some, who, through grace, may be led to say, "We will go with you, for we perceive that God is with you." At all events; such upright dealing will bring comfort into our own souls, and preserve us from falling into those snares which Satan lays to catch the fearful and double-minded professor. But if we are habitually afraid of being decided; if we endeavor to keep a good reputation with the world; if we want to live on the borders between the two kingdoms of light and darkness, maintaining a sort of friendly communion with the inhabitants on either side of the line; if we are ashamed of avowing our principles before men, when duty and the honor of Christ call for such an avowal; then we may be assured, on the truth of the Gospel, that we have no scriptural evidence of being the children of God: for thus says our divine Savior, "Whoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." "If we deny him, he will also deny us."

"Blessed Lord! keep me from the snares and fascinations of a world which lies in wickedness. May all my affections wing their way towards you, and be ever fixed upon you. Oh, be the center on which I rest, and to which all my desires tend. Let my whole life be devoted to your service, which is perfect freedom. In all things may I seek your glory; and from the sweet constraining principle of faith and love, delight in every relative and personal duty, to the glory of your name.

What is earth and all its treasures, Dazzling bright to mortal eyes? When compared with heavenly glories, Deep within the shade it lies.

Earth is but the land of shadows, Faintly lit with glowworm light; Where the prince of darkness reigns, Presage of eternal night.

Oh! you Sun of glorious splendor, Shine with healing in your wing;

Chase away these shades of darkness;

Holy light and comfort bring.

Let the heralds of salvation Round the earth with joy proclaim, Death and hell are spoiled and vanquished Through the great Emanuel’s name.

Take your power Almighty Savior, Claim the nations for your own;

Reign, oh Lord of life and glory, Until each heart become your throne.

03.42-42. ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

42. ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE And did Jesus say to his disciples, "you know not what manner of spirit you are of," when, in their zeal for the honor of their Master, they wanted fire to descend upon the unbelieving Samaritans? Then, Oh my soul, look well to yourself! Search deep into your principles of action, the ground of your obedience. Weigh well your motives in the balance of your sanctuary. Examine your intentions. Behold and see what manner of spirit you are of. Among the twelve disciples, I find a traitor. Among the early Christians, an Ananias and Sapphira. In the judgment day, many will produce their wonderful works, to whom Jesus will say, "I never knew you." How important, then, is self-knowledge, the result of divine teaching and self-examination! In the common business of life, those thrive best who examine most into their concerns. When a tradesman neglects his accounts, he will soon have a painful account to give. Negligence and bankruptcy are like substance and shadow; the latter follows closely upon the former. These remarks are still more important when transferred to our eternal concerns.

Oh! then, before it be too late, give me grace, blessed Redeemer, to examine well what manner of spirit I am of, lest I should remain in error until that awful period, when, standing before your dread tribunal, every spirit shall be made manifest of what sort it is. With all sincerity of heart, I would inquire:

1. When I attend the ordinances of the Gospel, in what spirit do I attend them? Do I come into the house of God as a poor beggar would go to the dwelling of the rich, for bread to eat and clothing to put on? Is it the bread of life and the garment of salvation, which I earnestly crave at the throne of grace? Do I go as a poor debtor who has nothing to pay - as a guilty criminal, on whom the sentence of death has been passed, that my debts may be canceled through the blood of Jesus, and my soul delivered from the curse of the law? Do I go, as one who is full of a sore disease, to the great Physician for health and cure, for the gift of the Holy Spirit, to renovate my corrupted nature? Do I go to the house of God, as my exceeding joy, to hear the glad tidings of salvation, to learn the way of righteousness, and to sing the praises of the Lord? Or do I go in a spirit of formality, for the sake of being thought religious; from mere custom and habit, and in a spirit devoid of devotion and love?

2. When I give to the poor, in what spirit do I give? Have I considered all my property as a trust committed to my care by the Almighty Proprietor of the universe, to whom I must one day give a strict account of my stewardship? Do I view the poor as the Lord’s bankers; remembering who has said, he that has pity on the poor; lends unto the Lord, and that which he has given, will he pay again? Do I esteem the pious poor, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to those who love him, as brethren, whose necessities it is not only my duty, but my pleasure to relieve, consistently with the claims and necessities of my own family? Do I relieve them for the sake of Christ, because they belong to him, with a single eye to his glory; and as unobserved by others as circumstances will admit? Or do I relieve the poor through public institutions only that my name may be enrolled, and my beneficence made known to the world; thus loving the praise of

men, more than the praise of God? Are my charities confined to the body; or do I seek the spiritual good, as well as the temporal benefit of my fellow-creatures?

3. When I discourse among religious friends upon the truths of the Gospel, in what spirit do I discourse upon them? Is it from a heart-felt conviction of the sweetness, richness, and vastness of these mysteries ? Is it with a view to mutual edification, to provoke one another to love and to good works, to stimulate to exertion in the cause of Christ, and to excite others to greater usefulness? Is it from a pure desire that Christ may be glorified; that his name may be honored, and his righteousness exalted? Is it from a principle of love, that I converse with others on the preciousness of Jesus, the work of the Spirit, and the joys of heaven? Or do I speak of these things in a spirit of spiritual pride, to make a display of my religious knowledge, to be thought wise, and to be esteemed a saint?

4. When I perform the daily duties of my worldly calling, in what spirit do I perform them? Is it with a view to glorify God in them, and to obtain an honest livelihood, through the divine blessing on my labors, that I may thereby provide for my family, and have enough to give to him that is in need? Or is it from a covetous desire of wealth for its own sake, that I may vie in splendor with my richer neighbors; have a greater opportunity of gratifying my pride; of gaining the appellation of opulent; and raising my family in the world?

5. When the religion of Jesus is traduced, and the Gospel dispensation derided by carnal men, in what spirit do I hear these things? Do I pray that the Lord would convince them of their errors, and convert them by his grace? Do I labor to do them good, if opportunity will permit, by speaking a word for Christ, and exhorting them in a spirit of meekness and love?

Or, with the disciples of old, do I secretly pray for vengeance to overtake them, like the enemies of Elisha; forgetting that I am a partaker of the same evil nature with themselves; and if made to differ in any measure, most humbly, yet gracefully acknowledge with the apostle, "By the grace of God, I am what I am?"

6. When reviled for righteousness sake, in what spirit do I treat my persecutors? Do I return good for evil - blessing for cursing - kindness for abuse? Do I bear them on my heart before God in prayer; and earnestly implore, like my passionate Savior when nailed to the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?" Or do I resent their injuries by sourness of temper, irritation of spirit, retaliation of wrongs; returning, when possible, evil for evil?

"Almighty Savior! you who are the author and finisher of faith, give me a right spirit; a purity of intention; a principle of love; that all my thoughts, words, and actions may be regulated according to your will. With true humility of heart, may I ever study to advance the spiritual welfare of my fellow-creatures, by exhortations, prayers, influence, and example. Do not allow the enemy of souls to fill me with high notions of my own excellence; but ever keep me low in my own eyes. Preserve me from spiritual pride, the bane of all true godliness. In the lowly attitude of deep contrition, may I daily come to your bleeding cross for renewed forgiveness and renewed strength. There may love and gratitude fill my heart, until, passing through the gates of death into the celestial city, my soul shall be forever dedicated to your service and glory."

Ah! Who can tell the joy, Which reigns within the breast, Where heavenly dews of grace descend, And Jesus is the guest.

Like some sweet summer rose, It sheds a fragrance round Though still, alas! the noxious thorn Of nature may be found. A bright celestial day Pours light and warmth within Yet still a cloud too often obscures Its beams, through inbred sin.

Here is the seat of war, Where sin and Satan rage; The conqueror is the dying saint, Who, fighting, quits the stage.

Blest Jesus, to my soul Your grace and strength impart;

Til, clothed in perfect righteousness, I see you as you art.

03.43-43. ON THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER

43. ON THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER

There cannot be a greater blessing imparted to us, than a spirit of prayer. It is the pledge of all other blessings. When it pleases God to bestow a spirit of prayer, every other spiritual blessing is, as it were, waiting to descend upon the seeking soul. The spirit of grace and supplication is closely connected with believing contrition. "I will pour upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and mourn." A spirit of prayer implies faith in the promises of God, and an earnest desire for the promised blessings. It includes waiting and hoping. "I waited for the Lord," says David, "yes, I waited patiently for him." And what was the happy result? "He inclined his ear unto me, and heard me." Oh! it is a blessed state of heart, thus to wait upon God continually in the spirit of humble, fervent, believing prayer. Satan well knows the value of such a spirit, and therefore tries hard to prevent its exercise. He labors to extinguish this sacred fire, kindled in the soul by the Holy Spirit. He endeavors to disturb the mind; to ride upon the wings of the imagination; and to fill the soul with an almost endless succession of fleeting images. This daily interruption of the enemy constitutes no small part of the Christian warfare. The believer feels greatly distressed, when his foolish heart thus wanders from its divine center. At such seasons his language is, Oh that I were "near, and like my God!" But alas! I groan, being burdened. My heart is pained within me. I am almost tempted to conclude that my experience of joy and peace is delusion.

If I am a child of God, why am I thus? And yet, I cannot but feel some encouragement from the thought, that if I were under the absolute control of natural corruption, I could not thus lament and mourn over its workings and deceits. Why do I groan, being burdened, if I feel no burden? And if I feel my burden, who has given me this spiritual sensibility? I know that in a natural state, man can neither mourn over, nor feel the weight of spiritual evils; it being one of the marks of unregeneracy to grow in love with, rather than groan under, sin.

If I am daily anxious to possess the spirit of prayer, to be inwardly renewed in the spirit of my mind, to be more under the influence of filial love and filial fear, may I not hope that a God of grace has indeed drawn me by his loving-kindness, and loved me with an everlasting love? Delightful thought! Is it too much to draw this happy conclusion? There is no merit in any creature, saint, or angel. The voice of sovereign grace is, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy; and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Oh! that I may be enabled by humble faith to lie at the foot of the cross; and there to view, with growing delight, the never-ending wonders of redeeming love! Such are the feelings of every true believer.

"Lord, bestow upon me this blessed spirit of prayer. Preserve me from the incursions of the enemy, from the wanderings of my wayward heart. Take the world out of my affections. Let not its image be painted upon my imagination. But let your own image be deeply engraven on my soul." As we cannot live naturally without air, neither can we live spiritually without prayer. The latter is as necessary to the soul, as the former is to the body. A prayerless person is a Christless person.

Living without God in the world, he must die without hope. The natural heart dislikes prayer, because it requires a frame of mind quite opposed to its corrupt views and feelings. If we feel an inward dislike to secret prayer; or if, when we pray, our hearts are habitually cold, and distracted by worldly cares and sinful imaginations; we cannot have a clearer proof of our being carnally minded, which is death. To pray aright, we must see our wretchedness, we must feel our misery, we must acknowledge our guilt, pollution, and helplessness, we must lie at the foot of the cross, plead in faith the merits of a crucified Savior, renounce our own righteousness, supplicate forgiveness through the blood of Jesus, implore the gift of the Holy Spirit, hunger and thirst after righteousness, and pour out our souls in grateful acknowledgments for redeeming grace. Now all this is contrary to the natural man. It was, therefore, no small mark of the conversion of Saul, when Jesus said to Ananias, "Behold, he prays."

What an exalted privilege is prayer! How precious is the throne of grace! And yet, "What various hindrances we meet, In coming to a mercy-seat!" There is even in the believer at times, a painful backwardness to approach that throne, on which his Father sits in the mild radiance of covenant love. Yes, even in his happiest moments, when with filial confidence he draws near the mercy-seat, the artful enemy will labor hard to impede him in his work, and tempt him to give up the duty; well knowing that every relaxation in duty is a weakening of principle. When such assaults are violent, the heart is grieved, and the believer is greatly discouraged. But if he really loves the exercise of prayer, and seeks opportunities for holding communion with God, although much hindered by foolish, wandering, hated thoughts, let him not be induced to abandon the sacred work, which would only give the tempter an advantage over him. When Satan casts his fiery darts, then must the soldier of Jesus Christ hold up the "shield of faith," and wield the weapon of "all prayer;" being assured that, in spite, of every opposition, victory shall be the glorious result. The divine command is, "Go forward." So did the Israelites when the Red Sea was before them, and the Egyptians behind them. Through the power of Jehovah, the mighty waters divided; a way was made for his ransomed to pass over; and they sang the high praises of their Redeemer, while their enemies lay dead upon the sea shore.

"So let all your enemies perish, Oh Lord: but let those who love you be as the sun when he goes forth in his might."

"How blessed you are, O Israel! Who else is like you, a people saved by the Lord? He is your protecting shield and your triumphant sword! Your enemies will bow low before you, and you will trample on their backs!" Deu 33:29. "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; and he shall thrust out the enemy from before you, and shall say, Destroy them."

Yes! all the spiritual enemies of the true Israel shall sink as lead in the mighty waters, in that day when Satan and his rebellious angels shall be cast into the lake of fire, never more to harass the glorified church of God, which shall shine as the sun forever and ever!

I desire, I long, I pray to be yours, Oh blessed Jesus, - a member of your mystical body - a sheep of your pasture.

Almighty Savior! grant unto me the spirit of prayer, that, with my whole heart, I may lift up my soul unto you. Open my understanding to understand the Scriptures. Incline my will to choose those things which are pleasing unto you. Fix my affections upon yourself, all - precious Redeemer.

Sanctify my imagination; store my memory with spiritual treasures; sprinkle my conscience with your pardoning blood; cover me with your justifying righteousness.

Come and dwell, Oh divine Savior, in my heart by faith. Make my body the temple of the Holy Spirit; impress your divine image on my soul. Preserve me from the power and pollution of sin, the snares and wiles of Satan, the love and influence of the world; shed abroad your love in my heart; establish me in the faith of the Gospel. May I ever receive you in all your glorious offices and characters as my only, my complete salvation.

Give me grace, Oh blessed Jesus, to believe in the dignity and majesty of your person as the eternal Word, the everlasting Son of the Father, of equal power, glory, and eternity with the Father and the Holy Spirit. May I behold you with admiring love and gratitude as the Virgin's Son, lying in the manger; taking upon you my nature; that so, being God and man in one Christ, you might satisfy eternal justice, and bring in everlasting righteousness.

Oh! may I contemplate, with mingled feelings of grief and joy, your agony and bloody sweat, your cross and passion;, your precious death and burial; - with grief, when I reflect on sin, my own sin, which nailed you to the accursed tree; - with joy, when I meditate on your dying love; a love, which angels cannot fathom; a love, which fills the bright intelligences above with wonder and delight; a love, which fills each humble soul on earth with gratitude and praise!

Jesus! I would - Oh! that in the humble confidence of faith, I may say, I do receive you as my only, my beloved Savior!

Impart into my soul this spiritual, this practical, this experimental knowledge of yourself, who are the light of the world, and the wisdom of your people.

Oh! wash my guilty soul in your cleansing blood, you, who are the bleeding propitiatory sacrifice, the Lamb of God.

Now that you are ascended up on high, and have entered into the holiest of all, plead the cause of a poor wretched sinner, who looks unto you as the Lord my righteousness- my great Melchisedek. Exert your regal power in my soul, Oh king of saints, and destroy all your enemies and mine. Subdue every rebellious inclination of my heart, which opposes itself to your will. Bring all my powers into subjection to your divine authority; and sit upon the throne of my heart, the Lord of every motion there.

Oh! may I delight in the contemplation of those soul-reviving characters which you sustain in the covenant of grace! You are the Redeemer, Mediator, Justifier, Surety, Advocate, and Purifier of your people; their friend and counselor, their shepherd and guide, their husband and guardian. And Oh! how beautiful are the images which the Holy Spirit employs to shadow forth your excellencies. You are "the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys;" "a plant of renown" You are "the true vine", which supplies each living branch with fruitfulness and verdure. You are "the fountain," in which all may wash and be clean - the rock on which your church is immovably fixed - the way in which your people journey to the heavenly Canaan - the door, by which they enter into the covenant of grace - the day-star, which illuminates their path and guides them safely to glory. You are the bread of life, the tree manna whose flesh is food indeed, and whose blood is drink indeed.

Oh I may I daily feed upon you by faith in my heart with thanksgiving, until I see you in the heavenly paradise, and taste through eternal ages the sweetness of redeeming love!

Oh! may I prize a throne of grace, Accessible in every place;

Wherever I lift my soul in prayer, On earth or sea, my God is there.

If in the hour of deep distress, Its woes, my heart in sighs express; A sweet return of love I find, To sooth the sorrows of the mind. Or when the grateful odors rise Of praise - delightful sacrifice! My soul expands with joys unknown To every bosom, but its own.

Ah! where proceeds this sacred love, Descending gently from above? To you, Savior, and your blood, I owe this precious gift of God.

Oh! may I daily love you more, Of blessings, you, the bounteous store; On me let every grace descend, Oh, Source of bliss - you sinner’s friend!

03.44-44. ON THE CAUTIONS AND WARNINGS OF SCRIPTURE

44. ON THE CAUTIONS AND WARNINGS OF SCRIPTURE The word of God abounds with cautions as well as encouragements; with warnings as well as invitations; with threatenings as well as promises. These are necessary and important; otherwise, they would not be as thickly scattered through the sacred volume. We find the need of cautions and warnings in proportion as we are made acquainted with the subtlety of Satan, the deceitfulness of sin, and the treachery of our own heart.

We learn by a thousand painful instances, that "he who trusts to his own heart is a fool." How short-lived are the best resolutions made in our own strength! They resemble the early dew which soon passes away, and the grass upon the house-top which withers before it grows up. What a valuable part of the Bible are the kind admonitions of a loving Savior! How should we prize the salutary counsels of him who spoke as never man spoke; who sticks closer than a brother! May we ever remember his gracious exhortations; for "they are spirit, and they are life." "Without me, you can do nothing" - "watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation" "Take heed and beware of covetousness" - "Strive to enter in at the strait gate" - "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" - "Continue you in my love."

We are here taught by Infinite Wisdom, that of ourselves we can do nothing that is pleasing to God, or effectual towards our salvation: that our spiritual enemies are constantly plotting our destruction, spreading nets for our feet, and holding out their baits to draw us into sin: that the love of the world is a whirlpool down which millions are carried into perdition: that carnal ease and sensual indulgence form the road to hell: that to escape this dreadful end, we must strive, yes, agonize, to enter in at the strait gate which leads unto life eternal. We are exhorted to seek, as the first great object of pursuit, not the honors and wealth of the world, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. We are warned against the smallest approach towards spiritual declension; and to avoid so great an evil, we are commanded to persevere in the good and the right way, by continuing in the constant exercise of a supreme love to Jesus, who loved us, and gave himself for us. Such are the salutary counsels given to us by our divine Savior, who said to his disciples, "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them." In the Gospel of the blessed God, we are also cautioned against spiritual pride: "Do not be high-minded, but fear."

How prone we are to be proud, although we have nothing to be proud of! Our hearts are strongly inclined to pride, which is the very essence of the fall. Pride cast angels out of heaven, and man out of paradise. Pride fights against the mercy of God; bars the sinner’s heart against the Savior; and hurries the proud rebel down the precipice of desperation into the burning gulf of hell! "Happy, then, is the man who fears aways," lest he fall into the condemnation of the devil!

Blessed Jesus! clothe me with humility; destroy this baneful root of pride out of my heart; and make me meek and lowly; resigned to all your wise disposals, however painful they may be to fallen nature.

How needful at all times is this kind admonition: "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." We are never in such danger of falling as when we think ourselves the most secure. Self-dependence and carnal security are those fatal props by which thousands are upheld through the delusions of Satan, until they drop into everlasting misery.

How good is this caution, also: "Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, lest any of you seem to come short of it."

Self-love blinds the eyes of the mind, so that we cannot see our real state and condition. This was the case with the declining church of Laodicea. She imagined herself rich and increased with goods, and as having need of nothing; when; in the eye of the all-searching Jesus, she was wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. Of Ephraim it was said, "gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knows not." Of Ephesus, "you have left your first love." Of Sardis, "you have a name that you live and are dead." So blind are we to our spiritual declensions!

All are not believers who believe themselves to be such. The divine touchstone is, "by their fruits you shall know them." When Christians are sometimes led to doubt the sincerity of their faith, it is often attributed to the temptation of Satan; but this may not always be the case. Had the church of Laodicea exercised a holy jealousy over herself, that very fear of self-deception would have indicated much self-knowledge and spiritual discernment; and might, through grace, have preserved her from degenerating into that state of lukewarmness, which evidently originated in pride and self-conceit.

Satan not infrequently harasses the true believer with desponding fears; while he buoys up the mere nominal professor with presumptuous hopes. These desponding fears, if indulged to excess, are injurious to the believer’s advancement in holiness. They wound his peace, and are dishonorable to a faithful, loving Savior.

Yet, if these fearful apprehensions lead him to closer self-examination, and greater searchings of heart; to more fervent supplication, and increased watchfulness; then Satan is foiled, and the believer, rescued from the power of the enemy, through the unfailing grace of the Redeemer, is made to come off more than conqueror, and to sing with joy in the ways of the Lord. When the believer in Jesus has attained to this happy state, his soul is in a right frame: humble, watchful, and holy. Being taught in the school of Christ to know himself and his Savior, he proceeds with steady step towards the heavenly Canaan, under the equalizing influence of hope and fear.

Everything which can comfort the child of God is recorded by the pen of eternal truth. As his salvation is all of grace in its origin, so is it also in its progress and consummation. "God is faithful, who has promised." "He who has begun the good work, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Nothing can be stronger than the following assurance of love and mercy which is made to every penitent sinner, flying for refuge to the cross of Christ: "God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. So God has given us both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can take new courage, for we can hold on to his promise with confidence. This confidence is like a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain of heaven into God’s inner sanctuary. Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the

line of Melchizedek." Heb 6:17-20.

Yet, in the Holy Scriptures, we meet with many alarming passages which ought to awaken our solicitude, and cause us to ponder the path of our feet. "The just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." "If we sin willfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." "If, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus, Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning; for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to depart from the holy commandment delivered unto them."

These and other similar passages show us the importance of that proverb, "the fear of the Lord tends to life and he who has it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil."

How many do we see in the course of our lives, who, after flourishing for a season, begin to fade and die! Is it not because the root of the matter was not in them? because their hearts were never savingly changed! because they were never really and truly in a state of grace?

Peter calls such characters, "spots and blemishes." Jude styles them, "spots in your feasts of charity" - "clouds without water - trees without fruit, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever!" Awful words indeed! Oh what need there is for close examination, lest we should be found among those self-deceivers who fancy themselves to be something while they are nothing; and who, after they have made a noisy profession before men, will prove at last mere castaways! The blessed Savior has not left us at uncertainties in these important inquiries. He has given us solid marks whereby to judge of our true state and character: "if you love me, keep my commandments" - "you are my friends, if you do whatever I command you" - "follow me." As love is the surest evidence of faith, so obedience is the truest test of love. How vain, then, is that profession which is destitute of these graces! Universal holiness is the distinguishing mark of genuine Christianity; "Be holy, for I am holy," is the command of him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.

Supreme love to the Lord Jesus Christ is the governing principle of every believer. This sacred attachment to the Savior forms the grand distinction between the children of God and the children of the wicked one. A man may make a reputable profession of religion for a season and appear like a flourishing tree and a fertilizing cloud; but if his heart be destitute of "the true grace of God," he will be found at last to resemble the character reprobated by Jude - "without fruit" and "without water." In seasons of temptation he will wither away, not having a rooted principle of grace in his heart; and thus manifest to the church and the world, by his declension and apostasy, that he was never truly ingrafted into Christ by faith. The force of temptation soon destroys his feeble attachment to the visible church; and he remains a solemn warning to all who call themselves Christians, of the danger of false profession.

"Oh blessed Lord, preserve me, your unworthy creature from this awful state of self-delusion. Oh give me true grace, deep repentance, and fervent love. Unite my soul to yourself in the bonds of the everlasting covenant. Let sin be my daily aversion, and holiness my everlasting delight. Prepare me for the enjoyment of yourself here; and crown all your mercies with the gift of yourself, as my everlasting portion, in your kingdom of glory." In seasons of doubt and gloom, When Satan would drive to despair, Then Christ is the life of my hope, And hope is the life of my prayer. My sins, like a death-bearing cloud, Often hide the dear cross from my view; But Jesus dispersing the mist, Disperses the enemy too.

How kind is our merciful God! His word and his promise how true!

He bids me take courage and fight, With a crucified Jesus in view. Should Satan come in like a flood, And fill me with grief and dismay, The Spirit appears to my aid; His standard drives Satan away. By nature unable to stand, Or vanquish temptation to sin;

Through Jesus, almighty to save, The crown we are certain to win.

03.45-45. ON SELF-DECEPTION

45. ON SELF-DECEPTION A good thought does not consist in simply thinking about good things. We may meditate upon the most excellent subjects, and even feel some delight in them, while our meditations are neither pleasing to God nor profitable to ourselves. From the habit of attending a Gospel ministry, and reading religious publications, we may be led into an evangelical train of thinking; and yet, both the faithful preacher and the pious author may be to us only as the summer shower falling upon the barren rock.

"Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves," is the cautionary voice of revealed truth. There is a danger of being satisfied with the sentimentalism of religion. If a person can express himself with energy and elegance on the grand peculiarities of the Gospel, and thus convey his thoughts with acceptability and usefulness, he may be in danger of substituting this knowledge and gift of utterance, for humble, heart-felt religion. As he is not a Christian who only talks about Christ, so he is not a spiritually-minded man who only thinks about spiritual things. It is a great blessing to have spiritual views; but what do they avail, without spiritual affections, and a spiritual walk?

We are in continual danger of self-deception. What is knowledge without love? What is a ready tongue without genuine experience? David said, "I believed, therefore have I spoken." And Paul, when quoting this passage, adds, "We also believe, and therefore speak." Hence the apostle exhorts the Ephesian converts to speak the truth in love, that they might grow up into Christ in all things; who is the head of his mystical body the church. I would, then, with all solemnity put these searching questions to my heart: Do I esteem Jesus precious? Do I feel him precious? Do I love him as my only Savior? Do I trust wholly in his atonement and intercession? Do I delight in his precepts as well as in his promises? Do these views and feelings make me humble and self-denying, thankful and obedient? Is it my aim so to walk, that I may please God in all things? Am I looking continually to the Holy Spirit for power to repent, believe, love, and obey? Do I daily come as a humble suppliant to the foot of the cross? Have I laid hold by faith on the promised salvation, so freely held out to me in the Gospel of grace? If this be the character of my religion; then my thoughts on good things are good thoughts; they are the inspiration of the Spirit of God, from whom alone "all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed." They are evidential of that spiritual-mindedness, which is life and peace.

Come, Oh my soul, and pour out your heart at a throne of grace. There you may ask for whatever you need, with the fullest assurance that the blessed Jesus will supply your every need out of his inexhaustible fullness.

"Blessed Savior! I ask for a more spiritual mind; a greater purity of heart; an increasing deadness to the world; a growing likeness to you; a more lively faith; more ardency of affection; more love for souls; more knowledge and wisdom; more meekness and forbearance; yes, more of every grace, which will enable me to adorn your Gospel, and glorify your holy name."

How awful is the state of the self-deceiving and self-righteous professor! He builds upon a false foundation; buoys himself up with false hopes; and lulls his conscience to sleep with a false peace. He trusts to an arm of flesh - and his heart departs from the Lord. He cannot brook the thought of being altogether indebted to another, even Jesus, the eternal Son of God, for a free justification; and therefore uses the Savior's merits only as a make-weight in the scale of his own virtues, to counterbalance the weaknesses and failings incident to human nature. "But Christ will sooner abdicate his own, Than stoop from heaven to give the proud a throne."

How different are the views and feelings of the convinced sinner. He sees himself ruined and undone, lying under the curse of a broken law, without strength, without righteousness, and without hope. He feels the weight of the burden of his sins. He sinks under the ponderous load, and finds no help from men or angels. When he views God through the medium of a broken law, he beholds him as an offended Judge, whose uplifted arm is ready to execute the awful sentence. He dreads to think upon God; a slavish fear fills his heart; and horror seizes upon his frame. He looks to the right hand, but finds no rest; and to the left, but obtains no deliverance. In some highly-favored hour, some precious moment, grace, like a stream of light, darts upon his benighted soul. The clouds of despondency begin to break. The thunders of Sinai cease to roar. He hears a still small voice speaking pardon and peace through the blood of Jesus. He listens - he can scarcely believe the sound, which in an inward, yet powerful manner, reaches his trembling soul. But he is not deceived. The light gradually increases. The divine Spirit, through the written or preached word, reveals to his now prepared mind the adorable crucified Jesus, in all the glories of redeeming love. He now views the Almighty in a new, endearing aspect. He sees him as a tender, reconciled Father in Jesus Christ; infinitely just and holy, yet forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. He flies to the hope set before him in the Gospel, and seeks refuge from the storms of wrath in the wounded side of Jesus.

"Rock of ages! cleft for me, Let me hide myself in thee," is the earnest prayer of his heart. By faith he is clothed in the Savior's righteousness, armed with strength for the spiritual combat, and sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Joy and peace now fill his soul; love constrains him to obedience; and childlike confidence in the promises supports him under every trial. He seeks the glory of his Redeemer; loves his cause and people; pleads nothing but his merits before the throne; and counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ his Lord. He hates and resists those sins which once he loved, and renounces that world which so much enamored him. Thus, by a progressive sanctification, he goes on from strength to strength, until he finally appears before God in Zion.

Such are the blessed effects of the Gospel, when it comes with power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance. It invariably produces works of faith, labors of love, and patience of hope. It brings glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good-will towards men. It turns the lion into the lamb; the desert into the garden of the Lord. It converts the impure and savage heart into a habitation fit for the mild and holy Dove. Old things pass away - and behold, all things become new.

How divinely glorious, then, is the religion of Jesus! It restores the sinner to the divine favor; it renews him after the divine image; it redeems him from the depths of hell; and raises him to the highest seats in glory! What tongue can speak, or what heart conceive, the richness and extent of

human redemption? How cheering is the soul-enlivening truth: that "all are welcome to these blessings to whom these blessings are welcome." Lord, make me willing in the day of your power. Seal this great salvation to my heart, and make me your henceforth forever.

Come, Holy Spirit, from above, Oh source of light and fire of love;

Come, dwell within my longing breast, And give my troubled conscience rest.

Almighty Visitant, dispel The dark designs and storms of hell;

Exert your mighty power divine;

While beams of mercy o’er me shine.

Subdue every rebel inbred foe, Which only you and conscience know:

Purge out that hated leaven, sin, How deep soever it lies within.

Take from me unbelief and pride, That spear which pierced my Savior’s side;

Destroy each lust, until you alone Are seated on affection’s throne.

Come, Holy Spirit, from above, In all the energy of love;

Come, seal salvation to my heart, And never from my soul depart.

Through all my journeyings here below, Oh, do your light and truth bestow; And when my earthly toils are over, Oh. be my bliss for evermore!

03.46-46. ON LUKEWARMNESS

46. ON LUKEWARMNESS The path of the true Christian lies remote from unbelief and lukewarmness. Thousands who profess to believe the Gospel, are indifferent to its precepts and promises; and tens of thousands, though nominally Christian, are opposed to it through unbelief. Hence the zeal of the true believer is reviled by the infidel as fanaticism, and by the lukewarm professor as unwarranted obsession. No state of heart is more revolting to a God of love, than a state of spiritual lukewarmness. Bodily sickness and earthly privations are slight evils, when compared with this spiritual distemper. It is most offensive to that gracious Being, who unrobed himself of his glories, who condescended to become a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; that we hell-deserving sinners be rescued from the burning wrath, and be received into heavenly glory.

Outward prosperity, the admiration of friends, self-love, and the gradual omission of watchfulness and prayer, lead us insensibly towards this dangerous precipice, down which thousands have fallen, and from which nothing but sovereign grace can preserve us. The natural inclination of the heart is from God; and even when renewed in righteousness, it feels the force of this evil inclination, the moment it relaxes in the exercise of faith and prayer. Believers in Jesus should therefore dread nothing so much as leaving their first love, and backsliding in heart. All spiritual declensions begin in the heart and in the closet; and though slow at first, yet they increase with awful rapidity as the principle of grace is weakened through the indulgence of sin.

If reason and experience tell us that the surest preservative against falling down a precipice, is to keep at a distance from its edge; surely that must be the safest path for a Christian, which lies the most remote from spiritual declension. Those impressions which are made merely upon the passions, soon degenerate into lukewarmness, when the novelty ceases, or when persecution arises because of the word. This lukewarmness is rapidly succeeded by coldness, and coldness by contempt; for "evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." But what is painfully true must not be withheld- even real Christians may grow lukewarm for a season, through the power of temptation, the force of indwelling sin, the fear of man, or the blandishments of the world. They may fall asleep in the arbor of carnal ease, or on the soft couch of worldly prosperity; and by thus grieving and quenching the Spirit, lose for a time the sensible enjoyment of divine love, as well as the evidence of their adoption into the family of God. Awful state! most seriously to be dreaded. No eclipse is so dark as the hidings of the divine countenance. For this, they shall be made to smart and mourn; for this, they shall go heavily, "as one that mourns for his mother," when they are awakened by the voice of mercy, and called to look upon him whom they have pierced by their ingratitude and declension. This sinful wandering from God does not destroy their sonship - for the word of truth declares, that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" - any more than the disobedience of a child towards an earthly father makes him not a child. He is still a child, though a disobedient child. The father is displeased, and withholds his regards. The wayward child is made to know this, either by correction, distance of manner, or the withholding of some favor. Hence he is brought to see, to

fret, and to lament his disobedience; to long after reconciliation; and never to rest easy, or become happy, until the displeasure is removed and confidence and comfort are restored. In this manner God deals with his redeemed people, when they decline and disobey. He hides his face, and they are troubled. He blows upon their comforts, and they wither. He has a thousand ways of manifesting his displeasure, both in the course of his providence, and in the actings of his grace. But love is still inscribed upon all these chastening dispensations. How gracious is the voice of their heavenly Father, speaking to his wayward children through his word! "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." "Whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives." "You shall consider in your heart, that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you." "I will be his Father, and he shall be my son; if he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men, but my mercy shall not depart from him" "Behold! happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore, despise not the chastening of the Almighty." Is not this the language of a loving, tender parent, who seeks the good of his rebellious children?

All sin is productive of sorrow, and naturally leads to the chambers of death. Blessed, then, are those souls whom grace has brought within the bonds of the covenant. If they wander from the fold, they shall be mercifully driven into it again, through the faithfulness of the good Shepherd, who has said, "I will hedge up your way with thorns; I will never leave you nor forsake you" But let no one dare to presume upon the mercy of God, and sin that grace may abound. Such conduct would prove the person so acting to be destitute of faith and love. Should any deluded sinner be led by Satan so to abuse the grace of the Gospel, he may be allowed to follow the wicked devices of his own depraved heart, until he fall, as a vessel fitted for destruction, into the abyss of hell.

It is the part of true wisdom to distinguish between the privileges of God’s children, and the abuse of those privileges. Who would condemn the noble faculty of speech, because thousands pervert it to the basest purposes? Is there any one gift of providence, which is not, by some, converted into an instrument of wickedness? But let it ever be remembered, that those who abuse the blessings, either of providence or grace, must bear the consequences of such impiety, whoever they be; for God is no respecter of people.

It is evident, then, that if we do not enjoy peace through believing, there must be something wrong either in our views or in our hearts. Examine, Oh my soul, where the evil lies; for peace is the sacred legacy which Christ left to his church when he said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you."

God in Christ is the Father of all his redeemed people. Now, a loving, obedient child delights in the society of a tender parent. He comes to his father cheerfully, and without fear. He tells him his little needs, and sincerely and sorrowfully confesses any fault which may have been committed against so loving a parent. But if a child dreads his parent, or feels shy, and avoids his company, even when his father is manifesting nothing but kindness towards him; must there not be something wrong in the heart of such a child? Does not the child either mistake the character of the parent, or feel a consciousness of some indulged sin, which is the latent cause of this defect in duty? The Gospel inspires confidence and love. The moment we believe in Jesus with the heart, that moment we obtain peace with God, and pass from death unto life. This peace of justification cannot be broken, because it is founded on the atonement of Christ, who is "our peace," and "has made

peace for us through the blood of the cross." The sins of believers cannot destroy this peace, which is immutable; since Jesus, foreseeing the sins of his people, atoned for them by the one sacrifice of himself. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." The debt was paid; the satisfaction was made, and fully accepted; when the Savior cried out, "It is finished!" and bowed his head and died! But the peace of sanctification- that peace of God which is the sweet fruit of the Spirit - may be ruffled. Every sin disturbs this peace, like the agitating wind, or the pebble cast into the glassy lake. To preserve this inward peace, we must go continually to Jesus. As the feet contract defilement by walking through a miry road, so our souls have need to be washed every hour from every hour's defilement, while journeying through a sinful world. As peace with God is not the result of our obedience, but of Christ's atonement, and, as such, cannot be broken; so the enjoyment of that peace of God which passes all understanding, and which is the work of the Spirit in our hearts, can only be maintained by constant prayer; by delighting in the study of God's word; by watching against the workings of indwelling sin; by walking closely with God in all holy obedience; and by a daily application, through faith, to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness.

Every approach to lukewarmness is destructive to our peace. To keep the heart under a lively sense of the love of God, we must never put our sins between our souls and the Savior. This will only obscure his grace and bring distress upon our minds. We must look at them as laid upon Christ when he hung upon the cross. Oh! that nothing, no, not a finger, may be placed between Jesus and my soul, lest it obstruct my view of his full and free redemption!

Many look at their sins, instead of their Savior; or at their sins as lying between them and their Savior; and so are discouraged, by false fear, from coming to him. But this is a device of Satan. We must remember that Christ was made a curse for us when he hung upon the cross; that he there made a full atonement for all the sins of all his believing people; for thus says the apostle, "He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity;" "having forgiven you all trespasses." Oh blessed revelation of grace and mercy! This apprehension of Christ and his all-sufficient merits will banish every doubt and fear; prevent that hateful lukewarmness which is the very bane of godliness; and cause our hearts to burn with holy love; and to overflow in grateful praise.

Oh heavenly Father! be graciously pleased to preserve my soul from this evil of lukewarmness, and from every approach to spiritual indifference and declension. Let the sacred fire of love ever burn upon the altar of my heart. Keep me humble and active, zealous and self-denying, until called to your courts above where all your servants shall serve you with ever-growing delight through the countless ages of eternity.

You saints, who taste the holy joys, Which from the Gospel sweetly flow; Can you behold with unconcern A world deep sunk in guilt and woe?

Behold the millions bound with sin, Surrounded by the shades of night;

Behold, until pity drops the tear, Until zeal awakens at the sight.

Arouse, you torpid saints, and bend Your knees with humble, contrite shame, That you so little pain have felt For those who know not Jesus' name.

Come, join that little holy band, Who labor to convert a world;

Join the victorious host of God, Whose peaceful banners are unfurled.

Pour out your consecrated store;

Enrich the treasury divine;

Pour out the fervent heart-felt prayer, Until truth through every region shine. The cause is great - the promise sure; The work of mercy shall be done:

Eternal love has firm decreed The heathen to the eternal Song of Solomon

03.47-47. ON FORGETFULNESS OF GOD

47. ON FORGETFULNESS OF GOD

How awful is the declaration of the royal Psalmist! "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." Sin is a dreadful evil, under whatever guise it may appear; whether in the loose attire of wickedness, in the brazen armor of profaneness, in the fringed garment of pharisaical pride, or in the rough clothing of sanctimonious austerity. Sin is an infinite evil, whose extent cannot be measured; its malignant nature may be ascertained by the poisonous fruits which it daily produces in the world; and by those tremendous denunciations of wrath, which are revealed against it in the word of God. But if we would learn what an evil and bitter thing sin really is, we must go to Mount Calvary, and there contemplate the amazing price which Jesus, the eternal Son of God, paid to infinite Justice for our redemption, when he himself became the High Priest - the Victim - and the Altar.

"Oh blessed Savior! give me faith to behold this great sight with a broken, believing, grateful heart. Enable me to look unto you and live; yes, to take shelter in you as in a rock of safety; and while, like Moses, I stand in the cleft of the rock, may I view by faith all your goodness pass before me, and hear your gracious name proclaimed in accents of love." The wicked and all who forget God shall be turned into hell. What a large portion of mankind does this embrace. Awfully tremendous thought! The profligate, and the comparatively amiable and moral who forget God, are here classed together. The Scripture meaning of the term forget, is not a total failure of the recollection respecting the being of a God, but a practical disregard of his presence and authority; it is living without God in the world; acting as if he either saw not, or heeded not, the conduct of his moral creatures. Those who now forget his omniscience, shall before long be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. All his perfections, his slighted mercies, his violated laws, and his abused Gospel, shall be eternally glorified in their destruction. Oh! my soul, flee to the mountain, escape for your life, tarry not in, all the plain, look not behind you, linger not, lest you be consumed.

How happy are they who love to meditate upon God, and to whom the Lord manifests his mercy! "A book of remembrance is kept before him of those who think upon his name." "They shall be mine, says the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels." Believers are the Lord’s jewels; they are precious in his sight; they are his peculiar treasure, being the purchase of his own most precious blood. They delight themselves in the Lord, in his perfections, promises, commands, and ordinances, and are filled with the abundance of peace. Oh! that I may have an increasing evidence of my interest in Jesus, by thus delighting in him, and loving him above every created good!

If forgetfulness of God be so heinous a sin, as in the very nature of things it must be; then, how important it is to have right views and feelings respecting our obligations to our Almighty Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer. The divine command, "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth," forms the basis of happiness; but the divine lamentation, "My people have forgotten me

days without number," proves us to be children of the fall.

Everything in religion depends upon the right state of the heart! If the main-spring be wrong, the whole movement of the machine must be in disorder. In Scripture, we find how great a stress is laid by him who looks at the heart, on the inward principle. The motive must be pure, or the work is hateful in his sight. Faith working by love, is the Gospel spring of action. This is beautifully set forth by Paul, in the eleventh chapter to the Hebrews, where he produces the most interesting witnesses to the power and efficacy of faith.

Though millions of wretched sinners forget God, in the midst of their pleasures and pursuits; yet, in every age, he has had a people to show forth his praise. God never left himself without witnesses. The apostle speaks of them as "a great cloud of witnesses:" and in the heavenly world, John, when wrapped in sacred vision, beheld a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands. That unconverted people should habitually live in a forgetfulness of the Savior, is not incredible. They have no love to Jesus, and therefore their thoughts never dwell upon him. But that his people should so much forget him; that they should live so little under the abiding influence of his presence; that they should be so carried away with the trifles of time, to the sinful neglect of eternity; is truly painful. Nothing can more fully testify to the power of that sin which dwells in us, or prove more forcibly the continual necessity for watchfulness and prayer, than this criminal forgetfulness of our Almighty Friend and Savior. The best preservative against the evil of forgetfulness, is a heartfelt compliance with the Redeemer's command: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." If the glory of God be our first and chief concern; if our most anxious desire be that of the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but you, and there is none upon earth I desire beside you;" if Jesus is precious to us, and all else esteemed as nothing when compared with him; then like Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, we shall walk before God with a perfect heart, upright and sincere; then like Moses, we shall endure as seeing him who is invisible; and like David, we shall set the Lord always before us. With the apostles, we shall then do all to the glory of God; and our whole desire and aim will be, that "Christ may be magnified in our bodies, whether it be by life or death."

Such is the sacred purpose of the true believer. His aim is high; yet he deeply deplores those inbred sins which prevent his constant elevation. He resembles a bird, to whose foot a stone is tied. He struggles to ascend, but feels the gravitating force of nature. Yet grace enables him to rise above the level of the world, and to soar higher and higher towards the heavenly regions. Not so the generality of mankind. Most men die as they live. An awful forgetfulness marks their lives, and a stupid unconcern their deaths. If conscience should perchance be heard amid the clamor of a thousand lusts, each panting for gratification, Satan, too crafty to deny the claims of conscience, whispers the pacifying expedient in the sinner's ear, "a death bed repentance". Thus Satan lulls his fears to rest; well knowing that the heart increases in its hardness by delay, and feels the less inclined to repent, in proportion as it defers repentance.

"Lord, deliver me from this delusion of the artful enemy. Keep my conscience awake. Enable me to seek first your kingdom of grace; that, at death, I may be admitted into your kingdom of glory, through the merits of my Redeemer."

Why is my heart so wayward grown, So prone to start aside? Where are the joys and comforts flown, Which once my God supplied? Have his redeeming mercies ceased In copious streams to flow?

Why are his judgments now increased, To fill my heart with woe?

Alas! a cold, deceitful heart Has grieved the Holy Dove; My sins have said - Arise, depart; And now I mourn his love.

Dark and deserted is my soul;

I hear the lion roar;

Lord, make a trembling sinner whole, Who lies at mercy’s door. In pity listen to my moan, Return with pardoning grace;

Oh! take away this heart of stone And you shall have the praise.

03.48-48. ON WATCHFULNESS

48. ON WATCHFULNESS This life is a state of probation. Hence trials are necessary in order to prove us, as gold is tried in the fire. God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does he tempt any man; but we are tempted when we are drawn aside of our own lust and enticed. Satan works upon our corrupt nature, and there he finds materials ready prepared for his destructive purpose.

While we are in an unrenewed state, we are under the dominion of sin. We naturally love it, and are captivated by it; for our heart is only evil continually. honorable

Common prudence and worldly interest, as well as natural conscience, may prevent an unconverted man from committing many crimes which would outrage society. The fear of punishment and the dread of public infamy may operate to the prevention of those evils, which would bring a man under the lash of the violated laws of his country. The certain consequence of disease and poverty attendant on some vices, proves a partial check to their commission; though, alas! too weak to arrest the general torrent of licentiousness.

Thus, by the constant operation of these inferior motives, and through the goodness of a restraining providence, we are happily preserved from that inundation of iniquity, which would otherwise destroy the fabric of society.

There are, it is true, many amiable characters to be found, even among those who are hostile to the spirit of the Gospel, who may be considered as ornaments in the midst of surrounding depravity and pollution. Polite education and civilized society can varnish over the old Adam! But these amiable worldlings reject, as fanatical, those unwelcome declarations of Scripture, which assert the radical corruption of our nature, and the absolute necessity of being born again of the Spirit. In the midst of all this boasted morality - this vaunted amiability of temper - this studious endeavor to appear honorable in the eyes of each other - we perceive no filial fear of God; no hatred of sin; no delight in holiness; no cordial reception of the blessed Jesus as the only Savior from guilt and pollution; no self-abhorrence; no watchfulness against the sins of the heart; no deadness to the vanities and smiles of the world.

Under every garb, whether plain or splendid, the carnal mind is enmity against God. This truth cannot be too much impressed upon the mind and conscience. Hence we see the necessity for renewing grace; for, until we are united to Christ by a true faith, we cannot receive those powerful principles of love and fear, which operate as perpetual excitements to holy obedience, and constant checks to presumption and carnal security. When we are thus savingly united to Jesus, we receive out of his fullness every needful grace. Being "accepted in the beloved," we have peace with God; we are adopted into his family; are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise; enjoy sweet fellowship with the Father and the Son; and, experiencing the strengthening consolations of the Spirit, are enabled to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God. Such is the character, walk, and privilege of every true believer. "Lord, make me a branch in Jesus, the living vine. Create my soul anew, and fill me with every holy, pure, and

heavenly affection."

Great, indeed, is the character of a child of God; yet, he is renewed but in part. The Canaanites are still in the land. Satan knows this well, and tries most assiduously to regain possession of that heart from which grace has dislodged him. To effect his purpose, he studies tempers, natural constitutions, weaknesses, and peculiar situations in which believers are placed; and thus endeavors to suit his temptations to the vulnerable parts of the Christian citadel.

How needful, then, is the duty of watchfulness! If an army, passing through an enemy's country, appoints its out-posts and sentinels to observe the motions of the inhabitants, lest it should be surprised by an opposing force, and unexpectedly defeated; surely it behooves the Christian soldier to obey the command of the great Captain of his salvation; "watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation."

Through the slothfulness and unwatchfulness of believers, Satan too often makes sad inroads into their peace and purity.

Mr. Winter, in one of his letters, makes this striking observation: "Watchfulness and prayer form the Christian's entrenchment. These are the lines our enemy cannot break. Be the person who uses them ever so weak, he will be sure to stand; be the person who neglects them ever so strong in himself, ever so judiciously taught, or ever so extensive in his knowledge, he is liable to fall." The farther the experienced Christian advances in his earthly pilgrimage, the more he learns how needful to his safety are watchfulness and prayer.

There are some who treat as legal this circumspection and self-distrust. But the real believer well knows, that the more lively his faith is, the more alive he himself is to the motions of his spiritual enemies, lest he should be overcome by some sudden temptation.

There are three evils against which we should earnestly pray to be preserved: indecision - indifference - and insensibility. When the mind begins to be first affected with the importance of religion, many things are done, which were before omitted. But no sooner is the religious feeling of the heart made known to the world by this outward change of conduct, than the artillery of Satan is directed against the young professor; and too often, alas! proves successful in shaking the newly formed purpose of taking up the cross and following Christ. The enemy of souls now plies his warlike engines with Satanic violence. Worldly interest - carnal ease - false shame - the fear of man - the frowns of relations - and the raillery of sinful companions, are all employed with consummate skill to undermine his good resolves. These powerful attacks, if not resisted through the energy of almighty grace, soon produce indecision in the purpose: from indecision, the step is easy to indifference; from indifference to the voice of conscience the transition is quick to insensibility; from insensibility to the threatenings of God, how short is the road to obduracy - the very seal of perdition. Who can contemplate this awful progress of declension, and not acknowledge the immense importance of watchfulness and prayer?

There cannot be a more humbling representation of the fallen state of man, than in the falls of those eminent saints whose lives are recorded in the pages of Scripture. The Almighty, in his wisdom, may have permitted these falls, to humble the best of men, by leading them to feel that their steadfastness in holiness does not depend upon their strength, but on his grace, that their resistance of evil is not from any natural power of their own, but entirely from the communicated

influence of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts. When Noah lived, before the flood, he testified as a "preacher of righteousness" against the prevailing iniquity of the age. He walked with God in faith, fear, love, and obedience, and found grace in his sight. But when safe in the bosom of his family, a monument of mercy, after the tremendous deluge, he drank wine and was drunken, and lay uncovered in his tent! Can this be Noah - the holy Noah? Then let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.

Lot, whose righteous soul was vexed from day to day with the filthy conversation of the wicked, when rescued by the hand of mercy from the devoted cities of the plain, and safely sheltered in the mountain, fell into the combined atrocity of drunkenness and incest. This speaks with awful voice, "do not be high-minded, but fear."

David, the man after God’s own heart, who never once defiled his soul by heathen worship, when raised to the throne of Israel, and enjoying rest in his palace, was enticed by deceitful lusts into the dreadful sins of adultery and murder.

Solomon, who was honored with the name of Jedidiah, (beloved of the Lord), who built a splendid temple for the worship of Jehovah, and whose wisdom attracted the Queen of Sheba to Jerusalem; when grown old, and after having witnessed the faithfulness of God in the promises made to him on ascending the throne, "was turned after other gods," through the allurements of "his foreign wives;" and erected "high places" for the abominations of the heathen. Surely we must say, "Lord, what is man, that you should be mindful of him!"

Hezekiah, so mercifully raised from a bed of death, was lifted up with pride, perhaps on account of the stupendous miracle wrought on his behalf.

Peter, so zealous and confident, denied his Lord with oaths and curses.

Abraham, so eminent for faith, betrayed the evil of mistrust, showing that the fear of man brings a snare.

Jacob, under the semblance of piety and filial affection, with a lie obtained his father’s blessing.

Moses, so renowned for meekness, was condemned to die in the wilderness, because he spoke unadvisedly with his lips.

Aaron, the high priest of the Lord, made a golden calf, around which the people danced to their shame.

How faithful is the pen of inspiration; what indubitable marks of divinity are stamped upon the holy Scriptures! Here, Truth with impartial hand dips her pencil, now in the brighter, now in the darker colors, and thus draws her characters to the very life. Here we see man, just as he is, both by nature and grace. If characters so eminent for holiness have been stained with sin, where shall we find sinless perfection in this lower world? All need the blood of Jesus; all need the preserving grace of God; all need the constant exercise of watchfulness and prayer.

Those who take encouragement from these painful instances of corruption in the best of men, to trifle with sin; who, like Ham, delight to sport with the spiritual nakedness of God’s children; who despise the truths of the Bible, because some holy characters recorded in it have been drawn by

Satan and their own hearts into grievous crimes; evidence a total ignorance of their own hearts, and a total destitution of that grace, which, through the blessed truths of Scripture, leads men to holiness, to happiness, and heaven.

While infidels tauntingly expose the sins of believers, let them behold with solemn awe the displeasure of the Almighty, as manifested in their temporal afflictions and those heart-rending sorrows, which, like piercing thorns, sprang out of their iniquities. And when believers contemplate these Scripture characters, let them seek for grace to avoid their falls, and to copy their unfeigned repentance. The all-conquering Lamb, who fought and overcame Satan by dying upon the cross for our redemption, will not allow him to exult with shouts of final victory. He raises the fallen believer through an act of inconceivable, unmerited mercy; fills him with shame and self-abhorrence; leads him to the fountain of his own most precious blood; imparts to him a fresh supply of his Holy Spirit; and thus enables him to renew the conflict with unabated vigor, in deep humility, self-distrust, and simple reliance on his almighty power, combined with constant vigilance against the motions of every inward and outward foe. But the soul which shall dare to presume upon such mercy, and so indulge in sin, is in the utmost peril of falling into perdition; for this very spirit of daring proves a man to be a self-deceiver, an enemy of all righteousness. A true believer may fall into sin; but he cannot sin on the principle that grace may abound, or because Jesus has said, "my sheep shall never perish;" well knowing that the character of Christ’s sheep is, that they hear the Shepherd’s voice and follow him. A true believer may fall into sin; but he cannot sin habitually, or with continued delight - well knowing that "whoever is born of God does not commit sin; for his seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." To do so, would prove him a hypocrite, and not a child of God. The grace of the Gospel gives no license to iniquity. To imagine for a moment that it grants the slightest accommodation to sin, is to cast a foul reproach upon the spotless purity of that Holy Being from whom all grace proceeds. That evil men should abuse this revelation of mercy, is no more marvelous than that they do every hour abuse the choicest blessings of providence. It is strange to think how incorrectly men reason, in general, about spiritual things. They can invent a thousand objections against what they do not love; which objections they would instantly repel, if brought against some favorite worldly scheme.

I perceive, then, that there is great need to watch against the false reasonings of my own mind. If I feel tempted to parley with sin, to grow lukewarm in religion, or to draw back into the world, let me ask myself these solemn questions - Is my heavenly Father less kind and gracious than when I first knew the Lord? Is my Savior less lovely and precious in the eyes of saints and angels? Is the Divine Spirit less holy and comforting to the tried believer? Is sin less hateful in the sight of God, and less destructive to the soul? Is Satan less watchful and subtle against the sheep of Christ? Is the world less vain and deceitful in its nature and pursuits? Is the heart less vile and treacherous in its inward workings? Is heaven less glorious and desirable to the weary pilgrim? Is hell less dreadful and tormenting to the perishing sinner? Have any of these objects changed their nature, since first the light of truth broke in upon my mind? If not, then why should I begin to change my views and feelings respecting them? Why grow lukewarm and indifferent? Oh! what need for suspicion, lest all should not be right! What need for watchfulness, self-examination, and prayer.

If these realities are still the same - if the truths of God are immutable - then why should I be less vigilant, less prayerful, less anxious about these infinitely momentous truths? Time is rapidly receding; eternity is rapidly advancing. My state must soon be irrevocably fixed in a world of

happiness or misery. Then why am I so cold, so indifferent to the highest interests of my immortal soul? Is it not owing to the prevalence of inward corruption, and the workings of Satan in my depraved heart?

"Blessed Jesus! look in mercy upon a wretched, lost creature. Were I to be crushed, as in a moment, and sent quick into hell, it would be righteous judgment. But you are gracious, you are full of compassion, you came to seek and to save rebellious sinners. Lord, save me - help me - undertake for me. Snatch me as a brand out of the burning fire. Deliver me from the jaws of that roaring lion, who is ever going about, seeking whom he may devour. Lord, give me not over to him as a prey. Allow me not to be carried captive by him at his will. Fill me with a constant dread of sin; make me ever watchful and vigilant. Bear me in your arms of love, through all tile dangers of my earthly course, until, safe removed from every storm, I serve you in your everlasting kingdom."

Oh! gracious Friend of sinners, Sanctify my guilty soul;

Speak the word, Almighty Savior, And your servant shall be whole.

Save me from corruption’s power, Save me from Satanic wiles;

Spread your guardian wings around me Cheer me with your heavenly smiles. As I wander through the desert, Be my constant help and stay:

Shine upon my path, and lead me To the realms of endless day.

Then, Oh then, in sweetest rapture, Free from danger, loud I’ll sing, In the grand celestial chorus, Glory to the Immortal King.

03.49-49. ON THE DANGER OF RICHES

49. ON THE DANGER OF RICHES

There is a beautiful harmony in the doctrines and precepts of Scripture, whether promulgated under the Patriarchal, Mosaic, or Christian dispensation, which strikingly proves its divine origin. Every enlightened reader of the Bible will perceive a rich vein of truth running through the whole of the sacred volume. What is obscurely revealed under the patriarchal dispensation, is more fully made known under the Law, and exhibited in its brightest colors by the Gospel. A short review of the Scriptures, with respect to the sin of covetousness, will verify this observation.

Job, when vindicating his character, makes the following declaration: "Have I put my trust in money or felt secure because of my gold? Does my happiness depend on my wealth and all that I own? Have I looked at the sun shining in the skies, or the moon walking down its silver pathway, and been secretly enticed in my heart to worship them? If so, I should be punished by the judges, for it would mean I had denied the God of heaven." Job 31:24-28. We have here the closest connection between covetousness and idolatry. The two sins are classed together as twin evils springing from one common source, the unbelief and earthliness of the heart. This is in strict accordance with the other parts of the sacred oracle. Paul styles covetousness, idolatry; (Col 3:5;) and a covetous man an idolater. (Eph 5:5.) Our Savior explains the nature of this idolatry: "How hard is it for those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" To possess wealth, when imparted in the providence of God, is not sinful; for it was said of Abraham by his servant Eleazar, "The Lord has blessed my master greatly and he has become great; and he has given him flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and men-servants and maid-servants, and camels and donkeys." But the sin lies in trusting in these things; hence Job says, "If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, you are my confidence; if I have rejoiced because my wealth was great - I would have denied the God that is above."

David was aware of the same danger arising from the possession of wealth, and he gives this salutary caution: "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them." Or in the words of Job, "make them not your hope and your confidence." Solomon points out the same evil "He that trusts in his riches shall fall." (Pro 11:28.) Moses strongly cautions the Israelites against this misuse of temporal things: "The Lord your God will soon bring you into the land he swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is a land filled with large, prosperous cities that you did not build. The houses will be richly stocked with goods you did not produce. You will draw water from cisterns you did not dig, and you will eat from vineyards and olive trees you did not plant. When you have eaten your fill in this land, be careful not to forget the Lord, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt." Deu 6:10-12. From where does this proneness to depart from God arise? this cleaving to earthly things? It springs from the fall of Adam. It is the very fault and corruption of our nature. We are all naturally idolaters, "loving the creature more than the Creator, who is over all, blessed for evermore;" and therefore this evil justly exposes us to eternal death. Nothing but divine grace can save us from this idolatrous attachment to earth. Who does not daily

feel its influence? Oh! how much I need the sovereign grace of God to wean my affections from the world, and cause me to seek my all in him! Herein consists true happiness. Until God in Christ be my all-sufficient, my all-satisfying portion, I cannot be truly happy. A divided heart must of necessity be a wretched heart. "Lord, unite my heart to fear your name. Collect my scattered powers, and let them work for you alone. As it was with the Israelites, so may it be with me. In my departure out of a wicked world, let not 'a hoof be left behind.' May all that I possess be wholly consecrated unto you." Were we told of some highly-favored individual, whose every desire after wealth and pleasure might be gratified; should we not be ready to exclaim, this must be a happy man? A slight acquaintance with human character would soon dissipate this illusion. The desire of man which is the very essence of covetousness, makes us dissatisfied with what we already possess. While an increase of possessions, by increasing our cares and troubles, tends only to diminish our portion of actual enjoyment. The experience of Solomon, so feelingly described in the book of Ecclesiastes, speaks volumes on this subject. He made the dangerous experiment of gratifying his desires, with an eagerness which could only he equaled by his means of gratification- I thought in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless. "Laughter," I said, "is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?" I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly--my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well--the delights of the heart of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor." Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun." Ecc 2:1-10. But what was the fruit of such unbounded gratification, which by thousands is esteemed the climax of human happiness? Hear the humiliating confession of Solomon, than whom no one had ever a fairer opportunity of reaping happiness, if ever it sprang out of worldly pleasure "Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun." And after enumerating a variety of vanities, he closes his book with these important words: "Here is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is the duty of every person. God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad." Ecc 12:13-14.

Nothing is so restless as the spirit of a covetous man. He is continually pursuing after a phantom. Dissatisfied and miserable, "They have planted the wind and will harvest the whirlwind. The stalks of wheat wither, producing no grain. And if there is any grain, foreigners will eat it." Hos 8:7. "We are merely moving shadows, and all our busy rushing ends in nothing. We heap up wealth for someone else to spend." Psa 39:6. Solomon felt this when he said, "I hated all my labor which I

had taken under the sun: because I shall leave it unto the man that shall be after me; and who knows whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? This is also meaningless."

How contentedly happy is the child of God! He views every event as directed by Infinite Wisdom; and reviews every gift as the expression of Infinite Love. He knows that God is well acquainted with the nature of his own gifts, and is therefore satisfied with the portion which Infinite Love bestows; as well as with the dispensation by which infinite Wisdom takes away. With childlike acquiescence in the divine disposals, he learns, in whatever state he is, therewith to be content. He does not labor to be rich. He finds, by experience, that riches cannot confer happiness, or health, or honor. He sees many rich men miserable, and many poor men happy. He blesses God for his daily bread; eats his food with gladness and singleness of heart; and praises God for his hourly mercies flowing to him through that precious medium of communication between heaven and earth, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He has, however, covetous desires. He covets earnestly the best gifts. He longs and labors to possess these eternal blessings, which never cloy, but increase the joy and happiness of the soul by their increased possession. He prays with fervent desire for the graces of faith and love; for humility and purity; for the filling of the Spirit; for the presence of the Savior; for the love of the Father; for a heart filled with all the fulness of God. This is the happy man, whose desires are accomplished. He delights in the Lord, and the God of all grace gives him the desires of his heart. The character of his life is contentment with moderation in earthly things, combined with ardent desires after the increase of spiritual blessings. He is diligent in business as a duty; fervent in spirit as a blessedness; active in serving the Lord as his highest honor.

Oh! for this contentment, this thirsting after God, this devotedness to his service and glory! He who trusts in riches, is like one who endeavors to repose upon the foam of a tempestuous sea. No sooner does he throw himself upon it, than it separates, and he sinks as lead in the waters; while he who trusts in the Lord, resembles the man, who, securely stationed upon a rock, sees the billows spend their fury at his feet. He views the wild uproar, and smiles at the storm. In this fallen world, where sin has planted sorrows in awful profusion, is it not amazing, that creatures, liable to continual change, are not solicitous to find a shelter from the tempest? They are anxious, indeed, to obtain rest, but they seek for it where it never can be found - in earthly things.

Men are apt to imagine, that if they can only amass a fortune, and reach the hill of prosperity, they shall escape those troubles which overwhelm the many who dwell in the valley below. But are not mountains the most exposed to storms? Are they not the most bleak and barren parts of the earth? while the sheltered valleys stand so thick with corn, that, in the poetic language of David, "they laugh and sing?"

History furnishes abundant proofs that elevated stations expose men to perpetual dangers, and cause the soul to be barren in those fruits of peace, contentment, and piety, which enrich the heart of the lowly, retired believer. Why, then, should I envy the great, or labor to be rich? Even if I should happily escape the common snares of wealth, yet death will soon transfer it into other hands, and then what will all my riches profit, if at that solemn period I should be destitute of faith and love!

"Lord, make me anxious for the true riches. May I daily lay up my treasure in heaven. May my heart be there. Let no idol be seated on the throne of my affections. May you reign the sovereign Lord within. Oh! may all my powers be subject unto you. May I own no sway but yours. All will then be well. Whether prosperous or afflicted, all things shall work together for my good." The Scriptures point out in the strongest manner the danger of riches. Many monuments of wrath are there presented to our view. Achan, Gehazi, Judas, Ananias, and Sapphira, being dead, yet speak with warning voice. The love of money proved their downfall.

We all naturally love ease. We have a natural love of rest. Toil and pain are alike irksome to the savage and the sage. Those earthly possessions which promise the greatest portion of enjoyment, are the most coveted by mankind in general. In civilized countries it may be said, in the expressive language of Solomon, "Money answers all things." It is able to procure for us those various conveniences which tend to smooth the path of life. It provides us with food and clothing; with innumerable elegancies and superfluities; with opportunities of extending our researches after knowledge, of visiting distant countries, and treasuring up the labors of the dead. Money can command almost everything, but what is most essential to our happiness - peace of conscience, joy in God and victory over sin and death.

Here, then, arises the danger of riches. They furnish us with every requisite to earthly pleasure. They give us a commanding influence over our poorer neighbors; and an importance in the circle in which we move. Hence we secretly pant after their increase. They engross the affections; they fill the mind; they captivate the will; they usurp the place of God in the soul. When riches flow into the coffer, trouble is never apprehended; but when they cease to flow, the darkened clouds seem rapidly to threaten the destruction of our earthly joys; the smile then forsakes the worldling’s countenance; gloom settles upon his once laughing face; despair seizes on his heart, and death not infrequently closes the fatal scene.

Such a state of mind as this, infallibly proves the love of money to be the predominating passion in the soul. And such a state of mind is incompatible with salvation. Our blessed Lord has declared, in words too plain to be misunderstood, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man - trusting in his riches - to enter into the kingdom of God." Paul in like manner bears his testimony against this sin of our nature: "Charge those who are rich in this world, that they do not be high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who gives us all things richly to enjoy." He cautions believers most solemnly against the evil of covetousness, by declaring that "the love of money is at the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows." 1Ti 6:10.

If true believers, we ought again and again to impress upon our hearts this sacred truth- that real happiness consists in having God for our portion; in being satisfied, yes, thankful for the allotments of his providence; in feeling ourselves to be pilgrims and strangers upon earth, hastening along the stream of time to that blessed world, where every trial will be forgotten; or, if remembered, will only, by its recollection, enhance our everlasting joy. This state of mind, this holy frame of heart, is the work of the Spirit, the fruit of faith. "All your children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children." "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you." "Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God’s peace,

which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." Php 4:6-7. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

"Oh, blessed Savior! wean my foolish heart from the world. Save me from the love of money, which is spiritual idolatry. Raise my affections to high and heavenly things. May you in time and through eternity my all in all."

Why, Oh my soul, should earthly joys Detain you prisoner here below? The richest gems are trifling toys, Compared with those believers know.

How glorious their immortal crowns, More dazzling bright than mid-day sun Jesus their happy souls adorns With wreaths, which he himself has won.

How vain are all the scenes of earth, Beneath their now exalted view!

They feel the honors of their birth, The friends or God, and angels too.

Oh! blissful state of holy joy!

Awake, my soul, and upward soar; Your rebel passions now destroy, Let earth engross your heart no more.

Yet, Lord! I look alone to you Exert your sovereign, saving power;

Oh! set my captive spirit free; Be this redemption’s joyful hour!

03.50-50. ON THE THORNS IN THE PARABLE

50. ON THE THORNS IN THE PARABLE In the instructive parable of the sower, our divine Redeemer, who spoke as never man spoke, has discovered to us the nature of those thorns which choke and render unfruitful the good seed of the word of God. "The thorny ground represents those who hear and accept the message, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. And so they never grow into maturity." Luk 8:14.

WORLDLY CARES are thorns. If we are anxious and troubled about many things; anxious about the events of tomorrow, and forecasting evils which have no existence but in our own minds, we are sowing tares and thorns, which must of necessity destroy all the vigor and fruitfulness of the Gospel seed. The work of faith is to perform present duty; and then leave the issue with God, who works all things after the counsel of his own will. We have no power over the varied events of life. Circumstances arise which cannot be foreseen, nor prevented if foreseen. Prudence may lay her plans, but he who rules on high can thwart them all. "There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." It is, then, the part of Christian wisdom to obey the beautiful precept of Solomon: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths." In such a world as this, which is made up of vicissitude and agitations, how highly privileged is the man who can say with David,"The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the strength of my salvation, and my stronghold." Psa 18:2. How calm is that soul whose cares are laid upon God! This is the Christian’s privilege: "Casting all your care upon him, for he cares for you." "Cast your burden upon the Lord, and he will sustain you." Oh my soul, remember who it is that invites you to this rest. It is Jesus - the friend of sinners. How affectionate is his invitation: "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Cares are vexatious to a worldly mind. Afflictions are viewed as so many suspensions of worldly happiness. Poverty is dreaded as the greatest worldly evil; and even religion itself is treated as an enemy, because it demands the separation of the heart from worldly lusts and pleasures. And yet, it is owing to the absence of true religion, that the varied dispensations of Providence become crosses. We meet them in an unsubdued frame of spirit. We murmur and rebel against the correcting hand of our heavenly Father, and thus render that burden heavy, and that yoke grievous, which would otherwise be easy and light. While in this unhappy state of mind, we hear the Gospel with perpetual distraction. The cares of life, like prickling thorns, cover the ground of our heart, and prevent the good seed from springing up and bearing fruit to the glory of God.

"Oh blessed Spirit! awaken my soul to a due solicitude about my everlasting state. Let me not be sowing tares, while your ministers are sowing wheat. Let not my foolish heart by worldly cares choke the precious seed of holy truth. Make me watchful and vigilant. Break up the fallow ground of my heart by deep and abiding convictions, that I may no longer sow among thorns, but yield abundant fruit to the praise of the glory of your grace."

RICHES are thorns. What can riches, so coveted after by the world, do for wretched man, simply considered in themselves? They cannot produce happiness. How many families, overladen with wealth, are made unhappy by the very wealth which they possess! They cannot insure usefulness. How many people do we continually see, who, with the most extensive means of usefulness, are little better than cumberers of the ground! They cannot promote health. How many are rendered the victims of disease, by the facility which wealth affords for gratifying their carnal appetites and luxurious inclinations! They cannot prolong life. How many are cut off in the midst of their splendor, when they were fondly promising to themselves a long succession of joyous years!

If riches cannot procure temporal blessings; if they cannot, by their mere possession, even to their greatest extent, make us happy in ourselves, or useful to others; if they cannot promote health, or prolong life; how much less can they procure spiritual or eternal blessings: the pardon of sin; peace with God; purity of heart; and perpetuity of bliss in heaven! And yet, wealth is the grand desire of the world. To obtain riches, men are willing to risk the loss of soul and all the glories of heaven. The nominally Christian world is bowing down to the golden image which Satan has set up, while all kinds of music are employed to celebrate its praise. Even real professors of godliness have need to watch continually against the seductive influence of the god of this world. He can paint upon the imagination the shadowy glories of the world, and then whisper to the soul, "all these will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me." But Truth lifts up her warning voice to guard her children against the snares of this father of lies: "Those who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Our blessed Lord, whose love is infinite, has given us a double caution: "take heed - and beware - of covetousness; for a man’s life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses." And Paul, writing under the influence of the Spirit of Christ, exhorts us to "let our conversation be without covetousness, and to be content with such things as we have, since God has said: I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Riches, when loved and coveted after, become our idols. And even when they do not captivate the affections, they will soon choke the precious seed of divine truth, if not carefully guarded against. Hence our Lord calls it "the deceitfulness of riches." They draw away the heart insensibly from God, and then they become a curse, and not a blessing. Many who, while in the valley of humiliation, adorned the Gospel and labored with unwearied diligence to promote its extension, have become lukewarm when wealth has filled their coffers.

These characters present an awful instance of the danger of worldly prosperity, and should make every professor of the Gospel tremble, lest, when riches increase, his heart should be lifted up, and he forget the Lord his God. Worldly prosperity is almost always followed by declension. How many Christian families, once the ornaments of the church, have, in their posterity, lost all semblance of piety through the growing prosperity which attended their secular concerns.

Oh blessed Lord, give me grace to covet earnestly the best gifts, even the unsearchable riches of Christ; to labor after the attainment of those riches whose value can never be fully known in this lower world; but after which, all, without exception, are graciously invited to seek, that they may obtain everlasting life.

Blessed Jesus! pearl of great price, may you be my treasure.

"Give what you will; without you, I am poor; And with you, rich; take what you will away."

WORLDLY PLEASURES are thorns. Man has a natural thirst after happiness; but, being blinded through the fall, and having all his appetites vitiated, he is continually seeking that from the world which can only be found in God.

Fallen man, like Cain of old, is a fugitive. He is ever flying from the presence of his Creator, who is the source and center of true felicity. He is daily committing two evils: "forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out to himself broken cisterns which can hold no water."

Hence he is miserable while in quest of happiness. He drinks of the intoxicating wine of carnal gratification; revels for a time in sensual pleasure; and if he awakens to sober recollection, feels a thousand stings, which too often drive him to despair and death.

Consistent professors of godliness readily allow the sinfulness of gross sensual indulgences, and of such worldly amusements as lead directly to the violation of chaste feeling, or into the vortex of fashionable dissipation.

There are, however, pleasures of a sober and innocent kind, which, from their friendly aspect, are unsuspectedly admitted into the heart, and, like the "little foxes, spoil the vines." Few seem to consider that even lawful pleasures, when too eagerly pursued, become sources of pain, by secretly alienating the heart from God.

Hence serious Christians have need to guard against giving too much of their mind and time to those pursuits which may insensibly draw them off from private devotion and the daily duties of social life. The acquirements of music and drawing, as well as the prosecution of literary and philosophical studies, are lawful and agreeable when pursued in subservience to that great end of life so plainly enforced by the apostle: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Religion does not forbid the improvement of our intellectual faculties; it only guards against their abuse.

Lawful things are not always beneficial; and, if abused or used to excess, they become injurious. Society is pleasant; yet it becomes a snare, if it lead us from our secret chamber by its incessant attractions, and thus make us strangers to God and our own hearts.

We are everywhere surrounded with danger. Each pleasure has its poison, and each sweet its snare. And yet, how fleeting! Worldly delights resemble the rose, which droops almost as soon as gathered. Our blessed Lord warns us against those pleasures which too frequently choke the word, as thorns do the growing plant. The enemy knows this well; and, therefore, when young people, especially, begin to feel their consciences awakened under the faithful preaching of the Gospel, he stirs up their carnal friends to carry them into the various gayeties of life, that the incipient workings of divine grace may be destroyed in the very germ.

Oh! then, let us be upon our guard, not only against distracting cares and deceitful riches, but also against delusive pleasures, which, by their smiling face and winning form, would steal away our hearts, and rob us of eternal glory. Worldly pleasures, like Solomon’s many wives, entice the soul to idolatrous attachments and departure from God. There are, however, pleasures pure and

peaceful, holy and heavenly, which never cloy or injure the believer. Communion with God in Christ - the enjoyment of the divine favor, through faith in the blood of Jesus - the varied exercises in reading, meditation, and prayer - the society of experienced Christians - visiting the sick - instructing the young - relieving the poor and needy - pouring the balm of consolation into the troubled breast - directing the wanderer to Jesus - restoring the backslider - reproving the profane - promoting peace - and supporting by active and financial exertions those noble institutions which bless our happy land - form so many streams of pleasure, which at once refresh and fructify the soul.

If to these are added the duties of our secular calling, the endearments of domestic life, the well-timed relaxations of music, painting, and gardening, with the higher gratifications of mental study. Where, we may ask, is the lack of enjoyment to the real Christian? He needs not the vanity of the ball-room; the irritations of the card table; the pollutions of the theater; the snares of the race-track; the frivolity of the circus; nor the debaucheries of the club.

If poor, he seeks not for the noisy mirth of the ale-house, which ends in rags and misery; he is happy in the bosom of his family, with his Bible and his God. Oh that my, thirst may daily increase for the holy enjoyment of pure and undefiled religion!

How insipid are the boasted pleasures of the world, when compared with these soul-reviving delights, which a God of mercy has provided for the enjoyment of Christian pilgrims!

Blessed Jesus! fill my soul with your presence, and then I shall never lack a stream of pure delight, while journeying through this barren wilderness to the heavenly Canaan. Let no cares disturb my peace, no riches deaden my affections, no pleasures enchain my heart. Like the wise husbandman, in mercy eradicate every noxious thorn, and prepare me by your Spirit to receive and cherish the good word of your grace, that I may bring forth fruit a hundred-fold, to the glory of your holy name.

Touched by a sense of love divine, Your goodness, Lord, I feel;

What joy to call the Savior mine! Of endless joys the seal!

Though round my path a thousand snares Are laid by Satan’s art;

Though often assailed by earth-born cares, Those traitors of the heart.

Yet still, dear Lord, beneath your smiles, A heaven of joy appears;

While faith the weary way beguiles, And hope the prospect cheers.

If, through affliction’s darksome vale, I downward bend my way, Oh! may your comforts never fail To shed their cheering ray.

Or, should I mount the dangerous steep, Where earthly honors shine, Upheld by you, nor height nor deep, Shall part my love from thine.

Whatever I be, or rich or poor, I’ll trust your saving name; To all the seed your word is sure, To all who love the Lamb.

Oh! let me taste your goodness more, Each moment as it flies;

Until, landed safe on Canaan’s shore, Where glory never dies, I see my Savior face to face, Without a veil between; And sing loud praises to his grace, Who saved my soul from sin!

03.51-51. ON THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

51. ON THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS The parables of our Savior are full of wisdom and beauty. They are intended to convey some great truth, to which the various appendages are in general to be considered rather as natural accompaniments than as each requiring a forced or fanciful interpretation. We should, therefore, endeavor to ascertain what was the primary object which our Lord had in view, when he delivered these exquisitely beautiful lessons of divine truth, that we may derive that instruction which is inculcated by them. The parables of the net, containing good and bad fish; of the ten virgins, five of whom were wise, and five foolish; of the marriage feast, where one guest was found without a wedding garment; of the tares which sprang up among the wheat; of the vine with fruitful and barren branches; are all designed to show, that, in the visible church, the righteous and the wicked will live together, until the general separation at the day of judgment. The parables of the seed springing up imperceptibly; of the grain of mustard seed, growing from the smallest seed to a great tree; of the leaven, secretly working until the whole lump is leavened; beautifully point out the progress of the Gospel throughout the earth. The parables of the lost sheep, of the lost piece of money, and of the prodigal son, reveal to us, in the most affecting manner, the great love of God in coming to seek and to save that which was lost; the readiness with which he receives returning sinners; and the joy which angels feel at the salvation of men. The parables of the great supper and of the husbandman in the vineyard most strikingly show how men in general, and the Jews in particular, to whom our Lord then addressed himself, despise the offers of divine mercy, and persecute the faithful servants of God who speak to them in his name. The parables of the treasure in the field and of the pearl of great price, call upon us, from the common feeling of worldly prudence, like the wise merchantman, to part with a smaller possession for one of superior value; to give up the trifles of time for the glories of eternity. The parables of the ten pounds, of the talents, and of the sheep and goats, speak directly to the heart, and are calculated to produce the deepest concern respecting that strict account which we must render of every talent committed to our trust. The parable of the barren fig-tree exemplifies the divine patience, through the intercession of Jesus. The good Samaritan beautifully enforces the extensive duty of loving our neighbor as ourselves. The unmerciful servant is a faithful picture of the divine compassion, and of man’s hard-heartedness and ingratitude. The unjust judge, by way of contrast, conveys consolation to the suffering church under all her protracted trials. If this judge, so unjust, avenged the poor widow because she wearied him, shall not a God of justice much more avenge his own elect, though he bear long with them? The Pharisee and the publican gives us a striking view of spiritual pride and spiritual humility. The laborers in the vineyard is full of comfort to the Gentile world, who shall be called by the Gospel, even though it be at the eleventh hour; into the church of God. The two sons very pertinently shows the vast difference between saying and doing. The two debtors, spoken to Simon the Pharisee, and which, from its simplicity, drew from him the confession, that he would love the most to whom the most was forgiven, proves how pardoning mercy melts the heart into love. The sower, by its beauty and perfect adaptation to the human heart, is calculated to enlighten every mind in quest of truth, respecting those hindrances which prevent our profitable hearing of

the Word of God. The servant waiting for his Lord shows us in what posture every believer should be; not sleeping, not rioting, but diligently waiting to meet his Lord at his coming. The rich fool, addressed to the man who so unseasonably interrupted our Savior in his discourse, manifests the folly of heaping up treasure to ourselves, instead of laboring to be rich towards God.

So, in like manner, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus contains much valuable instruction, on a subject which men in general treat with awful indifference - the realities of a future world. This very impressive parable teaches us:

1. That riches and poverty are no sign either of God's favor or displeasure. His enemies often abound in temporal mercies; his friends in temporal affliction. (Luk 16:19-21) His enemies grow harder under the beams of prosperity. His friends are softened and melted in the furnace of adversity. Hence the latter pant more ardently after heaven; the former cleave more closely to the earth.

2. That death is making steady advances towards all, both rich and poor. (Luk 16:22) The rich man's wealth could not bribe death, nor avert his blow. The poor man's poverty did not cause him to be overlooked as too insignificant for the notice of this general destroyer.

3. That our state in the next world has no connection with our outward condition in this world. (Luk 16:23) Here, the rich man fared sumptuously every day; there, he was destitute of a drop of water to cool his tongue. Here, Lazarus was hungry and wretched; there, he was blessed and happy in Abraham's bosom.

4. That there is no mitigation of pain in hell. (Luk 16:24-25) Not one drop of water could be allowed by inexorable justice to alleviate his sufferings, or allay the intensity of the flame.

5. That the torments of hell are eternal. (Luk 16:26) A great gulf is fixed, which forever prevents escape from hell, or relief from heaven. Oh wretched state of unutterable woe!

6. That the soul in hell is in a state of consciousness. (Luk 16:27-28) The rich man looked back and remembered his former life and connections. He had five brethren. He dreaded their coming into the same place of torment; knowing, probably, that his example had helped forwards their impiety. He anticipated only five additional tormentors.

7. That the appearance of a spirit would not convert a soul. (Luk 16:29-31). Conversion is the work of God. He has appointed means for this blessed end; "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rise from the dead." Lord! make me wise in time, that I may be happy in eternity! This parable speaks at once to the understanding, the conscience, and the heart. Yet, it is painful to think how little the human mind is affected by the most solemn truths of revelation. People who profess to believe in the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and who would on no account be deemed infidels, can and do act, from day to day, as if the future eternal world was unreal, and all the promises and threatenings of the Bible without a meaning. If their earthly prospects are likely to be blasted by some improvident connection, and they are timely forewarned of the coming danger, how anxious are they to avail themselves of such friendly intimation, placing the most implicit reliance upon the veracity of their informant, and acting promptly and decidedly upon it. But the reverse is the case, as it respects their spiritual concerns. They are forewarned and admonished in vain. They hope things will end better than religious

people imagine; and thus madly venture upon the awful issue, rather than act as in temporal matters they would have acted. With all their boasted faith, they are unbelievers in practice. They acknowledge the veracity of Scripture, but refuse to obey its dictates. "They have loved idols, and after them they will go." The state of Christendom, it is to be feared, too much resembles this picture. There is a verbal veneration for the word of God, combined with a secret aversion to its holy requirements. But what is faith without works? No better than a tree destitute of its fruit. The faith of God’s elect is according to godliness. The word of truth must not only be believed, but practiced; not only acknowledged, but felt. Its solemn, its consoling, its purifying doctrines must have a transforming influence on the heart. Then, and only then, will the believer be made clean, being sanctified by the truth as it is in Jesus. This change constitutes the characteristic difference between the nominal professor of Christianity and the real believer. They are known by their fruits.

It is truly surprising that the human heart is so little impressed with the nearness of eternity. This insensibility only proves the powerful prevalence of unbelief. A very slight accident or disease, if it affects a vital part of our frame, soon dissolves the natural union between soul and body.

We are constantly walking upon the very borders of the invisible world, where all is unchangeable and eternal; yet we live as if time would never end; or, at least, as if its termination were very distant from us. This can arise only from the earthliness of our hearts; from the astonishing power which visible objects have over us; and from the small influence which unseen, future, eternal realities have upon our hopes and fears. But this small influence springs solely from unbelief. We know that we must die; and yet we live as if we did not believe it. We know that life is uncertain; and yet we lay our plans for years to come, as if nothing were so certain as our continuance here. We profess to believe that God will render unto every man according to his works; and yet we act as if our works would never be noticed in the day of general retribution. We acknowledge that out of Christ there is no salvation; that without holiness no man shall see the Lord; and yet we neglect the Savior, and treat the work of grace upon the heart as fanatical and delusive.

Lord, what is man! What a compound of contrarieties and inconsistencies! Oh give me a heart devoted to your glory, broken off from sin, and weaned from the world.

Dear Jesus, to your cross I bring This treacherous heart of mine;

Oh save me from the serpent’s sting, And make me wholly thine. From unbelief and inward guile Oh! keep my conscience clear;

Midst every deep Satanic wile, Preserve my heart sincere.

Whatever I am, or wish to do, Whatever my thoughts devise, Is all exposed to your view, Though hid from mortal eyes.

Whenever my devious footsteps stray, May I remember thee; And know, through all the dangerous way, That "You, God, seest me."

03.52-52. ON THE THREE ENEMIES

52. ON THE THREE ENEMIES

Why are so many souls deceived and plunged into destruction? Because they will not think. Lack of thought is one of the fruitful sources of human misery. "My people do not consider." A thoughtless mind is one of the characteristics of that broad road which leads to destruction; while anxious inquiry, a solicitous concern, a serious consideration about eternal things, is the first step through grace, into that narrow way which leads unto life eternal. Give me, blessed Savior, a thoughtful, serious, reflecting mind; a deep sight into myself; a watchful eye over my spiritual enemies; an unshaken confidence in you. From the word of God, and my own experience, I find that there are three powerful enemies, which are incessantly laboring to destroy my soul. The first is THE WORLD. Being rescued from its snares, through the mighty power of God, it still seeks to effect my ruin: 1. By its smiles - hoping thereby to win me back again, and allure my poor, vain heart by its soft, seductive influence. This is a most dangerous temptation, and few withstand its force. 2. By its frowns - thinking thereby to terrify my soul, and cause me to renounce the faith of Jesus, rather than suffer affliction with the people of God for a season. Lord, strengthen my faith, and arm me for the combat. 3. By placing before my eyes its riches, honors, and pleasures - to captivate my affections, and wean me from the unseen glories of a future world. Fatal temptation! "Demas has forsaken me," said Paul, "having loved this present era world." To withdraw the affections from the things of time; to sit loosely even to lawful enjoyments; and to wait with anxious desire for the signal of departure to a better world; is what unassisted nature can never perform: yet genuine religion consists in this happy state of mind. Lord, help me. Without you, I can do nothing; but, Oh! glorious triumph, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." The second enemy, who labors to oppose my progress to the realms of bliss, is THE FLESH; dangerous enemy indeed, because never separated from me. Wherever I go, I carry this enemy in my bosom. Lord, save me from this sinful man, myself! The flesh harasses my soul: 1. By exciting evil affections and lusts, and stimulating to wicked and unlawful actions. 2. By resisting the good motions of the Spirit; stifling its convictions, and craving a little more indulgence on the lap of sinful pleasure. 3. By laboring to blind my understanding by false reasoning, and thereby aiding the tempter in his work of destruction. Thus inbred sin is always at work. I am only safe while vigilant and constant at a throne of grace. The third enemy, by whose subtlety and malice man became a child of misery, is THE DEVIL. This great adversary of the human race, as well as the world and the flesh, has many devices and stratagems to deceive and to destroy. May I never forget my helplessness and danger; but ever look to Him who fought this warrior in my nature, and overcame him by his own most precious death upon the cross. The devil harasses my soul: 1. By injecting evil thoughts; those firebrands of hell, which fill the mind with anguish, and almost drive the trembling sinner to despair. The feeble-minded and the low-spirited are exposed to this artillery of Satan; from which even the strongest and most joyous believer is not wholly exempted. When the enemy comes in like a flood, Oh blessed Spirit, lift up a standard against him. When the overflowings of ungodliness make me afraid, then arise, Oh! mighty conqueror of death and hell;

so shall your enemies be scattered; then shall those who hate you flee before you! 2. The devil tempts me to ruin by presenting the bait of sin under false names and alluring colors. How many are destroyed by this temptation! The object of Satan is to represent the religion of Jesus as gloomy, unsocial, and forbidding; and the pleasures of the world as smiling, sociable, and enchanting. Lord, make me watchful. "In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird." Enable me to examine every thing by the light of truth: to prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good. 3. He seeks my destruction by stirring up the wicked to persecute my soul; and by spreading stumbling-blocks to impede my progress towards the heavenly Canaan. These are but a small part of his devices, of which the believer is not ignorant. We are in an enemy's country. This is the field of battle. Here we must fight; but, if we endure faithful unto the end, we shall triumphantly join in the conqueror's song. My prayer must daily be, that I may never be allowed to indulge a thought, which I would not dare to express; or do an action in secret, which I should blush to have known.

I do not expect, while in this state of mortality, to be free from every sinful thought, or effectually to prevent their entrance into the mind. This is the perfection of heaven. Yet I must labor after this blessedness by faith and prayer, or I am only a hypocrite and self-deceiver. The ready access which Satan has to the imaginative powers of the soul, and the quickness with which he can dart his poisonous suggestions into the heart, are most astonishing. No season is too sacred to prevent his bold intrusion. The house of God and the table of the Lord do not afford a sanctuary from this enemy. Judas stands on record as an awful witness to this truth. The Christian's private retirement is often greatly disturbed by this restless invader, who tempted the holy Jesus in the desert. He raises visionary schemes of profit or pleasure, to amuse the fancy or engage the passions. No art or stratagem is left untried, to tempt the harassed soul to forego its duties, or meditate on any thing rather than Christ, and holiness, and heaven.

Oh! how precious at such a season are prayer and the word of God! The sword of the Spirit and all-prayer are the weapons which Satan cannot long withstand, when wielded by the arm of faith. "Resist the devil, and he shall flee from you," is written for the encouragement of tempted pilgrims. But who can prevent the injections of Satan? I might as soon attempt to check the whirlwind in its course, or stop the flowing tide. Yet I may and must resist them by faith and prayer, or I shall perish by them. All-sufficient help is offered. Jesus has said, "My grace is sufficient for you, my strength is made perfect in weakness." The promise is, "God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." I must daily seek this promised aid by humble, persevering prayer. Then, as surely as the promise stands recorded in the Bible, so surely shall I come off more than conqueror through the blood of the Lamb. This is not, however, the work of an hour. The believer's warfare ends only with his life. He puts off his earthly tabernacle and his earthly troubles together. Oh my soul! take encouragement from that consoling question which was put to doubting Sarah: "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?"

Almighty Savior! when sin is working within me, and my soul is bowed down with sorrow; when Satan buffets me with his horrid assaults, and all seems darkness and despair; when unbelief would tempt me to give up all for lost: then may I hear you speak in cheering accents to my soul, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?"

Oh! let me never forget this animating question, which puts to flight a host of unbelieving fears. May I daily live upon your grace, and rest on nothing, blessed Lord, but you. When I contemplate

myself, what do I behold? A polluted nature; a deceitful heart; a body every moment tending to decay; a beclouded understanding; a depraved will; affections in disorder; a memory retaining things forbidden; a creature, in short, born in sin; a child of wrath; an heir of hell. Awful as this portrait is, and humbling to the pride of carnal man, yet it gives but a faint representation of the original. And can such a hateful creature enter into heaven? Impossible! I must be born again. But can the Lord renew so vile a being, and cause the graces of his Spirit to abound in such a heart as mine?

Hear, Oh! my soul, the words of your Savior which he spoke to Sarah, as the ANGEL OF THE COVENANT: "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?"

Lord, I believe - help my unbelief. I believe you can in a moment raise me from a death in sin to a life of righteousness; and shall I doubt your willingness? You came to call sinners to repentance. You came to seek and to save that which was lost. Thousands in every age, who have felt the power of your regenerating grace, can witness to this delightful truth, that nothing is too hard for you.

Oh! heavenly Father; bestow on me, the vilest, the most unworthy of your creatures, a look, a smile of love, for his dear sake in whom my soul delights, even Jesus, the sinner’s friend.

You are almighty; nothing is too hard for you. Let not unbelief; for one moment, stop the current of your grace; but cause your saving mercy to flow onward in my soul, until unbelief and pride, and every sin, shall be forever lost beneath the powerful stream. Then shall I be able to tell some fearful, doubting saint, what you have done for my soul, and to the latest moment of my life proclaim, with heartfelt joy, that nothing is too hard for you.

I will plead your promise, Lord, I will trust your faithful word;

Since this precious truth I see, "As your days, your strength shall be"

Often I feel an evil heart, Prone to wander and depart; But your word still speaks to me, "As your days, your strength shall be"

Satan, with his crafty wile, Seeks to fill my heart with guile;

Yet the promise says to me, "As your days, your strength shall be" In whatever strait I come, While I journey to my home, This shall be my stay and plea:

"As your days, your strength shall be."

03.53-53. ON INDWELLING SIN

53. ON INDWELLING SIN

Nothing grieves the believer in Jesus so much, as the sin which dwells in him. He can feelingly adopt the language of the apostle: "Oh wretched man that I am!", and with him acknowledge, "we that are in this tabernacle, do groan, being burdened." Yet, let not the worldling imagine that the believer has no inward enjoyment. This very grief on account of sin is accompanied with holy peace and joy, through faith in the atonement of Jesus.

How great is the change which grace makes in the soul! Sin, which once was sweet, now becomes bitter. Sin, which once wore the mask of beauty, now appears in all its native deformity. The mind, enlightened from above, beholds sin in the mirror of truth, as hardening and deceiving, unprofitable, shameful, and deadly. Its evil effects are seen in the destruction of original innocence; the desolating judgments of heaven; and the miseries which cover the earth. Its evil effects are felt in the corruption of our nature, the stings of conscience, and the abounding iniquities of mankind. But, above all other views, we behold the infinite evil of sin in the agonies and death of Jesus, the Son of God.

Oh! that I may have grace to bewail, at the foot of the cross, the exceeding sinfulness of sin. There I would confess both my guilt and pollution; and there, looking with an eye of faith to the bleeding sacrifice, I would wait in humble hope, until Jesus speak those soul-transporting words: "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you."

Sinless perfection is the bliss of heaven. There, believers who die in the Lord become "the spirits of just men made perfect." While they sojourn here below, they are called to wrestle and fight both with inbred sin and outward temptations. Hence we find in that faithful word, which is the "light" and counselor" of the church of God, continual calls to vigilance and activity, and reiterated cautions against negligence and sloth. There are four evils against which the most advanced believer has daily, yes hourly, to contend. The first is UNBELIEF. This is a powerful enemy to our peace. It was unbelief which gave Satan the first advantage over the once happy pair in Paradise. They doubted - they disbelieved - they fell. Unbelief is the parent of numberless evils, which, although of different complexions, yet, like the human race, may be traced to the same source.

Doubt, distrust, evil-surmisings, murmurings, complainings, slavish fears, despondencies, creature dependencies, contempt of divine threatenings, slighting of divine promises, rejection of Jesus, neglect of the Gospel, ridiculing the work of the Spirit, atheism, deism, Socinianism, carnal security, lukewarmness, backsliding in heart or life, false profession, hypocrisy - all these, and a thousand other evils, spring from unbelief. Lord, deliver me, I humbly and earnestly beseech you, from these soul-destroying, hell-deserving sins. The second inbred evil is PRIDE.

Pride is a subtle enemy. It spoils all that we think, and speak, and do, until the Spirit of Christ destroys its power in the soul. Pride is the last sin which dies, and expires only with the life of the believer. Through his whole pilgrimage he has to contend against spiritual pride, in all its specious

and multiplied forms. In heaven, pride cannot exist. There, all is humility and peace. Self-love, self-seeking, self-will, self-confidence, self-righteousness, all spring from pride. Pride, like unbelief, is a root of bitterness, from where grow in dreadful luxuriance, vain-glory, love of human applause, seeking of honor, independence, rebellion, revenge, anger, contempt of others, resentment of real or supposed injuries, ambition, presumption, etc.

There is no end to this extensive evil, which infects the hearts of sinners, and fills the earth with misery and blood.

Blessed Jesus! you humbled yourself even unto death, to make an atonement for my pride. Oh! make me humble and lowly in heart. Clothe me with humility, that, with all lowliness of mind; I may walk before you to your honor and glory. The third enemy is SENSUALITY. This dreadful evil is the parent of crimes, which the apostle declares ought not so much as to be named among the holy followers of Christ. How awful, then, is the thought, that the nominally Christian world is, at this very moment, stained with crimes of so polluting a nature, as to oppose a barrier, in many instances, to the conversion both of the heathens and the Jews! Our Lord has told us that offenses will come; but he has also denounced a "woe unto him through whom they come."

Self-indulgence, sloth, luxury, gluttony, and drunkenness, unite with carnal gratifications and impure desires in binding chains around the captive sinner, until death consigns him to the dungeon of hell. Oh! you holy and ever-blessed Spirit, purify and purge my heart from this dreadful enemy the flesh, which wars against the soul. Wash me in the precious blood of Jesus. Pardon all my sins of impurity, and fill me with holy affections and pure desires. The most solemn threatenings are denounced in Scripture against these inbred sins: "He that believes not, shall be damned." "Every one that is proud in heart, is an abomination to the Lord." "If you live after the flesh, you shall die." But there is another enemy which lodges within the human heart - COVETOUSNESS, or the LOVE OF THE WORLD. This sin ever opposes the exercise of love to Christ, and heavenly things, in the soul of the believer. The world assumes an undue importance, owing to our coming into continual contact with its fleeting possessions; while eternal realities are the objects of faith and hope. Hence, even the advanced believer finds frequent occasions to use the lamentation of David: "My soul cleaves unto the dust; quicken me, according to your word." The conviction of this evil should lead us to more earnest prayer for that spiritual-mindedness which is life and peace.

Worldly prosperity too frequently produces lukewarmness, and declension from the ways of God. But if we possessed more of that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, more of that telescopic eye which looks within the veil, and views, as near, the distant glories of Emanuel’s kingdom: we should be less attached to earth; yes, altogether weaned from it; and be enabled to say with the apostle, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." This proves the necessity of regeneration, since the love of the world is the natural affection of the unrenewed heart. Nothing can eradicate this idolatrous attachment to earthly things, but the love of Christ shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit. The more we see of the preciousness, glory, and excellency of Jesus, the more we discover of the emptiness, vanity, and insufficiency of all earthly good; and the more will our souls be withdrawn from present things, and fixed upon things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. The evils flowing from this

sinful love of the world, are many and great. Idolatry, (for whatever supremely engages the heart, be it a diadem or a feather, is our idol,) avarice, greed, the love of money, of earthly possessions, of splendid equipages, and of all those things "which the nations of the world seek after;" fraud, deceit, over-reaching, theft, envy at the prosperity of others; repining at our own condition, if lower than our neighbor's; an unwillingness to part with all for Christ; a shrinking from the cross; a dread of suffering for righteousness' sake - these, and many other evils, flowing from covetousness, prove the soul to be in a state of enmity against God: for "if any man will be the friend of the world, he is the enemy of God." From these four dreadful sources of evil - unbelief, pride, sensuality, and covetousness - spring all the miseries which inundate the earth, and fill hell itself with horrors.

These sins are so interwoven with our fallen nature, that, until we are created anew in Christ Jesus, they form, as it were, part of ourselves. How needful, then, is self-examination! How important to consider our ways! We may leave the world with respect to its vain amusements, and yet never have the heart disengaged from it. Withdrawment from the world does not necessarily produce a crucifixion to it. It is one thing to leave the sinful customs and company of the world, and another to sit loosely to its fading pleasures and possessions. We may be worldly in a lonely desert, and spiritual in the midst of a crowd. The world may reign in the cell of the monk; and be renounced in the counting-house of the pious merchant. The exhortation of Paul is at all times most appropriate and seasonable: "

"What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep. Those in frequent contact with the things of the world should make good use of them without becoming attached to them, for this world and all it contains will pass away." 1Co 7:31.

Blessed Lord! implant in my heart that lively faith, that deep humility, that heavenly purity, that spiritual-mindedness, which will evidence my union to you, and prepare me for your beatific vision in the world to come. When I survey my treacherous heart, So base, so vile in every part;

How wondrous, Lord, that sovereign grace Should make this heart your dwelling-place!

It is true, I hate each rebel sin, And long for purity within;

Yet, ah! what evils still remain, The purest act of love to stain. Were this my only hope and plea, What I have said, or done for thee, Dread loads of guilt would sink me down, Beneath the terrors of your frown. But Jesus is my living way, My only trust, my hope, my stay; From him, I all my strength receive, And daily on his fullness live. When death shall loose the silver cord, Obedient to your mandate, Lord, My soul shall joy and peace possess, If Jesus be my righteousness.

03.54-54. On Trials

54. On Trials When I look into the world, and see all around me in pursuit of happiness; that certain something unpossessed, yet still desired; which eludes the grasp of thousands, who think they have just to make one effort more to seize the flattering shadow and be happy; I ask why all this restlessness, this feverish thirst for that which cannot satisfy an immortal soul? Is it not that man, blinded by his passions, fondly hopes to find happiness in a world, from where it long since took its flight, when Adam ate of the forbidden tree?

"Thorns and thistles shall the earth bring forth to you," is the language of Jehovah to his fallen creatures, when he cursed the ground for man’s sake; and if the divine inspiration of the Bible rested upon the truth of this one declaration, every age and every heart must feelingly witness to its holy origin.

Vain man would attempt to be happy while remaining at a distance from his God. He plucks the flower, and it withers in his hand. His fond expectations of earthly bliss, like wave succeeding wave, roll along in quick succession, without bringing him any nearer to the desired haven of rest and happiness. This world is not a resting-place to the wicked, nor the resting-place of the righteous. "There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked." His desires are restless, his passions are restless, his spirit is restless. He needs what he has not, and does not truly enjoy what he has. He is of the earth, earthy. His aims, pursuits, and pleasures, all spring out of and settle upon the world. Thus he reaps those thorns and thistles which spring up in such abundant crops, wherever he erects his dwelling. Disappointed and chagrined that happiness is ever eluding his grasp, he grows peevish in his spirit, or a complainant against his kind, yet insulted Creator. No wonder that misery marks his steps, even though, like those of Asher, they be "dipped in oil." (Deu 33:24.)

Worldly riches cannot give quietness; when God gives trouble. Oh my soul, learn true wisdom from what you see around you. Every situation is planted with thorns in this wilderness of sin. Vain, then, is the expectation of man, to find a place of pure, uninterrupted rest below the skies. And yet, what crowds are daily in search of such a place of rest in the midst of a polluted and tempestuous world! Some think it lies in the region of wealth; others in that of pleasure; others in that of honor. Some fancy it is found in the busy throng; and some in the stillness of retirement. But all who seek it in the world shall never find it.

You, blessed Jesus, are the true and only resting-place for guilty sinners. Believing in you, they enter into rest. Your people, it is true, must bear your cross, but they enjoy your consolations also; they feel a peace and calm within, which all the panting candidates for worldly happiness can never obtain. They have peace with God, peace in their own consciences; and study, as much as lies in them, to live peaceably with all men.

Thus they are enabled to bear with composure the varied trials of life; looking with assured hope to that rest which remains to the people of God, when this stormy world shall have passed away, and its votaries be doomed to that doleful place, where they have no rest day nor night, but where the

smoke of their torment ascends up forever and ever!

Oh divine Savior! be my portion, the lot of my inheritance. Then shall I rejoice in the midst of sorrows, and be calm in the midst of storms. Oh! speak peace to my troubled soul, and then all shall be still. Blessed Redeemer! all who come to you find rest unto their souls; and I would now come. Receive me in mercy. Cause me to know you as my Savior, and to rejoice daily in the joyful sound of mercy extended to the chief of sinners. When a sinner is first brought to the knowledge of the truth, and experiences the joys of faith and the sweets of pardoning love, he fancies that the bare mention of his own comforts will he sufficient to make all around him anxious to possess them too. A little experience, however, shows him, that the hard heart of man is not so easily to be moved.

Instead of converting those about him, he raises up a host of foes, even in the bosom of his own family, and among his kinsfolk and acquaintance. He becomes the object either of their pity or their scorn; and meets with cold neglect, or many sharp rebukes, where once he enjoyed a hearty welcome. His name is cast out as evil; his motives are maligned; his actions deemed precise and singular; his conversation whining cant; yes, his whole life condemned as unbecoming a true man, or even a person endued with common sense. The consistent believer in Jesus must, therefore, expect trials and opposition from an ungodly world. "As he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." The blessed Savior has given his people clear and repeated intimations to that effect. "Blessed are you when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil for the Son of man’s sake; rejoice you in that day, and leap for joy, for behold your reward is great in heaven." The Christian’s trials arise from various sources.

They spring from HIS GENERAL CHARACTER.

If the believer be divested of all unnecessary singularity in dress or deportment; yet his attachment to the Redeemer, evidencing itself by a firm adherence to the precepts of the Gospel, and a rooted aversion to all sin, will, of itself, create dislike, and beget such a secret enmity in the hearts of the ungodly, as cannot fail of showing its malignity by outward contempt or ridicule.

There was nothing of singularity in the character of the blessed Jesus, except his unspotted holiness; his unbounded benevolence; his perfect conformity to the divine law; his heavenly wisdom; his deadness to the world; his boldness in reproving sin; his entire resignation to his Holy Father’s will; his divine power in healing diseases, feeding the hungry, casting out devils, and stilling the raging elements; and yet, with all this display of majesty and glory, of tenderness and compassion, how hated, how despised, how persecuted, was the Savior of mankind! If they thus treated the master of the house, they will also despise those of his household. "If," said our Lord, "they hated me, they will also hate you." Have you, Oh my soul, reason to believe that you are born from above; that a divine change has passed upon you? Where are the fruits of faith? Where is the opposition of the world? Examine well; for it is declared - "woe be unto you, if all men speak well of you." Is the image of Jesus stamped upon you? Are you bold in confessing Christ before men; faithful in discountenancing every thing that is contrary to his blessed word? Do you acknowledge him to be the Lord your righteousness, your only atonement, advocate, and friend? Lord, grant that I may, through grace, be able to say, "you know all things, you know that I love you."

I need not court opposition - only let me live a life of faith in the Son of God; and opposition will be excited, as naturally as fire introduced into water occasions a contest between the two elements: for "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." The believer's trials frequently arise from HIS PECULIAR SITUATION. This added to the former, namely, his general character as a true Christian, whereby he tacitly condemns the conduct of a wicked world, brings still greater odium upon him, and puts all his graces to the severest test. A pious wife, child, or servant is often severely tried in the furnace, by being brought into immediate contact with an ungodly husband, parent, or master. The natural enmity of the heart, aided by natural authority, receives additional strength; and fails not to vent its utmost malice against the unoffending lambs of Christ's flock. Like the savage wolf of the forest, such characters seem to take delight in devouring the weak and defenseless, and satiating themselves with the miseries of others.

Many hearts are made to bleed by the unkindness of these adversaries to the truth, whose only charge against the objects of their cruelty is, that they dare not comply with their sinful commands in direct violation of the law of God. But Jesus is the good Shepherd. He watches over his flock with tender care in the dark and cloudy day. In the midst of all their outward troubles, he gives them inward peace. While trusting in his unchanging love, they experience a joy, of which the utmost rage of persecution cannot deprive them.

If such be the blessedness of the lambs of your flock, Oh gracious Savior, give me a holy courage in your cause, a holy confidence in your mercy, a holy consolation from your exceeding great and precious promises. Let me never dread the sneer nor the frowns of the ungodly. Preserve me from sinful compliances with the customs, and from sinful conformity to the spirit of the world. Make me valiant for the truth; ever daring to be singular in the cultivation of Christian tempers, and scrupulous in the choice of Christian companions, whom you have called the salt of the earth, and the light of the world; and to whom it is your good pleasure to give the kingdom. The believer's trials sometimes spring from THE IMMEDIATE HAND OF GOD. The wife is deprived by death of her earthly support, a tender husband; the husband, of an affectionate wife. The parent sees the hope of his declining age sink into the grave; the child is left an orphan in a wicked and ensnaring world. The tenderest ties are snapped asunder by the unrelenting hand of death. Diseases of various kinds are commissioned to invade our frame. One faculty after another is taken away, or greatly impaired. Earthly comforts droop and die. Riches fly away; poverty advances, and nothing but clouds and storms appear in sight. In such a situation, the poor trembling believer is sorely assaulted by the tempter to doubt of his interest in Christ, of the love of God to his soul, of the truth of the promises, of the power of his Redeemer, of his willingness to save. In short, he is tempted to unbelief and hard thoughts of God. At such bereaving seasons, injudicious friends are apt to suspect his character, and, like those of Job, to charge him with hypocrisy. The ungodly rejoice over him, saying, "There, there, so would we have it. You see what is the end of his prayers and religion. If he be a child of God; let him deliver him, if he will have him." But the triumphing of the wicked is short. The very storm which purifies the humble believer, often strikes the scorner dead. Death, like a tiger, darts upon him in a moment, when he is least aware of his approach. He, who, being often reproved, hardens his neck, shall suddenly be cut off, and that without remedy; while the child of God calmly waits the hour of his dismission, and even longs to depart, that he may be with Christ.

Oh the depth of the goodness and severity of God! By these trials, the Lord brings the faith and love of his people into lively exercise, and thus demonstrates the efficacy of true religion. The graces of the Spirit generally thrive most in a rugged soil, and in tempestuous seasons. Like the Israelites in Egypt, they increase in the midst of oppression, persecution, and suffering; for as gold shines brightest in the furnace, so the Lord's people glorify him most in the fires. (Isa 24:15.) The believer's trials arise also from HIS INWARD CORRUPTIONS. This is more painful to him than all the rest, because the sufferings he endures from indwelling sin are the bitter fruits of that evil nature, which is so offensive to God his Savior.

He can bear with calm composure the taunts of men; he can patiently submit to be accounted a fool for Christ's sake; yes, he can suffer joyfully the spoiling of his goods, and even the loss of life itself; but he cannot endure the inward workings of corruption. He cannot submit to the power of indwelling sin. He cannot tamely allow his mind to be assaulted by his spiritual enemies. He cannot bear the thought of losing that joy and peace through believing, which is the very foretaste of heavenly felicity. Oh the anguish of his mind, when corruption rages! How fervently does he pray for deliverance! How precious is the blood of Jesus at such seasons! He flies to the strong for strength. He takes refuge in the wounds of Jesus, and is safe. This trial, like every other, is over-ruled for good. A holy watchfulness, an increased dread of sin, a jealous, godly fear, a spirit of prayer, a more simple dependence on Christ, a more hearty loathing of self, a more ardent breathing after holiness and heaven, are excited in the soul. Thus, through grace, Satan is defeated, and the tempted believer comes out of the furnace, as gold tried in the fire, leaving nothing but the dross behind.

Happy are the people who have God for their Lord, yes, happy are you, Oh Israel; who is like unto you, Oh people saved by the Lord, who is the shield of your help, and the sword of your excellency! and your enemies shall be found liars unto you. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

Oh! 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus, To rely upon his word;

Cares and sorrows fly before us, When we trust a pardoning God.

Here we meet with heavy crosses;

Many burdens we must bear; But the Lord can make our losses Lighter than the ambient air.

Then, my soul, why so distressed?

Why cast down with anxious fear?

Jesus helps the weak oppressed, He the drooping soul can cheer.

Gird your loins, let hope support you;

Speed with cheerful haste your way;

He who called you to the journey, Will conduct to endless day.

03.55-55. ON AFFLICTION

55. ON AFFLICTION

All the ways of God are good; yes, all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, unto such as love him and keep his commandments. Should any one ask: why, then, does the Lord afflict his people? We answer, because he loves them. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." This will appear from a few reflections on the nature, design, and end of affliction. Its nature is indeed unpleasant to the children of men- Paul declares it to be "not joyous, but grievous." The cup of affliction is composed of bitter ingredients, at which our nature revolts. But should we commend the physician, who prescribed only luscious medicines for a distempered stomach! His skill would rather appear in administering a bitter, yet salutary draught. And so it is with our heavenly Physician. He knows our inward malady, and he has medicine to heal our sickness. Affliction is one of his medicinal dealings which is more or less bitter, according to the spiritual malady of his people. But our heavenly Father, who does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men, never infuses more wormwood and gall than is needful to correct our vitiated souls.

Hence we plainly see what is the design of affliction. It is to do us good. The tender-hearted physician for the body aims at nothing but his patient’s recovery. He calls every day. He watches every term of the complaint; and is our heavenly Physician less attentive to his dear afflicted children? Ah! no. He calls not merely once a day. He is always near them. His eye is always upon them. His ears are always open to their prayers. When he sees a favorable change in their spiritual state, he administers the cordials of his promises to strengthen and restore them to that peace and comfort and joy, which, before the afflictive dispensation, they were not in a proper frame of spirit to receive.

Thus we see the gracious end of affliction. Before the trial came, they were perhaps growing lukewarm, or insensibly gliding into a sinful compliance with the customs of the world; or, they were settling upon the lees; and feeling quite at ease in Zion. Surrounded with earthly comforts, they were forsaking the fountain of living water, and idolizing some created good in the bosom of domestic life. But now, they return unto the Lord, and find their happiness in their God. Our heavenly Father, in perfect accordance with his covenant of life and peace, sends the needful trial: "If your children forsake my law, and walk not in my covenant, then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes." Thus for a season, if need be, we are in heaviness through manifold temptations. The Lord deals graciously with his people. Though he puts them into the furnace, yet he will not allow it to be heated one degree more than is needful to consume the dross and purify their souls. He presides over it himself. His wisdom and love regulate its strength. Thus, in the midst of all their trials, he never leaves them nor forsakes them. In this way, the Holy Spirit carries on the great work of sanctification in their souls, manifesting their sonship by these fatherly corrections, and fitting them for that pure region where nothing can enter that defiles or makes a lie. And is it thus with God’s dear children? Then, Oh my soul, receive the cup of affliction with humble resignation and adoring love. Kiss the hand that smites. Bless the rod which

chastises.

While the bramble is allowed to grow wild, the vine is pruned; while God says of the wicked, "Let them alone," he scourges every son whom he receives. And truly his "loving correction" shall make you great.

How consoling, then, to the true believer, is this sweet assurance of the royal Psalmist! "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies." David was a tried saint. He had often been made to pass through the furnace of affliction, and always found himself the better for his trials. In Psa 119:1-176 he says, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept your word." And then he adds, "You are good and do good: teach me your statutes." Thus acknowledging the goodness of his heavenly Father, in not leaving him to follow the devices and desires of his own deceitful heart.

It is delightful to consider that the sufferings which believers are now called to endure, are the only sufferings which they shall ever experience. In heaven there is neither sighing nor sorrow. None of its inhabitants say I am sick; for the former things are passed away. What an animating thought! It should make the children of God exclaim with the apostle, "I am full of comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all my tribulation."

If we read the word of God with due attention, we shall find that the most eminent saints have been the most tried. The faith of Abraham, the patience of Job, the meekness of Moses, the purity of Joseph, the devotion of Daniel, would not have been so conspicuous, had not these peculiar graces been brought into exercise by trials remarkably adapted to each.

God is Sovereign, wise and good. He can overrule the sorest temptations of Satan, to the establishing of his people. "Who is he that will harm you, if you be followers of that which is good?" is a question full of comfort to the tempted believer. Suffering he may endure; but real injury he shall not sustain since eternal truth has declared, that "all things shall work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose." "Wherefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." The happiness of man consists, not in an exemption from trials, but in having his will swallowed up in the will of God. For this we are taught to pray: "Your will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Just in proportion as we approximate to the unreserved obedience of the heavenly host, we shall be happy. Our trials are sent for this very purpose - to mold our will into the divine will, and consequently to make us holy and happy. From these few reflections, it is evident, that the advantages which believers derive from sanctified afflictions are many and great. In affliction, we often detect the sin which most easily besets us. This is the most difficult sin to find out, though the most in operation, on account of its blinding and deceiving nature. We have therefore cause to bless God for showing to us the accursed thing, and wherefore he contends with us. In affliction, we obtain clear views of the insufficiency of all earthly things. A dark shadow is thrown over the smiling scenes of busy life. We discover the little value of those possessions, the attainment of which once appeared so desirable. In affliction, we learn to estimate, above all treasures, an assured interest in Jesus Christ. The blessedness of the believer is then felt and acknowledged. His peace of mind, and hope of glory, the fruits of saving faith, are esteemed more precious than rubies. In affliction, the promises of God’s holy word are sweeter than honey and the

honey-comb. They are sacred cordials administered by infinite love, to revive and strengthen the drooping saint.

Thus, while the prosperous worldling in the midst of his abundance despises the "hidden manna;" the contrite believer in his heaviest trial can extract sweetness "from the wormwood and the gall." A Savior’s love, experienced in the soul, renders all palatable, however distasteful to our nature.

If man had never sinned, suffering would have been unknown; but, having lost the divine image, Infinite Wisdom is pleased to appoint sundry trials, as means in his hands for restoring us to that filial spirit which we lost through the fall. Sanctified affliction can bend the stubborn will, and bring us to the frame and temper of little children.

Hence we find in Scripture much to this effect: "And have you entirely forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you, his children? He said, ’My child, don’t ignore it when the Lord disciplines you, and don’t be discouraged when he corrects you. For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes those he accepts as his children.’ As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Whoever heard of a child who was never disciplined? If God doesn’t discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children after all. Since we respect our earthly fathers who disciplined us, should we not all the more cheerfully submit to the discipline of our heavenly Father and live forever? For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God’s discipline is always right and good for us because it means we will share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening - it is painful! But afterward there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way." Heb 12:5-12.

Under affliction, the believer is like a city set on a hill. His faith and patience, his meekness and resignation, cannot be hidden. They manifest the reality of his religion, and prove to an unbelieving world the blessedness of serving God. His mind is kept in perfect peace. His heart is full of holy joy. He lies as clay in the hands of the potter; and with his suffering Savior he can say, "Father, not my will, but yours be done." If doubts and fears are permitted to overshadow his soul, they only resemble the dark clouds which pass athwart a summer’s sky. The manifestation of a Savior’s love soon dispels the gloom. The afflicted believer is stirred up to closer communion with God. He girds his loins. He trims his lamp. He waits for the coming of his Lord in the daily exercise of faith and prayer. When his trials are heavy, his prayers are more fervent and frequent; for the same wind which extinguishes a less fire, causes the greater to burn with increased intenseness. What says our divine Master? "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many will wax cold;" but, "he that endures unto the end, the same shall be saved." In seasons of deep distress, Satan is sometimes very busy in suggesting hard thoughts of God, exciting doubts, and creating murmurings. Many battles are then fought, and the faith and love of the believer are tried to the uttermost. But he who is in him, is greater than he who is in the world. Jesus, who vanquished Satan in our nature, by his Spirit, destroys the power of the adversary in the hearts of his people. Thus, he enables them to rise superior to all their trials, through his grace which is sufficient for them. In tribulation, the child of God experiences many sweet tokens of his heavenly Father’s care. His sick chamber is the abode of grace, mercy, and peace. The bright beams of hope dispel the gloom which gathers round the grave, and raises his enraptured soul far above a sorrowing world. At such a season of unspeakable delight, his heart is loosened from every earthly tie; and in the language of the

exalting apostle, he can say, "Oh death, where is your sting? Oh grave, where is your victory?"

Thus affliction has a two-fold effect. Like the wintry blast, it kills the noxious weeds of lust, pride, and covetousness; while, like the genial warmth of summer, it cherishes all the kindly graces of the Spirit, humility, purity, and love.

Many people are apt to imagine that if they are not deeply afflicted, in some way or other, they cannot be the children of God. We see instances, however, of excellent characters passing through life with comparatively few trials; and yet maintaining a peculiar spirituality of mind. There is certainly no necessary connection between affliction and resignation, or prosperity and gratitude. When adversity meets a man destitute of grace, it stirs up within him a rebellious spirit against the moral government of God; or, at least, it calls forth his natural corruption into more active operation. When prosperity pours its profusion upon an unconverted person, it tends to foster all the evils of pride, insolence, and independence; so that the man almost forgets that he is mortal, a being accountable to his Maker. It is grace alone which makes all the real difference between one man and another. "By the grace of God," said Paul, "I am what I am." And to the Corinthians he adduced this argument as a ground for humility: "Who makes you to differ from another? And what have you, that you did not receive? Now if you did receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?"

We may therefore conclude, that when affliction renders a man humble, and resigned to the will of God; when it tends to wean him from the world, and produces a change in his whole spirit and conduct; it is because the God of all grace is employing it as a means whereby to lead him to deep consideration; and, through the accompanying power of the Spirit, to true repentance, faith, and holiness.

So, when in prosperity the heart expands with benevolence; when a man is cheerfully employed in diffusing a portion of that comfort around him which he himself enjoys; when he is laboring to glorify his Redeemer, by aiding those institutions which have for their object the dissemination of divine truth; when he is led to consider himself as a steward of the manifold gifts of God; and when all this is accompanied with true humility, unostentatiousness, and self-denial; then we may safely conclude that God has blessed his basket and his store; that all his fruitfulness is the effect of grace alone, and not the natural consequence of mere worldly abundance.

How precious, then, is the grace of God! Natural evils are converted into spiritual blessings, when thus sanctified by divine grace; and, without this grace, natural blessings, such as health, plenty, friends, and influence, become snares and excitements to sin and rebellion. Oh, then, let me ever pray for grace to use both affliction and prosperity aright. Lord, impart unto me this inestimable treasure. When you give grace, you give yourself: "Yourself, of all your gifts the crown." Be still, my soul, and know the Lord, In meek submission wait his will; His presence can true peace afford, His power can shield from every ill. Your path is strewed with piercing thorns;

Each step is gained by arduous fight Yet wait, until hope’s bright morning dawns, Until darkness changes into light.

Soon shall the painful conflict cease;

Soon shall the raging storm be o’er;

Soon shall you reach the realm of peace, Where suffering shall be known no more.

There shall your joy forever flow In one unbroken stream of bliss;

There shall you God the Savior know, And feel him yours as you are his.

03.56-56. ON THE CHARACTER OF MARTHA AND MARY

56. ON THE CHARACTER OF MARTHA AND MARY With what beautiful simplicity is the interview between Jesus arid the sisters of Lazarus related by Luke, in the 10th chapter of his Gospel. How gentle and yet how forcible is the reproof which our Lord gave to Martha. How gracious the testimony which he bore to the piety of Mary. Mary sat at Jesus' feet and heard his words. Happy and favored station! She sat at the feet of him who is infinite wisdom, and heard, with teachableness and delight, those gracious truths which proceeded from his lips. The Lord inclined her heart, as he did Lydia's, to attend unto the things which he spoke unto her. His words fell like good seed into a soil prepared by sovereign grace, and brought forth the blessed fruits of righteousness.

Martha was cumbered with much serving, and careful about many things. Her mind was ruffled at the apparent inattention of Mary, who had left her to serve alone. But Jesus, instead of reproving, bestows his commendation on Mary's conduct; since he came to their house, not for the purpose of feasting himself with their earthly dainties, but to feast them with the delicious truths of Gospel grace. This family picture is often exhibited in the Christian world. We are naturally more inclined to the bustle of religious occupations, than the retired devotional exercises of meditation and prayer. Martha's hospitality was in itself commendable, and sprang from love to her Savior; but the hurried state of her mind, and the neglect of a precious season for spiritual improvement, were highly reprehensible. She forgot her own spiritual needs, and the great object of Christ's visit. She was cumbered with much serving. Her spirit got ruffled. An improper feeling carried her away beyond the bounds of affection and decorum. She even interrupted our Lord in his discourse with Mary, and wished him to dismiss her with a suitable reproof for neglecting her household concerns. "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? bid her, therefore, that she help me." The reproof, however, unexpectedly fell upon herself. "Martha, Martha, you are careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful; and Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." This faithful admonition was no doubt sanctified to her; for "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."

We cannot contemplate this family scene without being struck with the value of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. A mind active and ardent, alive to neglect and susceptible of irritation, is generally admired by the world, as indicative of a noble spirit; while a retired, noiseless, yet humble and obedient frame of heart, is ridiculed or despised, as low and unmanly. But the Lord sees not as man sees. Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. That which is highly esteemed among men, is an abomination in the sight of God.

Like Mary, I too am privileged to sit at Jesus' feet; for when I read the Holy Scriptures, I read the word of Jesus. When I hear the Gospel faithfully preached, I hear the Gospel of Jesus. With what reverence, then, should I listen to the words of eternal truth: with what delight should I receive the glad tidings of salvation, proclaimed by him who came down from heaven to seek and to save that

which was lost; and who has graciously declared, that all who look unto him, who come unto him, who receive him, and believe in his name, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

Lord, give me faith, and hope, and love, that all my affections may be fixed upon you; and my whole life devoted to your glory. But alas! how often do I resemble Martha! Daily do I need her salutary reproof. The various occupations and businesses of life; the multiplied cares and anxieties about earthly things; no, even the very labors required in actively conducting religious institutions, have a tendency, without great watchfulness and prayer, to weary the spirits; to clog the wheels of the mind in its ascent heavenward; and to render us unfit for that tranquil, spiritual posture of soul in which Mary was found, when she sat at her Savior's feet. To be actively employed, is good for the Christian; while a too great seclusion unfits the mind for general usefulness. There is, however, a happy combination of activity and retirement, which at once strengthens the mind, and preserves its spirituality from decay. The characters presented to our view in the Holy Scriptures are drawn by the unerring pencil of truth. There we see man as he really is, both in his best and worst estate. The excellencies of the saints are recorded with remarkable conciseness; while their defects and falls are dwelt upon with awful particularity. The reason seems to be apparent: to humble the natural pride of man; and to demonstrate, that he who glories, must glory in the Lord. The Bible tells us the unwelcome truth, that "Man in his best estate is altogether vanity;" that "there is not a just man upon earth, who lives and sins not." It is absurd, then, to expect perfection; but not unreasonable to expect consistency.

While I labor to promote the spread of the Gospel through the benighted regions of the earth, I must beware lest I neglect to cultivate, by close communion with Jesus, the work of grace in my own soul. When, like Martha, I find my mind cumbered with much serving; when I begin to feel an increasing distraction of thought, and a growing unfitness for spiritual meditation; then let me be take myself with redoubled frequency to Mary's happy station. At the feet of Jesus, I am permitted to ask for every blessing. In secret fervor of spirit, I may there implore that all-sufficient grace, which is so freely promised to all who sincerely seek the heavenly treasure.

Lord, enable me to cultivate diligence with devotion; to employ my humble powers in your service, both in the active range of Christian benevolence, and in the passive exercise of self-denying resignation. Mold my will to yours, Let holy love be the ever-moving spring of all my actions; that whatever I do in word or deed, I may do all with a view to your glory, and the spiritual good of a perishing world.

Descend, blest Spirit, in my heart, And give me Mary's better part; An interest in the Savior's love, A foretaste of the joys above.

Dispel the darkness of the mind: In you alone sweet peace I find; Whose kindly office it is to bless, Through Christ the Lord, my righteousness.

Oh! may I walk with holy fear, While journeying as a pilgrim here;

Feel my weak soul by you sustained; And in the path of life maintained.

Descend, blest Spirit, from above, You God of peace, of joy, and love, Seal your salvation to my heart, And never from my soul depart.

03.57-57. ON THE CHARACTER OF THE BEREANS

57. ON THE CHARACTER OF THE BEREANS The character and conduct of the Berean Jews, as recorded in the 17th chapter of Acts, is very instructive. As pride and prejudice shut out the light of truth, so humility and openness prepare the way for its admission. These Bereans were more noble than those of Thessalonica. They were people of a more ingenuous spirit. They did not resort to the base refuge of ridicule and persecution. They possessed a more elevated mind. Knowing the importance of the apostles' doctrine if true, they judged it, not only expedient, but due to the greatness of their message, to receive the Word. They admitted them into their synagogue, and with all readiness of mind, with a cheerful disposition of heart, listened to their preaching.

Having thus permitted the light to shine upon them, they did not, like the Thessalonians, immediately expel it, by driving the holy messengers of mercy out of their city; but they proceeded to search the Scriptures. They brought the doctrine of the apostles to the test of God's holy word. This they did, not superficially, but carefully; "they searched the Scriptures." They dug deep into the sacred mine. This they did, not occasionally, but constantly; "They searched the Scriptures daily," with unwearied assiduity, like those who were in earnest to discover the pure gold of divine truth. This they did, not critically, but sincerely; not to cavil with the apostles' doctrine by finding out objections against it; but to see "whether those things were so;" whether they were so revealed in the Scriptures as the apostles declared them to be. The effect of this ready reception of the word, of this daily searching of the Scriptures, was, that they believed. The Holy Spirit graciously guided their inquiring minds into all truth, so that they heartily embraced the word of salvation. "Anyone who wants to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God or is merely my own." John 7:17. This blessing was not confined to a few. It is said, "many of them believed;" also, "of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few." What a bright example! and what an encouragement is here held out to us!

Many of the Jews of Thessalonica, no doubt, acted like these Bereans; for we read in the 4th verse, "a great multitude believed." And in that city, the apostles planted a church, which shone exceedingly bright in faith and love. The carnal mind, in every place, is enmity against God. Even in Berea, the unbelieving Jews who came from Thessalonica, stirred up the people so that it was found needful to send Paul away. What a striking picture the word of God gives us of the human heart! We see man under all circumstances an enemy of God. Whether he live in ruder or more polished times, the heart, until renewed by grace, is the seat of sin. Whether he be enveloped in ignorance, or enlightened by science, he naturally hates the pure and holy light of evangelical truth. The sensual shuns its purifying tendency, the self-righteous its humbling, tendency. All, without exception, love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

Yet, God has never left himself without witness. In every age he has had a seed to serve him, who are accounted to the Lord for a generation. Neither has he ever left his people without sufficient evidence, whereby to prove the truth of his own revealed will respecting them. Among the many facts which may be adduced to prove the divine inspiration of the Bible, the two following may

perhaps deserve some notice.

First - as it respects the Old Testament. It is well known that the Jews were never either a philosophical, or a literary people. There are no works among their ancient uninspired authors which can lay any claim to genius. Yet the books of their prophets surpass all the celebrated writers of antiquity. What heathen poet, however laureled by admiring ages, can exceed the sublimity of their conceptions, the grandeur of their descriptions, and the exquisite taste and beauty of their imagery, when describing the glorious majesty and unsullied purity of the One, Only True God - the works of his hands - the ways of his providence - and the wonders of his love?

How skillfully do they dissect the human heart, and delineate to the very life the character of man in his lapsed and restored condition. How pure are the precepts, how precious the promises, how dreadful the threatenings, how solemn the warnings, with which their writings abound! When contrasted with the fables of the heathen poets; with their deification of the worst passions of mankind; with the impure character which they give to their gods; though embellished by all the flowers of rhetoric, and sweetened by the enchanting flow of numbers; it must surely convince every unprejudiced mind, that such writings as the Jewish prophets have left for the benefit of mankind, cannot be the product of unassisted fallen reason, but the gracious revelation of the Divine Spirit, under whose influence these holy men both spoke and wrote.

Secondly - as it respects the New Testament. The writers of the New Testament, with the exception of Luke and Paul, were men of no education; and yet their writings are the only standard of truth, respecting the character and work of the Savior of the world. These unlettered men elevated the standard of morals to the highest pitch, and revealed those heavenly principles which alone are able to restore man to the lost image of his Maker. So did not the most renowned and wisest philosophers of antiquity. The authors who immediately followed the said writers, called the primitive fathers, fell into many fancies, and even errors, on certain points; as if it had been permitted, in order to draw the line of distinction between divine inspiration, and the ordinary illumination of the human mind, more clear and defined. But the two great evidences for the truth of Christianity, are Miracles and Prophecy. At the time when the Lord Jesus declared himself to be the Messiah, and proclaimed the glad tidings of salvation to a lost world, miracles were needful, in order to prove the truth of his mission, to manifest the divine approbation to his doctrines, and to fulfill the prophetic character of the Messiah, as recorded in Isa 35:1-10.

Miracles were also necessary after his ascension, to evidence the truth of those doctrines propagated everywhere by his apostles, which declared Jesus to be the Son of God, the true Messiah, the Savior of the world. When these doctrines were thus fully attested, by the power of God accompanying the preaching of the cross, miracles ceased in the church, as being no longer needed.

Yet a still more important evidence was reserved for future ages, no less declarative of the divine approbation to the Christian religion than miracles; and that evidence is prophecy. The gradual fulfillment of those prophecies which were foretold by Christ and his apostles, may be considered as a standing miracle; since it is utterly beyond the power of man to insure the accomplishment of any predicted event independently of the will and purpose of God. Any man may predict, but the accomplishment must prove the truth of the prediction.

Christ, as God in our nature, foretold what would come to pass through his own prescience. The prophets and apostles, as his servants, spoke under the immediate influence of his Spirit dwelling in them. (1Pe 1:10-11.) Thus the prophecies which have been fulfilled, and which are now fulfilling, and which still remain to be fulfilled to the end of time, form a chain of evidence to the divine origin of Christianity, which Satan and his emissaries can never destroy.

These two external evidences, of miracles and prophecy, taken together with the whole character of the blessed Jesus, answering in every minute particular to the ancient prophecies of the Old Testament; and also in connection with the internal evidence of the Gospel, arising from its agreement with the nature of God; and its adaptation to the needs of fallen man; ought, yes, and will, satisfy every honest inquirer after truth that Christianity is of God.

Such an one, through grace, will be led to acknowledge with heart-felt gratitude, like the Bereans of old, that Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh; the only Savior and hope of perishing sinners. The joyful exclamation of such an enlightened soul will be, "we have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write." And should any skeptic reply, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" The simple answer will be, "Come and see." In every age, a generation of men has sprung up, the Serpent’s brood, who have labored to bring the word of eternal truth into discredit by false statements and sophistries of every kind. "Your word is tried to the uttermost, therefore your servant loves it," was the language of David in his day.

It may appear strange, in this age of light and information, that the New Testament should be arraigned by modern infidels as the most immoral book that is extant. Surely this must be the dying gasp of infidelity; for what can be more feeble than such an attack? They may as well assert that the sun, when shining without a cloud in its meridian splendor, is the darkest part of the visible creation. The sun is indeed as darkness to those who are blind; and so are the things of God to those who are unenlightened by the spirit of truth.

How strange! A Roman emperor placed a statue of Jesus among his idol deities, on account of the excellence of his moral precepts; while modern infidels, reaping the benefits of his morality in the inestimable blessings of established governments, dare, in defiance of common sense, common honesty, and common experience, to denounce the holy Gospel of Jesus as the chief of immoralities!

It is truly awful to behold, how far men may travel in the road of sin and rebellion against the Almighty Governor of the universe! Is there in the whole world a morality so elevated, so pure, so influential, as the morality of the Gospel? We need only compare the lives of those who reject the Christian revelation, with the lives of those who truly believe it, and live under its purifying influence, in order to ascertain where true morality is to be found.

It lies in the pages of the Bible, and is exhibited in the spirit and conduct of its sincere believers. The history of the church in all ages attests this delightful truth, that, "the Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes." Men of the most savage natures have become mild; the most impure have become chaste; the most ungovernable have become obedient. In short, the whole moral change from darkness to light, from sin to holiness, from Satan unto God, has been effected solely by the Spirit of God, through the instrumentality of the Gospel of Christ.

Oh! blessed Suit of righteousness, you who are the light of the world, let your bright beams shine upon it, that the deep shades of error, superstition, and sin, may flee before your powerful rays, until all the earth shall be filled with your glory.

Shine, blessed Jesus, upon your church. Let all your people become burning and shining lights in the world, shining by a reflection of your glory. Illuminate my dark mind. Take away the thick film from my mental vision. Remove the veil from my heart, and let me behold your glory with unveiled face. Yes, let me daily contemplate your glorious character, offices, and perfections, until I am changed into your holy image, and made fit for the enjoyment of your heavenly kingdom.

How rich, how varied are the themes, The sacred page contains, Like oceans deep, or lucid streams That fertilize the plains.

Here, humble souls are sweetly taught Salvation through his blood; By whom alone mankind are brought To happiness and God.

Here, lofty philosophic minds, Deep versed in learned lore, Are lost amid those vast designs The cherubim adore. The sacred mysteries of grace Confound their reasoning pride;

They see no beauty in His face, Who bowed his head and died. But firm as on a solid rock, The saint on Christ relies;

He smiles in death’s dissolving shock, And mounts into the skies!

03.58-58. ON THE LIVING WATER

58. ON THE LIVING WATER

How beautifully instructive is our Savior’s conversation with the woman of Samaria, while sitting, wearied with his journey, on Jacob’s well! What an example to his followers does the benevolent Redeemer exhibit, of condescension to ignorance, and of affectionate improvement of trivial occurrences to the spiritual good of all around us! The human mind, until taught of God, is equally blind, whether clothed in the imposing vestment of a Jewish doctor, or in the simple attire of a Samaritan female. Nicodemus was as ignorant respecting the nature of the new birth, as this poor woman was of the living water.

Human learning, though called theological, can never make us savingly acquainted with the first principles of the Gospel of Christ. Many an unlettered peasant may be a scribe well instructed in the mysteries of the kingdom; while the learned doctor, filling the professor’s chair, may be a very babe in the things of Christ. This view is humiliating to the pride of man, and should teach us to call no man master upon earth; but in child-like simplicity to sit at the feet of Jesus, and drink of that living water, which alone can purify and refresh our souls.

How delightful is the thought, that Jesus, the Savior and friend of sinners, is the giver of this spiritual blessing! "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says unto you, Give me to drink, you would have asked of him, and he would have given you living water." How consoling the truth, that this living water shall be in all his believing people as a well of water, not drying up as earthly springs too frequently do when most needed; but daily rising higher and higher, until it issue into everlasting life.

"Jesus answered and said unto her, whoever drinks of this water (the well of Jacob) shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." The joys of earth are only top springs. Many are delighted with these bubbling waters in seasons of outward prosperity. But in adverse times, when comfort is most needed, they become wells without water. Where, then, must the poor worldling go to quench his thirst? He must go to Jesus. "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." "Whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." The Holy Spirit is this living water, whose sacred streams can satisfy the most thirsty soul with joys which strengthen and purify the heart. He who drinks of this fountain, shall thirst no more as once he did. His thirst shall now be after righteousness; after the enjoyment of God himself. Blessed thirst! Oh! that I could feel this thirst increasing every hour; and every hour betake myself to this spring. But what says the Savior? It shall be in you a well of water springing up into everlasting life. Happy experience, when sensibly enjoyed! Have I this precious internal spring? Have I the Spirit of Christ? This forms the grand indisputable evidence of being a child of God, an heir of glory. Were the whole world my own, I could find no real happiness separate from Jesus Christ. There are indeed many counterfeits which bear the image and superscription of happiness, but all shall finally be detected, and leave their possessors miserably poor.

"Man who is born of a woman is of few years and full of trouble." Such is the portrait which Job draws of human life. But man was created happy, and would have remained so, had not Satan beguiled him into sin. Yet being "full of trouble," he naturally desires rest. Hence all men are in quest of happiness, and every one expects to find it. Many fancy that they have obtained it, and wrap themselves up in this fond conceit, until death hurls them headlong down the precipice into the burning gulf below!

While we view the many millions of mankind in search of some imaginary good, and greatly thirsting after it, how gracious, how condescending is the invitation of mercy, to the only fountain of true felicity; "Ho, every one that thirsts, come to the waters; and he that has no money, come you, buy and eat; yes come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price." A world thirsting after happiness, but mistaking its true nature and source, is here most lovingly, most freely invited to accept of the inestimable blessing. "Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfies not?" is the powerful appeal to the hearts and consciences of sinners.

Much labor and expense are bestowed towards obtaining some supposed good; but being altogether of an earthly nature, it cannot nourish the soul, or satisfy its enlarged desires. Hence follows this gracious declaration; "hearken diligently unto me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come unto me, hear and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you; even the sure mercies of David."

Oh! what rich display of grace is here. Well may the Almighty say, "my thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are your ways my ways." But it does not stop here. The voice of mercy still cries, "seek the Lord while he may be found; call you upon him while he is near;" evidently implying that a time is coming when he will not be found; an hour is approaching, when he will not hear. He is now waiting to be gracious, and may be found in Christ upon a mercy-seat, to bless every returning penitent. But if the day of grace be once ended; if death find the sinner still impenitent and unbelieving, the Lord will he found indeed, but found seated on a throne of judgment; and the wretched criminal will be driven far from his presence, never more to heat the sweet call of slighted mercy. In this beautiful invitation to a world of sinners, grace reigns through righteousness; for it is added, "let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." A sweet assurance of joy and peace is given to every sinner, who thus, through grace, turns unto the Lord with a true penitent heart and living faith; "he shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

Here is nothing but joy and rejoicing! - Oh! what a precious salvation! The ransomed soul shall be filled with joy and peace through believing. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repents." The ministers of Christ ardently long after and rejoice in the conversion of sinners. "My heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." "God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the affections of Jesus Christ." "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." Such were the feelings of Paul and John. The whole church rejoices to behold the wandering sheep brought safe into the fold; and heartily welcomes the chief of sinners, when he becomes the loving disciple of her beloved Lord. "All they knew was that

people were saying, 'The one who used to persecute us now preaches the very faith he tried to destroy!' And they gave glory to God because of me." Gal 1:23-24. So wrote Paul to the church in Galatia, respecting his reception by the apostles at Jerusalem. The Almighty himself thus addresses his beloved people, redeemed through the blood of Jesus; "The Lord your God in the midst of you is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over you with joy; he will rest in his love; he will rejoice over you with singing." Thus the Lord will bless the righteous, and with favor will he compass him as with a shield. The certainty of all this blessedness is declared; "My word that goes out of my mouth, it shall not return unto me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing. whereunto I sent it." The glory of God is also secured; "Where once there were thorns, cypress trees will grow. Where briers grew, myrtles will sprout up. This miracle will bring great honor to the Lord's name; it will be an everlasting sign of his power and love." Isa 55:13. This glorious change from sin to holiness, which is figuratively expressed by the thorns and briars, the cypress and the myrtle, shall be for a sign, an everlasting sign of the divine origin of the Gospel of Christ, and for a perpetual memorial of the converting grace of God.

Oh my soul! after what object are you thirsting? After what are your desires tending? Look around you, and see if any created good can satisfy those desires? Be assured that nothing can make you truly happy, but an interest in the blood of Jesus; nothing but a union to him by faith; nothing but a sweet experience of his pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace; nothing but an entire and unreserved dedication of yourself to him who gave himself for you. Oh! then, cast yourself now at the feet of a loving Savior. He will not spurn you from him, though you deserve to be cast into the nethermost hell!

Oh! may I daily thirst for these blessings. I would now draw near to the fountain of living water. May I freely take of you, Oh Spirit of consolation. By your sacred influence may I feel my soul refreshed and strengthened, while journeying to the land of which sovereign grace has said, I will give it you.

Blessed Jesus, I am not worthy to approach you. But here is my encouragement; that those only are invited, who have "no money;" no merit of their own; and I have none. Your righteousness is my only boast and plea. You came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. How gracious, then, is this Gospel call to a world of perishing sinners! "Ho every one that thirsts come to the waters." Oh! that all may hear and embrace the offered mercy.

Hasten the glorious period, when all shall come with singing unto you; when the church shall lengthen her cords, and strengthen her stakes; yes, when the whole, earth shall be filled with your glory. Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly. Amen.

You fountain of eternal life, Whose streams forever flow, Spring up within my waiting heart, And all your bliss bestow.

Refresh my soul with living streams, Until holy fruits abound; A chosen tree of righteousness, On Zion's sacred ground.

Come, Holy Spirit, your grace impart;

Put forth your quickening power;

Vain is the hope of bliss below, The pageant of an hour.

Like tender flowers, we open the bud, And greet the morning ray; But before it is noon we droop and fade, The creatures of a day.

Yet on this little day of life What mighty things depend;

Eternal torments, or the joy, That knows nor bound nor end.

Then haste, blest Spirit, to my breast, Renew my guilty soul;

Speak peace, you blessed Comforter, And make the wounded - whole.

03.59-59. ON THE BURNING BUSH

59. ON THE BURNING BUSH

Much valuable instruction and consolation may be derived from the consideration of the vision with which Moses was favored in the desert of Midian. "The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. And he looked and behold the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed." (Exo 3:2.) Like Moses, I would now turn aside, and contemplate "this great sight;" at once so instructive and consoling. This bush, which in the original signifies a thorny bush is a fit emblem of the church of God. Considered in itself, it is weak and worthless; a bramble bush, the lowest among the shrubs. "You see your calling, brethren," writes the apostle to the church at Corinth, "how, that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence."

"The bush burned with fire;" which justly represents the state of the church in this evil world. The malice of Satan - the persecutions of the ungodly - the corruptions of the heart - the trials and afflictions which come immediately from God for the purification of his people, may well be compared to fire. The bush, though on fire, "was not consumed." This is a wonderful sight indeed. Here the grace and power of Jesus are eminently displayed. The church has always been in a furnace, and yet never consumed; yes, rather purified and brightened in proportion to the intensity of the flame. The cause of the church’s preservation is revealed to us. The Lord was in the bush. "God is in the midst of her, therefore shall she not be moved." "The gates of hell shall not prevail against her." "Fear not, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God." "No weapon formed against you shall prosper." "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it he afraid." This remarkable vision should teach us humility. The church is not compared to a stately cedar, but to a bramble-bush. We must have low thoughts of ourselves. Man is naturally proud. This inbred evil, even after conversion, rebels against the motions of the Spirit. Hence arises spiritual pride. When the Lord graciously imparts his gifts for the edification of the church, how prone we are to take the praise of these endowments to ourselves. This made the lowly-minded apostle expostulate with the Corinthian converts; "Who makes you to differ from another, and what have you that you did not receive? Now if you did receive it, why do you glory, as if you had not received it?" "Knowledge puffs up, but charity edifies."

Moses equally cautioned the ancient people of God against this subtle poison. "The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people, for you were the fewest of all people; but because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers." "It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the Lord your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to

your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people." Deu 9:5-6. How slow are we to learn this humbling, yet precious truth; that salvation is all of grace, rich grace abounding to the chief of sinners. The beauty and glory of the church are derived from Christ. He is the glory, as well as the glorifier of his people Israel. Filled with his Spirit, and bearing his image, the church "looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and majestic as an army with banners." Jesus beautifies the meek with salvation. "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." "By the grace of God, I am what I am." "In the Lord shall the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." From this vision we are taught to expect trials while journeying through this desert world. Sometimes the storm rages violently, and the flame burns with awful intenseness; yet nothing of the church shall be consumed, but its dross. Thus the malice of Satan and the world is overruled for good. Persecution tends only to refine the saints of God. It quickens their graces, and puts new life into their prayers. They run to the strong-hold, and are safe under the fostering care of an Almighty Savior. At such trying seasons, the chaff and the withered branches are consumed. Mere nominal professors cannot endure those persecutions, which are designed in God’s providence to separate the precious from the vile. "It must be that offences come;" "That those who are approved, may be made manifest." The consideration of "this great sight" should teach us confidence in the faithfulness and power of Jesus. He is in the bush. He never leaves nor forsakes his people. "When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you." - is the gracious sustaining promise. This vision of a bush burning, yet unconsumed, affords a striking view of the perpetuity of the church of Christ. Nothing shall be allowed to destroy this treasure of Jehovah. It may be reduced, and often has been reduced to the lowest ebb; but in the most degenerate times God never left himself without a church, however few in number, to show forth his praise. From Abel down to the present hour, there has ever been "a remnant according to the election of grace." When the whole earth was filled with violence, and all flesh had corrupted its way before God, "’Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. He was a just man, and perfect in his generation, and Noah walked with God." The desolating flood at length descended, and everything wherein was the breath of life perished, except the little church of God, which was preserved in the ark on the bosom of the tempestuous waters!

After the deluge, iniquity began to spread with awful rapidity. Idolatry reared its rebellious tower in the plain of Shinar; and the knowledge of the true God became gradually shrouded in ignorance and superstition, until the Almighty called Abraham by his grace, and caused genuine piety to flourish once more in himself and family. When planted in the land of Canaan, the Israelites soon forsook the God of their fathers. In the midst of abounding idolatry, the Lord raised up a prophet in whom seemed to center all the religion of the land. In the grief of his heart he said, "It is enough. Now, Oh Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." "I, even I, only’ am left; and they seek my life to take it away." But what was the answer of the Lord to Elijah? "I have left seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal." When our blessed Lord came in the flesh, darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people; yet even then there were

a chosen few, who in faith "waited for redemption in Israel."

During the dark period of 1260 years, foretold in the Revelation, wherein the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet would wage continual war with the church of Christ; the Lord appointed two witnesses (a constant succession of faithful men) who should testify to the power and grace of Jesus, even though they prophesy in sackcloth. In this period we now live, and can only attest to the truth of this remarkable prophecy.

All this is in virtue of the everlasting covenant. How extensive the promise of the Father to his eternal Son! "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." "His name shall endure forever; his name shall be continued as long as sun, and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed." From this manifestation of the Almighty to Moses, we are led to adore the sovereignty of God. He ordinarily chooses; not the great ones of the earth, but the poor and the despised. Some, indeed, but not many, noble are called. Worldly riches and elevated stations have a tendency to beget self-sufficiency and vain-confidence. "Poor in spirit, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom," is the genuine character of the church of Christ. Divine grace, however, can as easily bring the proudest monarch, as the lowest beggar, in the lowly attitude of contrition to the foot of the cross.

Happy will be that period, when the kings of the earth and its nobles shall esteem it their highest glory to become the subjects of the Prince of Peace; and their chief joy to promote the extension of his kingdom of righteousness throughout the world.

We are hereby led to admire also the wisdom and power of God. He can promote the enlargement of his church by those very means which its enemies employ to destroy it. The children of Israel grew and multiplied, in spite of Pharaoh’s efforts to prevent it. The Gospel spread with wonderful rapidity, notwithstanding all the threatenings of the Jews and Romans to check its progress. Those persecutions which scattered the disciples abroad, tended only to widen their field of labor; for they went everywhere, preaching the word. The sacred fire, thus dispersed by the rude hand of violence, multiplied itself in proportion to its dispersion. Hence it became proverbial, that the blood of tike martyrs is the seed of the church. "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed." Even its enemies wondered whereunto all this would grow.

While the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel together, against the Lord and against his Christ; the Almighty Sovereign of the universe proclaimed; "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." Jesus by his resurrection was declared to be the Son of God with power; and "of the increase of his kingdom and government, there shall be no end." "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

Two blessed periods are, therefore, fast approaching, the anticipation of which filled the ancient prophets and apostles with holy transport. The one, when the church shall arise and shine in her millennial glory; when she shall put on her beautiful garments, and become the joy and praise of the whole earth. The other, when, in the perfection of beauty, she shall be presented as a chaste virgin to Christ the heavenly bridegroom, and, being clothed with his righteousness, shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of glory forever and ever.

Oh, my soul, rejoice in this great salvation. Lord, grant unto your unworthy servant a portion of this felicity. Make me even now a living member of your mystical body, poor in spirit, and pure in heart,

patiently enduring every trial, daily exercising faith in your truth and mercy; adoring your sovereignty; admiring your power; and rejoicing in the perpetuity of the grace which lives in all your faithful people, and preserves them unto your eternal kingdom and glory.

Let my whole heart praise you, you God of my salvation. Let my whole life be consecrated unto you. The work, Oh Lord, is yours. You alone can new-create the soul. Perform this act of grace, this miracle of mercy, for your own glory and to your everlasting praise. Amen and amen.

Oh! come you servants of the Lord, Whose will is your delight; His boundless love and grace record, While heart and tongue unite.

Strike up your harps, and sweetly sing Of Jesus' lovely name; To him your grateful tribute bring, His endless praise proclaim.

Declare what wonders he has done, Make all his glories known;

Adore the Father's equal Son; The priest upon the throne.

Sing of his rich and sovereign grace, Transcendent and divine;

Sing how he died to save our race From misery and sin.

He died for us - he made our peace;

He pleads our cause on high;

Oh! may our praises never cease, Hosannahs never die! May each revolving year inflame Our zeal, delight, and love;

Until round the throne we chant his name In purer strains above.

Oh! come, you servants of the Lord, His endless praise proclaim; In gladsome notes his love record, For, "worthy is the Lamb."

03.60-60. ON ADOPTION

60. ON ADOPTION

How rich, how varied are the blessings of redemption! Like the gracious Giver, they are infinite and eternal, reaching from everlasting to everlasting. Fully to know the gifts of grace, we must know the fullness of him from whom they flow. Surely gratitude ought to swell our hearts, when we contemplate the author of our mercies, and the abject worms on whom those mercies are bestowed.

Happy is that heart which can appreciate the love of Jesus, and to which the Savior is increasingly precious. Thus to feel, is heaven begun; and form one of the brightest evidences of adoption into the family of God.

According to the natural order of things, we are first made the children of God; and then we receive the spirit of children. This is in perfect accordance with Scripture; "you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus;" and "because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father." For "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Hence "he that believes on the Son of God, has the witness in himself;" the indwelling Spirit testifying to his spirit, or conscience, that he is a child of God; for thus says John; "hereby we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us." Therefore, filial affections towards God as our covenant Father, produced in the soul by the Holy Spirit, constitute the Spirit of adoption, and prove us to be his redeemed children. This delightful feeling of sonship, with all its attendant blessedness, creates a peace and joy, such as a loving child experiences in the society and under the smiles of an affectionate parent. But we must never forget that this state of heart is not the mere effect of contemplating the change which may have passed upon us. When we look into ourselves, we find continual need for the deepest humiliation, even when we can praise God for his distinguishing mercy towards us. Our peace and joy are the fruits of faith in the blood of Christ, wrought in us through the mighty power of God. We can have peace and joy only through believing. But as we become the children of God by faith, so true peace in the conscience, and joy in the heart, can only be maintained and increased through an abiding reliance on the blood and righteousness of Jesus. From this foundation arises a sacred edifice of heavenly graces. "Don’t you know," says the apostle, that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, who you have of God; and you are not your own, for you are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s." All the delightful experiences of true believers are inseparably connected with the witness of the Spirit. For though, for perspicuity’s sake, we may endeavor to speak of them as so many steps ascending to the highest privileges of the Gospel, yet they are so blended together, that to separate them would be like separating the superstructure of a building from its foundation, or disjointing the members of a beautifully formed body.

Every grace of the Spirit has its counterfeit in the hypocrite.

Oh! what need we have to pray for wisdom "to try things which differ." All joy is not the fruit of the Spirit. "The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment." All peace is not the peace of God. "When they shall say, Peace, then sudden destruction comes upon them." The enemy of souls can sow his tares, which at a distance may appear like true wheat; while, on closer inspection, they are found to be destitute of the precious grain. The renewed mind, on the contrary, unfolds its native excellencies the more minutely it is viewed; just as the insect and the flower spread before us their exquisite forms and beauties in proportion to the power of the lens.

Thus the more we become acquainted with a real child of God, the more of the divine image we shall discover. Humility, love, and purity will equally spread before us their beauties, and prove that the workmanship is of God.

What remains of fallen nature will, indeed be uncouth and forbidding; but what is of God will be attractive and delightful. Oh! that my heart may be molded into this lovely image! There is in the blessed Jesus every thing to kindle our love to the highest flame. Lord, inflame my whole heart with constant, fervent love to you.

Some professors of religion consider every affection short of ecstasy as worth nothing. Hence many, it is, to be feared, substitute mere animal excitement for joy in the Holy Spirit; and thus deceive themselves. A person may bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, have much of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, and yet, not be able, from some mental cause, to exercise that filial confidence towards God in which the Spirit of adoption in a great measure consists; although none can possess the Spirit, without bringing forth the fruits of righteousness.

Others, from some peculiar temperament of body, may be prevented from feeling high transports of joy, while, at the same time, they can taste the sweets of inward serenity and composedness of mind. Others again, from a deep view of their own corruption, cannot or dare not recognize in themselves a holy conformity to God, though they hate sin and truly love the Savior.

Now, shall we say that such characters have not the Spirit’s witness, because they cannot feel this ecstasy of delight? Must the work of the Spirit be overlooked, in the absence of rapturous feeling? Shall we make those sad whom the Lord has not made sad? Oh how needful it is, for the enjoyment of true comfort, to place our experience on the right foundation!

Now, if joy, which is the Christian’s delightful privilege, be the effect of the Spirit’s witness, rather than the witness itself; then the humble follower of Jesus who has the testimony of his conscience, that he has chosen God for his portion, and cleaves wholly to his Savior for righteousness and strength, ought not to despond because he cannot rise to those heights of joy, which some favored believers are permitted to attain. He may, however, and he ought, to take courage, from this inward witness of the Spirit to his conscience, to aspire after so happy a state of mind, which conduces so much to the glory of God, and to the spiritual growth of his own soul; for "the joy of the Lord is our strength." May we not then conclude, that, when joy overflows the heart through a lively sense of redeeming grace, it forms a sunshine in the soul; and that when this joy is accompanied with love, and confidence, and reverence, and trust in God, we have the Spirit of adoption in its most genuine exercise? We also perceive, that joyful emotions arising from some powerful impression or animal excitement, may be transient, as is evident from the stony ground hearer, who anon received the word with joy, but in time of temptation fell away.

It is to guard against such a delusion as this, that we should endeavor to form a solid and scriptural basis on which to repose our hopes and consolations. Joy may be unhallowed, but submissive obedience to the will of God cannot. How important, and yet how determinate, is the declaration of Paul "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Am I led by the Spirit of God? - Oh! how much of happiness is contained in the right answer to this question. The Spirit leads the sinner to the foot of the cross. Have I ever reached that place of mercy? The Spirit leads the sinner from the love of sin to the love of holiness. Do I abhor whatever is contrary to the mind of my Redeemer; and seek my happiness in the performance of his will? The Spirit leads the soul from the vanities of the world, to the enjoyment of momentous Gospel blessings. Have I been graciously withdrawn in heart and affection from an evil world, and led into the purifying delights of fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ?

How blessed is the Spirit of adoption; that childlike Spirit which enables us to come to our heavenly Father, neither doubting his power, nor distrusting his grace. When we consider our weakness and his strength, our needs and his fullness, we may well feel happy while possessing in all its vigor this Spirit of adoption.

Sickness may invade our frame; poverty may diminish our substance; friends may prove unfaithful; yes, even Satan may harass our minds; and sin, dwelling within us, may lust and rebel; yet with God, the Great God; as our reconciled Father in Christ Jesus, we shall rise superior to every grief and loss; and feel and maintain a peace which the world can neither give nor take away.

While in this happy frame of mind, the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. But if we are children, then we are heirs; and - Oh! amazing thought! surpassing human intellect to conceive - heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ! - heirs of that Being, whom Abraham styles "the possessor of heaven and earth" - and joint-heirs with that Savior, who declared, "'all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Surely, then, with delightful propriety might the apostle say, "all things are yours, for you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s." Are the children of God, while thus exalted in privileges, exempt from affliction? Ah no! - while here below, they must tread the path of suffering - the path by which the blessed Jesus went to glory; for it is added, "'if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."

Oh you adorable Savior, may I never shrink from bearing your cross, when called to endure it; if I suffer with you, I shall also reign with you. But who is sufficient for these things? Of myself; I am perfect weakness; but in you there is fullness of strength, and through faith; in you I shall assuredly overcome.

Oh! that I may daily possess this sacred evidence of my adoption into your family; an evidence which will stand the test of trial and temptation; which will keep me humble in prosperity, patient in affliction, peaceful in death, and joyful through eternity. Impart this blessing for your own mercies’ sake, my only Helper and Deliverer.

You happy souls, the Savior praise, Whose grace has made you sons of God; To him devote your fleeting days, Who bought you with his precious blood. With childlike confidence repose Each care on his paternal breast, Whose love nor end nor measure knows; The center of eternal rest.

How sweet to dwell beneath his shade, Removed far from toil and care; Where none can make the soul dismayed That seeks and finds its refuge there.

Unite my heart, dear Lord, to You, To You be every moment given; On earth may I your goodness see, Your glory in the highest heaven.

03.61-61. ON FAITH

61. ON FAITH The heart of man is like a weight, whose natural bias is downward. Nothing but a power outside of itself can cause it to ascend heavenward. The attraction of gravitation is not more powerful in its effects on the various parts of the universe, than is the debasing force of natural corruption in the heart of fallen man.

There is, however, a counteracting principle - an attracting influence which can draw the soul from earth to heaven, and unite it to the blessed God. This principle is Faith. Without faith, it is impossible to please God because, until we truly believe in Jesus, we are in a state of guilt and condemnation.

True faith is not a mere passive impression, or an inoperative notion. It is a holy principle wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God, producing gracious habits, holy affections, filial reverence, and obedience. Faith is seated in the heart, influencing and purifying the whole inner man.

Faith unites the soul to Christ, as the branch to the vine. It draws virtue from him, whereby the believer is rendered fruitful in every good work. The sweet fruits of the Spirit appear and abound in rich luxuriance on these favored branches, to the glory of God.

Faith places the soul upon Christ, as the only foundation, on which it is built up a holy temple unto the Lord, unhurt by all the winds and storms which beat upon it. Faith feeds upon Christ continually, as the true bread which came down from heaven, of which, whoever eats shall live forever. Faith works by love to God, his people, and his word. It evidences its vitality by its fruits. Faith purifies the heart from sin, waging war against all internal and external evil. Faith overcomes the world, both when it smiles and when it frowns. Faith views the glorious land of promise as its own, and triumphs over all intervening difficulties and dangers which bestrew its path to Zion.

Faith makes the believer confident, yet watchful; bold, yet cautious; aspiring, yet humble. He is confident, since the promises of God are kindly given him to rest upon - watchful, since he feels the deceitfulness of his rebellious heart - bold, since the honor of the Savior demands his confession - cautious, lest he should be only gratifying a vain-glorious spirit; aspiring after that honor which comes from God only; yet humble, since he remembers his own vileness and utter unworthiness of the least of the divine mercies.

If it be asked, how can faith effect such wonders? the reply is, because faith is the gift of God, and the power of God. The believer, abiding in Christ, and deriving continual supplies of grace and strength out of his fullness, becomes mighty through this power which works in him mightily. He is strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, to fight the good fight of faith, and to lay hold on eternal life. Weak and helpless in himself, he is strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus his Lord and finally obtains the palm of victory through the blood of the Lamb. Thus, faith in Christ at once gives peace to the conscience, and leads it to all true holiness; for when peace is imparted to the conscience, purity is produced in the heart.

Such is the faith of God’s elect; a faith which is according to godliness. That system of religion must be awfully defective, which would dare to lower the standard of holiness under the false, I would say impious, notion of thereby exalting the grace of God. Because Christ is a Savior, shall we make him the minister of sin? Because God is merciful, must he therefore be unjust? He who is glorious in holiness, cannot save sinners in their sins or admit them into his kingdom, while sin has the dominion over them; it is impossible. The whole of divine revelation, yes, the very plan of the Gospel, is designed to preserve unsullied the infinite perfections of Jehovah; while the vilest of sinners are saved from hell, and made, through grace, to reflect the divine image, in all the beauties of holiness, righteousness, and truth.

None are saved by Christ, but those who are saved from their sins. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. The apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, says, "If there had been a law given, which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." (Gal 3:21.) This declaration is most important. If God could have given a law less spiritual in its requirements, and less awful in its sanctions; if he could have given a law, lowered in its standard, and yet compatible with his infinite holiness and man’s truest happiness; then life might have been attained by such a law. But as this, in the very nature of things, is impossible; as God cannot, from the absolute perfection of his nature, command less than infinite holiness approves, or less than infinite justice demands; as his law is immutably holy, though man has rebelled against it, and lost all power to obey it; it remains an unchangeable truth, that life cannot come by a law which condemns the very thought of sin, and lays the whole human race under merited condemnation. On this account, the Scripture has concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. This divine truth strikes at the root of those errors which would make the Gospel a mitigated law; or mix man’s works and the Savior’s merits in the great act of justification; or, denying the necessity of an atonement, make man’s repentance and obedience sufficient to insure the approbation of Heaven. The law is given to us, not for the purpose of obtaining eternal life by our obedience to its requirements, since "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified;" but as a rule of life, by which we are to walk under the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel is revealed for the all-gracious purpose of redeeming us from all iniquity; and purifying our hearts from sin, through faith in the atonement of Jesus the Son of God. Here spring all our hopes of forgiveness; all our peace of conscience; all our joy in the Holy Spirit. From this source of mercy we derive all our power to love and serve God in the filial spirit of adoption.

Thus it is evident, that where infinite justice finds its satisfaction, there, and there only, can my guilty soul find its salvation. The Lamb of God, bleeding upon the cross, as the divinely appointed sacrifice for the sins of a fallen world, is the sinner’s only refuge from the storm of eternal vengeance. To this blessed atonement I would look, and from it, I would draw all my hopes of pardon, peace, and purity.

Oh! for more faith and love. Lord, without you I can do nothing. I feel my helplessness, and my inward depravity. Lead me to the Rock which is higher than I. Wash me in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Sprinkle clean water upon me, and I shall be clean. Put your Spirit within me. Cause the south wind to blow, that my soul may be filled with precious fruits; that the spices may flow out, that my beloved may come and eat his pleasant fruits, and abide with me forever!

Oh! what a happy life is a life of faith in the son of God. To have the humble, yet scriptural, assurance that my sins are forgiven; to know from the word of truth, and to be persuaded that all things shall work together for my good; is the divine alchemy which turns all to gold.

Sickness, adversity, persecution, the buffetings of Satan, are all overruled for good, when the soul is accepted and pardoned through faith in the blood of Jesus. Nothing can separate such a soul from the love of God, while abiding in Christ by faith.

How safe, how happy, how rich is the true believer in Jesus. He is safe under the protecting wing of the Almighty; happy in the enjoyment of the divine favor; rich with all the treasures of grace and glory. He is Christ's, and Christ is God's. And yet, how is such a state despised by the world! Those who live in the enjoyment of it are deemed enthusiasts, or perhaps insane. Numbers who would be thought religious, treat such a state of feeling with coldness, or receive it with caution. They seem to dread everything that is fervent or transporting in religion; as if the affections had no share with the understanding in the great transactions between Christ and the soul.

Oh that I could feel my heart more alive to God; more active in his service! A lukewarm spirit is hateful to a God of love. I am convinced that faith is the gift of God, not only because I read it in my Bible, but because I feel my utter inability, by any natural power of my own, to produce it in myself. I am taught to pray for this blessing in the name of Jesus. But true prayer is equally the gift of God.

Thus I perceive that I am indebted to sovereign grace alone for the whole work of salvation from first to last; from the first incipient desire after God, to the full fruition of him in glory. Then what must I do! Must I sit still and do nothing! Ah, no! This would, indeed, be enthusiasm. Satan and may own indolent heart would have me act in this manner. But such reasoning would condemn, and not excuse me in the day of judgment. God has given me an understanding, which, though darkened through the fall, is still capable, under the advantages of Christian instruction, of knowing that the Creator ought to be loved, and feared, and served above all other beings.

He has given me a conscience, which, though awfully defiled, yet, under such instruction, is capable of making me feel that I do not love, and fear, and serve this almighty Creator above all other things; and therefore, that I am a guilty creature, and deserving of his eternal wrath.

God has cast my lot in a land where Jesus is preached, where sinners are invited to come unto him for all those blessings which they have lost through the fall, and of which they stand in need. My responsibility is, therefore, increased by this offered mercy.

What, then, must I do? Surely it is my duty, as a rational and responsible creature, to listen to the call of my heavenly Father. It is my duty to come to the cross of Christ, just as I am, blind, ignorant, helpless, guilty, and polluted, that I may obtain, through the riches of his grace, light, and strength, and righteousness, and sanctification.

If I do not come, the fault is altogether my own; it is because I will not. The guilt lies in the bad state of my heart. If I do come, it is through the secret, yet powerful operation of divine grace, seeing God is the first mover of the heart to himself. Infinite Wisdom knows how to reconcile these seeming differences; and what the believer knows not now, he shall know hereafter.

Hence it is evident, that all the specious pleas and excuses which sinners make for not coming to Jesus, will before long be found to originate in their love of sin, and in the corrupt state of their will.

Hell will be filled with self-reproaches, and with eternal self-condemnations. Let not Satan, then, Oh my soul, and a perverse rebellious will, keep you from the Savior. Press to him through the crowd. Do not be afraid of meeting with a repulse. His heart is full of tenderness and love.

Bartimeus could not heal his blindness; nor the leper his leprosy; nor the poor woman her issue of blood. They all felt their respective maladies. They believed that Jesus could restore them. They applied to him, and were healed. Go and do you likewise. Cry also to the Savior; touch the hem of his garment; and he, who is all power, and grace, and love, will impart this saving faith, and enable you to draw virtue from him; saying, "I will, be clean." "Only believe. All things are possible to him that believes."

Lord, I believe; help my unbelief. Lord, increase my faith. Enable me to come to you now in humble confidence and love, that I may receive out of your fullness grace for grace. Lord, shine upon your work. Make me a monument of your mercy, that I may live to your glory, and sing your everlasting praise.

Oppressed with grief overwhelmed with fear, Where can I find a refuge near?

Dear Savior, unto you I flee, Oh! hide me in Gethsemane. My sins assume an awful form;

Around I view the rising storm;

I fly, my only Lord, to you, Oh! hide me in Gethsemane. In that sweet garden, you did bear Of guilt and pain my awful share; Your bleeding form methinks I see Extended in Gethsemane.

Oh! fill my heart with fervent love; To you, let each affection move; From sin preserve me ever free, While sheltered in Gethsemane.

03.62-62. ON HOPE

62. ON HOPE

Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, declared, "Some of you have not the knowledge of God; I speak this to your shame." And may not the same reproof be directed to multitudes of professing Christians of our day? The ignorance of many is lamentably great. Light is in the dwellings of the righteous, and the spiritual Goshen is illuminated by the beams of heavenly truth; but what an awful extent of territory still remains enveloped in Egyptian darkness, under the tyranny of Satan and in bondage to sin! With Isaiah we must lament, while casting our eyes over the world, that "darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people." With what fervency, then, should true believers supplicate for the promised out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, who alone can enlighten the understanding, and guide the wretched slave to Jesus Christ for spiritual redemption. Too many, it is to be feared, seek their knowledge from human sources, rather than from the fountain of divine wisdom. The writings of good men may be lawfully used as little rills flowing from the sacred fountain of inspiration; but woe be to that church or people, who substitute them for the blessed spring itself. It is a never-failing mark of a fallen church, when human traditions or human systems are raised above, made equal with, or set in opposition to, the revealed word of God. The Bible is the grand depository of every truth that is necessary to be known, believed, and practiced, in order to eternal salvation. But even the Holy Bible itself is but a dead letter, without a spiritual discernment of its doctrines, and a spiritual relish for its precepts. "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." But, says the apostle, "God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God."

How affectionately did Paul pray for the Ephesian converts, that God "would give unto them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; that the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, they might know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." Many professing Christians would be at a loss to give a reason of the hope that is in them. They tell us, indeed, that God is merciful; that they trust to Jesus Christ; that they do the best they can, and want to injure no one; and therefore hope that all will end well at the last; though they do not pretend to so much religion as some people, who are perhaps no better than others, notwithstanding their preciseness and apparent sanctity of character. This is a creed which satisfies the consciences of thousands, while their affections are glued to the world, and the love of Christ is a stranger to their hearts. Such people have no sublime views of the Christian hope. A mist of ignorance rests upon it, which obscures its glory and damps its joy.

Lord, give me, through the teaching of your Spirit, a sweet realizing view of this blessed hope, which bears up your people under all their trials, and enables them to glorify you, even in the fires. The hope of the believer in Jesus flows from the free, sovereign love of Almighty God; therefore it is called "a good hope through grace;" "good," because it issues from the fountain of goodness; "through grace," because it originates solely in unmerited mercy. This hope rests upon an

immovable foundation, even on the divinity and atonement of Jesus Christ, who is called by the Spirit of Truth "our hope;" because all our hope of salvation is treasured up in him, and flows from him. All who possess this hope, have Christ dwelling in their hearts by faith; therefore, says the apostle, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." The Spirit of Christ is the pledge and seal of future glory, and abides in the hearts of all the faithful in Christ Jesus. But how are we to know when we truly possess this hope of glory? John informs us, "Every man that has this hope in him, purifies himself, even as God is pure." It is therefore a holy principle, sanctifying and cleansing the soul. He who has the hope of dwelling with Christ in glory, cannot delight in the service of Satan, or in the pleasures of sin. They are an offence unto him. To live in sin, while professing to enjoy the hope of glory, forms an indisputable mark of hypocrisy, or self-delusion.

Oh! with what jealous care should real Christians watch against those destructive tenets, which, under the cloak of evangelical doctrines, would break down the barrier of Gospel holiness, and let in the wild boar of the woods, or trample under feet the sacred ground of Zion. "He that says, I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." The believer, who is taught from above, well knows that sin separates between him and his God; and prevents the communication of his gracious beamings on the soul. He, therefore, hates and loathes this infinite evil. He longs for more of his Savior’s presence and love; and mourns over every corruption of his nature, and every contracted defilement, of which his heart is made conscious. Knowing what numberless deviations from the holy law of God his Savior’s eye beholds continually in his daily walk and conversation, he lifts up the prayer of David with self-abasement; "Cleanse me from secret faults." He pants after that blessed period, when sin shall no longer rebel against the Spirit dwelling within him; and therefore the "hope of glory" is to him a glorious hope and makes him long to be dissolved, that he may be with Christ. The Christian’s hope is "a living hope." It gives the believer vigor in running the race that is set before him. It animates him in his arduous warfare. It enables him to endure, with patience and fortitude, the rugged path through which he has to travel Zionward. The Christian’s hope is "full of immortality." It traverses the valley of the shadow of death, and opens to his view the boundless prospect of eternal glory. It gathers by delightful anticipation many a precious cluster of the grapes of Eshcol, and thus gives a foretaste of the joys of heaven. The Christian’s hope "makes not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in his heart, by the Holy Spirit who is given unto him." It forms a divine evidence of his union to Christ. He can now say with Paul, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes." He is not ashamed to confess Christ before men, as his only hope of glory. He can declare with humble confidence and heartfelt sincerity, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." The Christian’s hope is "a helmet of salvation," which covers his head in the day of battle, when the fiery darts of Satan are leveled against him. It is "an anchor of the soul," both sure and steadfast, which preserves the tempest tossed soul from being driven into the ocean of doubts and despondencies, or dashed against the rocks of presumption or despair. Surely, then, it is "a blessed hope." All who possess it are blessed. This made the apostle pray so sweetly for the Roman converts; "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit."

Diligence and privilege are inseparably united by the wisdom of God. Hence Paul thus exhorts the Hebrews; "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you

have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." Heb 6:10-12. Examine well, Oh my soul, what is the hope of your calling. You have been and are continually called by the outward preaching of the word; but here is the turning point - have you been drawn to Christ by the inward, effectual call of the Holy Spirit? To ascertain this important fact, inquire what is the nature of your hope? Is it a good hope? a blessed hope? a hope full of immortality? Have you cast the anchor of hope within the veil? Have you put on the helmet of salvation? Do you find your hope to be a lively hope, animating and invigorating your endeavors after the attainment of everlasting life? Does the hope which you possess purify all your affections? Is Jesus really dwelling in you as the hope of glory? Are you resting on him as the only foundation of hope? And, in the full assurance of this Christian hope, do you enjoy that peace which passes understanding; that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory? If this be your experience, then rejoice and be exceeding glad; for happy, unspeakably happy, will be your lot through the countless ages of eternity. But Oh! have you not reason to mourn over the little progress which you have made in the divine life, since the bright beams of grace first dawned upon you? "You know, blessed Lord, that I want to love you more than I have ever yet done; yes, I want those unerring marks of real love, which never fail to prove it to be genuine. I want to feel a greater delight in prayer; to pour out my heart before you with more childlike simplicity; to tell you more freely all my needs; to mourn more deeply over all my corruptions; to trust more unreservedly to the blood of Jesus; to dread all approaches to sin, and earnestly to covet the best gifts of faith, hope, and charity; humility of mind; holiness of heart; deadness to the world; and an entire subjection of the soul to you. You can in a moment impart these blessings. Thousands have been partakers of them, without diminishing your fullness. Open the doors of my heart, enlarge it by your grace, and let it be filled with your grace and heavenly benediction."

You will be inquired of by your people; not that you need to be informed, but that they may feel their need of you. Oh that I may approach you at all times sprinkled with the atoning blood, until the angel of death shall bear me to the mansions of glory, where hope shall be swallowed up in the enjoyment of your everlasting love.

Unite, you saints, in cheerful praise, To heaven your joyful voices raise;

Unite in melody divine, Until all in heartfelt chorus join.

Let sacred hope your breasts inspire;

While love, that pure celestial fire, Burns with an undiminished blaze, Amid the symphonies of praise.

Praise Him, who gave his only Son, For crimes which rebel worms have done;

Praise Him, who died upon the tree, Who bled and groaned on Calvary.

Praise Him, who long in patient love Our stubborn hearts has sought to move;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, You ransomed souls, you heavenly host O! may our praises never cease, While journeying towards the realms of peace; Where saints in lovelier accents raise A never-ending song of praise!

03.63-63. ON LOVE

63. ON LOVE True Christian love is of an enlarged, unselfish nature. It loves all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Party spirit is confined within the limits of a sect. But Christian love outsteps the narrow boundary; and can recognize a brother in each humble believer, who practically exemplifies the holy doctrines of the Gospel. When we love our own party exclusively, or people only of our own peculiar train of thinking, we love ourselves in them. We see our own image, and admire it. But when we love those who differ from us in nonessentials, because we discover in them the humility, meekness, purity, patience, and benevolence of the Redeemer; then, our love is truly Christian. It is Christ in them, whom we love. How little of this enlarged affection on pure Christian principles do we discover in the professing world! We hear much about it, but see little of it. It is highly extolled, but little cultivated. The heart of man is naturally selfish and contracted, bigoted, and full of jealousies. It suspects a foe, where charity hails a friend.

Nothing is more evident than this truth - that Christian charity increases our happiness with its own increase. A narrow, contracted spirit, under the influence of prejudice, and blinded by fond partialities, can never enjoy the refined pleasures of Christian communion. Such a spirit chills and freezes the soul; it checks exertion, except when party is concerned; and looks badly on those, however excellent, who "do not follow us." Distinctions seem necessary in this state of imperfection; but real Christians know well how to distinguish between the expansive charity of the Gospel, and that undefined latitudinarianism, which would level all distinctions.

There is a perfect consistency in preferring our own peculiar communion, to which we are attached from judgment and conscience; and in loving those of other communions, who bear the image of the blessed Jesus.

Lord, preserve me from all selfish and uncharitable feelings. Be the center of my affections; and may their only boundary be yourself, Oh unbounded ocean of eternal love! Enable me to give the right hand of fellowship to all who truly love you; and to rejoice in being in any measure instrumental in hastening on that glorious period, when Judah shall not vex Ephraim, nor Ephraim envy Judah; but when all shall love as brethren.

God is love. Love, therefore, brings heaven into the soul, and diffuses happiness wherever its influence is felt. Where love reigns, there is peace and joy, gentleness and goodness. How clearly does this consideration prove to us the divine origin of the Gospel of Christ, which breathes nothing but peace. Earth would indeed be blessed, if pure Christian love dwelt in every breast, and regulated every thought. The period so glowingly depicted by Isaiah is fast approaching, when "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all God’s holy mountain." But what is described as the cause of this blessedness? "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" What a stimulus should this be to strenuous exertion and fervent prayers! Every true believer should esteem it his privilege and duty, according to his ability, to aid in building the spiritual

temple, and in ushering in the latter day of glory.

Daniel has foretold, that "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased;" while the diligent laborers are thus encouraged by Zechariah; "I will strengthen them in the Lord, and they shall walk up and down in his name, says the Lord." Happy are those servants who shall be found so doing; may an increasing company of faithful missionaries ever abound in their labors of love, until all shall know the Lord, from the least unto the greatest; until righteousness shall run down as water, and judgment as a mighty stream.

Heaven is the place where love is enjoyed without alloy. In that blessed region of delight, no pride, no envy, no discord dwells. In the angelic world, God is supremely loved, and feared, and obeyed. Each blessed spirit loves its fellow; and all are knit together in one family bond of love. Happy state! Lord, mold my soul to theirs, or rather to your own most lovely image. Let me drink deep into your Spirit, and be daily preparing for those mansions, where all is harmony, and peace, and purity, and joy. From the word of truth we are clearly taught, that nations however correct, forms however excellent, creeds however orthodox, ordinances however scriptural, labors however abundant, and sacrifices however costly, will avail nothing in the sight of God, if genuine love be lacking in the heart.

Love is the very essence of true religion. It is the main spring which puts all in motion.

Precious faith unites the sinner to the Savior; while love, the fruit of faith, produced in the soul through the power of the Holy Spirit, gives vitality to the new creature, and enables him to act for God alone. It is evident then, that, without love, all religious profession is hypocrisy. Our real character is not estimated by him who looks at what we know, or what we say, nor even what we do; but from the inward ruling principle of the mind.

We may speak with the tongues of men and of angels, we may understand all mysteries and all knowledge; we may give all our goods to feed the poor, and our bodies to be burned; and yet be accounted by a heart-searching God as no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. We may attend the house of God with scrupulous exactness, and yet have no heart in the work. We may admire the preacher, without loving the word; and extol a form of devotion, while destitute of pious feeling. Oh! what need there is for inward searching of heart. True religion is less common than many imagine "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there be that find it."

Formality and hypocrisy are two powerful and successful agents of Satan. The enemy of souls is not very anxious whether men travel to hell by the road of profaneness or false profession. The latter, being more creditable, is generally the most frequented. Gross vice startles the conscience; while the garment of decency thrown over the general conduct, quiets the mind, and makes the deluded sinner more easy in his sins.

Blessed Lord, save me from the delusions of Satan, and the deceitfulness of my own heart. Let me know myself. Guard me against self-deception, self-love, and vain-glory. Make me humble, simple, and sincere. Fill me with love, and fit me for your service and glory.

Love is the distinctive characteristic of all God’s people. The soul which is savingly enlightened by the Spirit of truth, must, as a natural consequence, love God. There is a knowledge which may he

acquired by reading, hearing, and reflection. Religion may be learned as a science. Its doctrines may be arranged with all the accuracy of systematic precision; and its precepts be admired as lessons of the purest morality. But such knowledge, springing only from the exercise of the intellectual faculties, leaves the soul in its natural state of pride, earthliness, and self-sufficiency. Such knowledge puffs up, while charity edifies.

Every awakened soul needs to feel the love of God as its actuating principle; and the glory of God as its constant aim. Oh that I may experience these blessings more and more! Nothing can eradicate the love of the world from the heart, but this ardent and supreme love to God as the highest good, implanted in the soul through the power of the Holy Spirit. God is love. When, therefore, he draws forth the arrows of conviction, and lodges them in the sinner's conscience, he graciously dips them in the blood of Jesus, that he may heal, as well as wound. Thus, the blessed Spirit, by first convincing of sin, and then revealing the Savior, gives the broken-hearted penitent a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

How gracious are the operations of mercy! No sin, however great, can exclude that soul from heaven, whom the Lord makes a monument of his sovereign grace. As soon might the black vapors of the night which skirt the horizon, prevent the rising of the sun. "By grace are you saved." "By the grace of God, I am what I am," is the language of Paul, who styles himself the chief of sinners, and whose delight is to magnify the exceeding riches of redeeming love.

God is love. Hence all holiness proceeds from him. He must first draw the heart to himself by the powerful attractions of his own eternal love, or it will forever remain hard as adamant, and vile as hell. "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you," are the sweet accents of mercy to a family of backsliding children. The Spirit of God can alone fill the heart with love. The apostle gives love the first place among the fruits of the Spirit; for if this heavenly grace be lacking in us, all the rest of our benevolent or amiable qualities will profit us nothing.

How important, then, is self-examination on a subject which involves our present and eternal happiness! If I am a child of God, I shall love him supremely. It is impossible to be in the family of God, and not love God; for every one that loves, is born of God and knows God. He that loves not, knows not God, for God is love. Oh my soul, think what you owe to your great Creator. I am indebted to God for my being, my daily preservation, my hourly comforts. From him I receive every blessing; health, friends, and domestic enjoyments. To him I owe myself and all my powers; yes, all that I am and have. He not only made me; but, Oh wonderful love! he took my nature upon him, and died, the just for the unjust, that through his atoning blood, I might be saved from sin and the wrath to come.

If I am a child of God, I shall love all his children. If I am in the family of God, I shall love all the members of his family. This John declares as evidential of a state of salvation; "we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." "For every one that loves him that begat, loves him also that is begotten of him." Thus Christian love passes over the threshold of home, sect, and nation and embraces all who love the Savior, whether inhabiting the torrid or the frigid climates.

If I am a child of God, I shall love the commandments of God. His law will be my rule of life, while Christ crucified is the sole foundation of my hope. I shall have more delight in his Word than in all manner of riches; for these can only gratify my carnal nature, while that can satisfy my immortal soul.

If I am a child of God, I shall be anxious to live to his glory; to employ my talents in his service; and to promote his cause among men. I shall not be ashamed to confess myself his servant. If reproached, I shall rejoice in being counted worthy to suffer shame for his name, and shall be willing to be accounted even the offscourings of all things for Jesus' sake.

If I am a child of God, I shall bear the image of God. In God's family there is a family likeness. All the children resemble their heavenly parent. They have the mind of Christ, and are renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created them. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; but if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." I may possess an extensive knowledge of divine truth, and a facility of utterance, which, when combined with strong natural warmth of feeling, may cause me to make an imposing appearance. But what will knowledge avail, if destitute of humility; or glowing eloquence, if devoid of love?

Let me, then, seek most earnestly the sweet graces of the Spirit - love, humility, and purity. These will make me like the blessed Jesus, whose whole character bore these sacred features, and whose gentle command is, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls."

Blessed Jesus! be pleased to sanctify the desires of my heart. This is your will, even my sanctification. Let it be my will also. Oh put forth your healing hand and touch my leprous soul; yes, speak the word only, and your servant shall be healed. Let me never for one moment doubt your willingness to save, though I be the very chief of sinners. Your grace is infinite; if it were not infinite, I might indeed despair; but being infinite, how can I despond? Oh what a word is infinite! There is no depth of guilt in which infinite mercy cannot reach me; and no height of glory, to which infinite love cannot raise me.

Rejoice, then, Oh my soul, and be filled with thanksgiving. Jesus is your all-sufficient Savior. Believe in him; trust in him; come to him; and love him; and then shall you be saved with a present and everlasting salvation.

How blest are they who love the Lord, Who lean upon his word;

They feel a joy, a peace within, Which earth cannot afford. By faith they see the heavenly world, And taste the Savior's grace; The bliss concealed from carnal eyes They view "with open face."

They know their interest in his love, Who bought them with his blood; And with assured faith can say, My Savior, and my God.

You blessed flock - you chosen few, Let grateful praise ascend;

And, as you pass the vale of life, Extol the sinner's Friend.

03.64-64. ON JOY

64. ON JOY

Christian joy is not a tumultuous passion, or feverish affection; but a calm and composed frame; a holy serenity of soul; a gladsome rest in the faithfulness and grace of Jesus. It sheds a luster over the countenance; beams forth at the eye, and often causes it to be suffused in tears. It creates an indescribable delight in the heart.

Paul was in this heavenly frame, when he said, "I am filled with comfort; I am exceeding joyful in all my tribulation." This holy joy does not depend on outward circumstances, for the apostle could say, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." No one possesses this inward joy, but the real believer. "A stranger intermedles not with it." It is the fruit of the Spirit, and flows from a living faith in the divinity and atonement of Jesus. So inseparable from Christian joy are right views of the blessed Savior, that John commences his first Epistle, as he did his Gospel, by refuting those two heresies, which, like poisonous weeds, were then springing up. The one propagated by the Gnostics or Docetae, who denied the real humanity of Jesus; the other by the Ebionites, who denied the essential divinity of the Redeemer. How conclusive are the declarations of John; "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life." What language can more fully describe the real humanity of the Son of God?

"For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." What a striking attestation to the divinity of Christ! "That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."

Thus the apostle clearly and unequivocally states, that Christian communion can only be maintained in its blessedness, and Christian joy possessed in its fullness, by a cordial reception of Jesus Christ, as "God manifest in the flesh."

It were well, if all who profess to believe in Jesus would examine the ground of their faith, and the source of their joy, by this highly important passage in the word of God. Holy joy is a portion of heaven brought down into the soul, and enables the believer to soar above the troubles which assail him. Like the Alpine traveler, he looks down upon the storm which agitates the valley beneath. Even when compelled to exclaim, "without are fightings, and within are fears," he can "rejoice evermore."

Habakkuk was truly happy, when, raised above all the changing scenes of life, he thus sang to the harp of prophecy; "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,

he enables me to go on the heights." Hab 3:17-19 The apostles sang in the prison. The martyrs praised God in the fires. They rejoiced in hope of the glory of God, and were made more than conquerors through him who loved them, and gave himself for them. This holy joy, this peaceful state of heart, is, nevertheless, susceptible to be disturbed and ruffled.

Through the remaining corruption of his nature, the believer is often sorely harassed and distressed. The enemy plies him very closely with his temptations. Thus he finds hourly need for watchfulness and prayer, as well as for deep humiliation and self-abhorrence. If ensnared, through the subtlety of Satan, or by sudden surprisals of temptations, the enemy exults, and his heart is grieved. Yet, what must he do? Through grace, be betakes himself to the blood of sprinkling. He goes mourning to his heavenly Father, acknowledging his sin; pleads the merit of his Savior; implores the continued aid and protection of the Holy Spirit; lies low in self-abasement at the foot of the cross, and there receives this gracious word applied powerfully to his soul "go in peace, your sins are forgiven." Light beams once more in his heart; joy once more fills his soul. He hates himself and loves his Savior; watches more narrowly over the inward motions of his spirit; distrusts himself; and relies more confidently on the grace of his covenant God.

Thus the enemy of souls is baffled; his growth in humility is promoted; and God, through his restoring grace, is glorified.

"Affliction," says the apostle, "is not joyous, but grievous." Hence outward troubles may dampen the believer’s joy, while he looks off from the Savior to the boisterous wind and waves which rage around him. Peter did so, and began to sink. Faith, however, clings fast to the Savior and exults in the storm.

Paul was compelled at times to say, "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart." But where arose this grief? It sprang from the deep concern which he felt for his perishing brethren according to the flesh. Thus many favored souls who are happy in the love of God, and who rejoice in Jesus with a joy unspeakable and full of glory, can sympathize with David, and say, "Rivers of water run down my eyes, because men keep not your law." Their personal joy may be in lively exercise, while their hearts are greatly grieved for a world which lies in wickedness. Is not this the characteristic feeling of the children of God?

Christian charity is a compound of active benevolence and tender compassion, flowing from a supreme love to Jesus Christ. The true believer is, therefore, the genuine philanthropist. He not only feels for the miseries of others, but labors to remove them by prayer and suitable exertion. His heart can melt at another’s woe, and gladden at another’s welfare. Hence he rejoices over one sinner that repents. He feels his own joy increased by each increase to the church of God. He rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. As sin pains him, both when felt in himself and seen in others, so holiness delights him, when, like Barnabas, he beholds its growing influence in those around him. The joy of the Lord is his strength. When faith is in lively exercise, and joy is springing up in his soul, he can brave every danger, and boldly encounter every enemy which may oppose his way to glory.

Such is the happy experience of the believer in Jesus. It is his privilege to rejoice. A God of sovereign love wills the happiness of his people. As nothing but sin can separate the soul from God, or cause him to hide his face from us; so nothing but sin ought really to dampen our joy. Woe

be to him who can feel joyous in his sins! The Gospel is good news, glad tidings of great joy. Those worldly people greatly mistake its nature, tendency, and design, who suppose it to be a mere system of restraints; an enemy to innocent enjoyment. It ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace. The Gospel bids us to be happy. All that it condemns is an abuse of divine mercies, and that alienation of heart which leads us to seek from the broken cisterns of the world that happiness, which can only be derived from the eternal fountain of uncreated excellence. The Gospel, while it faithfully reveals to us our ruined state as sinners, and our utter unworthiness of the least of God's mercies, graciously opens to our view the way to unspeakable felicity, through the incarnation and death of the eternal Son of God. Those who reject the Gospel, and choose the forbidden pleasures of sin, find the fruit of their choice to be bitterness and death; while those who cheerfully renounce the world, and yield themselves unto God through Jesus Christ, have a spring of holy joy opened in their souls, which shall flow onward, until it issue in everlasting life. Oh! my soul, is this your experience? Do you feel this inward joy in a crucified Jesus? Are you leaning on the bosom of your Savior; resting on covenant faithfulness and unchanging love?

Enable me, blessed Lord, with joy to draw water out of the wells of salvation; to come daily unto you, the fountain of consolation; who has said, "drink, drink abundantly, Oh beloved." When I feel my inward depravity, Oh give me grace to see, with the eye of faith, the glorious remedy which you have provided. May I lay hold on Jesus Christ, and never let him go, until he bless me. Shine into my heart with the bright beam of your heavenly grace. Shed abroad your love in my soul. Give me the witness of the Holy Spirit. Grant that I may taste your goodness here, in the sweet refreshing streams of Gospel joy, until, borne with gladsome wing to the fountain-head in glory, my soul shall be lost in wonder, love, and praise.

How sweet the sacred joy that dwells In souls renewed by power divine; Where Jesus all his goodness tells;

Oh! may this joy be ever mine!

Descend and bless your servant, Lord, Your loving Spirit now impart;

Speak the all-enlivening word, And seal salvation to my heart. From earth, and all its fleeting toys, Be all my fond desires withdrawn;

Oh fill my soul with heavenly joys, Of endless bliss the glorious dawn.

Then shall my raptured spirit sing, In strains of pure celestial love;

When, borne on some kind seraph's wing, I soar to brighter worlds above.

03.65-65. ON PEACE

65. ON PEACE

There is something peculiarly calming to the soul in these beautiful words; "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you." This is a world of sin and trouble. Here, thorns and thistles grow around us; painful emblems of the human heart, and of the sad change which passed on Adam at the fall.

Though painful the change, yet, with a pleasing mournful recollection, our minds delight to contemplate the first parents of our race enjoying communion with their God, and happy communion with each other in the bowers of Eden. All was, then, serene and peaceful. No indulged sin poisoned their joys, or caused the divine countenance to be turned away from them. They had no feeling, but love and gratitude; no desire, but to serve and please their Almighty Creator. This happy state was, alas! of short duration. They listened to the voice of the tempter, and fell from holiness, from happiness, and from God.

He, who lately held sweet converse with his creatures, now banished them from Paradise, denied them all access to the tree of life, that pledge of immortality, and, in righteous judgment, pronounced the curse upon them. They now became dying creatures doomed through their willful disobedience to present and eternal misery. The ground was cursed for their sake. Refusing its spontaneous fruitfulness, it required their toil and labor; while the prickly thorn and thistle sprang up as silent monitors to remind them of their sins. May we not ask with anxious solicitude, How can such fallen, wretched creatures be kept in peace, "in perfect peace?" What warrant have we to trust in God, or stay our minds upon him, as our righteousness and strength? This important question has been answered by God himself. He graciously promised a Savior, even at the time when Justice pronounced death on the transgressors. Thus mercy rejoiced against judgment, and shed a ray of heavenly light over the benighted souls of our fallen parents. In the fullness of time, Jesus, the promised seed of the woman, was born. The ransom-price was paid by his precious blood-shedding upon the cross; and the gates of heaven were opened to all believers. The Gospel was preached, and pardon proclaimed to every humble, penitent, believing soul. All who lived before the advent of Christ, looking to the promise, and resting in the covenant of grace, were accepted in the beloved; and those who have lived since his advent in the flesh, can say, "whom having not seen, we love; and in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." To all such, the prophet proclaims peace; "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you."

Here, then, we learn the nature of true religion. It is staying the mind upon God. As unbelieving sinners, we cannot do this; as believing penitents, we may. Yes! it is the privilege of every contrite soul, thus to repose upon the mercies of God in Christ Jesus.

Oh blessed truth! though by nature far from God, we are brought near by the blood of Christ; though lying under the curse of a broken law, we are delivered from condemnation through the

death of Jesus; though helpless, restless, and wretched in ourselves, we are privileged, through faith, to stay our minds upon God, as our strength, our rest, and our peace. Oh what a work of grace, mercy, and love! Bless the Lord, Oh my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name.

We also learn where true stability is to be found. It is in God. Everything here in this world is fickle and changing. But that God who gives peace unto his people, "changes not, nor knows the shadow of a turn." The soul, therefore, which is stayed on him, finds rest and peace. If I rest my hopes upon an earthly friend, death removes the prop, and I fall, and mourn, and weep. If I place my confidence on riches, they fly away as an eagle towards heaven, and leave me to regret the folly of my covetous desires. If I build upon the breath of fame, it dies away, or changes into scorn or slander. If I repose upon the rosy couch of earthly comforts, how ever lawful and endearing, these lovely flowers will quickly fade, and leave me nothing but the thorns. Jesus is the only source of comfort; the only spring of joy. From him proceed all the peace and purity which gladden and beautify the church of God.

Oh my soul, never look for peace from the creature; never expect it from yourself. He who made peace for you by the blood of his cross, can alone impart peace to your trembling conscience. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. While rejecting his salvation, peace can never be enjoyed. "There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked." Solemn truth! no less engraven on the sinner’ s heart, than recorded in the book of God. How can peace dwell in a bosom on which the heavy curse of the Almighty continually abides? The world may appear smiling and happy, but its appearances are deceitful. True peace descends from above. It is the fruit of faith. The Holy Spirit alone can produce this blessedness in the soul; and, therefore, none can possess it but the faithful in Christ Jesus. The world can yield no solid peace to its most zealous votaries. Whatever I possess, without the presence of my heavenly Father, is unsatisfying and unstable. Oh my soul, seek a higher bliss than any which earth can give.

"Blessed Spirit of peace and love, place me on the rock of ages; let me never, never stray from you. Be the guide of my steps, and the guardian of my days. Give me your peace always by all means, and make me a living temple consecrated wholly unto you".

How great the peace, how blest the joy, Each true believer only feels!

Satan can never the bliss destroy, Which faith in Jesus sweetly yields.

Amid the ruffling scenes of life, Amid the storms which rage below, A calm retreat, removed from strife, Does Jesus on his saints bestow.

He kindly spreads his loving arms, As parent wings protect their brood;

He shields from danger and alarms;

He fills his saints with every good.

Oh could I call this blessing mine;

How rich, how vast the sacred store!

Blest Savior! grant one gracious smile, And earth shall hold my heart no more.

One gracious smile of heavenly love Would melt my heart and lay me low;

One blissful smile, which saints above, Which happy angels ever know.

03.66-66. ON HUMILITY

66. ON HUMILITY

Pride and vanity cannot thrive at the foot of the cross. It is only when we remove from this holy ground, that they shoot out their pestiferous branches in awful luxuriance. True humility loves the sacred mount of Calvary, on which the lowly Savior bowed his head and died! There, repentance sheds the contrite tear. There, faith views with joy the great atonement. There, love glows with fervent desires to the Friend of sinners.

Man is naturally a proud, selfish creature. Morality may teach him the badness of such a character, but can never produce in him any principle of renovation. He tries indeed to appear humble and unselfish, but the monster Pride is easily seen through the thin veil of false humility, which is thrown over its frightful visage; while Self, like another Proteus, assumes a thousand forms to escape detection.

It is only when the divine Spirit puts forth his new-creating power, through the instrumentality of the everlasting Gospel, that the proud selfish sinner becomes the lowly follower of the Lamb. He then learns to bear with cheerfulness the burden of a suffering brother, while, with all lowliness of mind, he esteems others better than himself.

Humility is, then, the work of grace. Without it, there can be no salvation; for God resists the proud, and sends the rich empty away. If angels in glory hide their faces with their wings, when standing before the Lord of hosts; if glorified saints cast their crowns before the throne of their Redeemer; if the humblest believer is the greatest in the Gospel kingdom; what a heaven-born grace is humility! How beautiful is the exhortation of Peter; "Be clothed with humility."

Oh that my soul may be arrayed in this lovely grace, the brightest ornament of the Christian character! We talk of humility. But Oh! bleeding Lamb, what is the humility of a sinful creature, when compared with yours? You, who humbled yourself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth, did stoop in infinite condescension to leave the throne of your glory, to lay aside the robes of your majesty, to be made in the likeness of men, to become the son of a poor virgin, to be made of no reputation, to take upon yourself the form of a servant; and having thus humbled yourself, to become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross! And why did you thus humble yourself with a humility surpassing all conception? It was, that your humility might atone for my pride; and, by this your infinite abasement, exalt a proud, rebellious, hell-deserving creature to a participation of your felicity, and to a place near your throne!

Enter into yourself, Oh my soul, and earnestly entreat the quickening Spirit of your Lord to search and try you. Can you dare be proud, while viewing the deep humiliation of the Son of God? Where would you have been, if Jesus had not died? And where will you be, if, through pride, you reject this great salvation? Are you willing to be nothing in your own estimation; yes, less than nothing in the sight of infinite perfection? Can you renounce your own fancied righteousness, as filthy rags? Do you throw yourself with absolute entireness upon the infinite mercies of a crucified Savior? Can

you delight in the praise and prosperity of others, even when, through their superior luster, you are cast into the shade? Do you feel no envious risings when others are made much of in your presence, and yourself studiously overlooked? Are there no workings of mortified pride within, when the conversation of others is anxiously listened to, and yours altogether disregarded? Is the glory of God the only object of your wishes? and the good of souls your only desire? Are you willing to be esteemed a fool for Christ's sake; and glad to lose the present good-will of your friends, so that you may win Christ, and be found in him? If it be your heart-felt prayer to be delivered from pride, and, like your lowly Savior, to be clothed with humility; then your graces are the graces of the Spirit; your conversion is sound; your state is safe; and your eternal habitation shall be with the once abased, but now exalted Jesus.

Cultivate, Oh my soul, this lovely grace of humility. Bless God sincerely for every occasion which tends to mortify your pride, and crucify your vain-glory. Do not be angry with those who slight you; who treat you with contempt and scorn. Rather receive it as a "needs be;" as a corrosive to eat out your overweening love of self; as one of those things which form a touchstone to try your inward state, and which, through the power of the Sprit, shall be overruled for the advancement of your spiritual good. Be thankful for reproof, whether conveyed with the smoothness of Christian meekness, or the keenness of satirical asperity. Remember that God's people are a tried people; that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution; that they who are not of the world, must expect the world's hatred. Let no contempt or suffering be allowed to abate your fervor, or slacken your speed; since the trial of your faith is much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire; and shall before long be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

What rich promises are made in the Gospel to humble souls! Jesus pronounced his first blessing on the poor in spirit. The Lord gives grace unto the humble. He fills the hungry with good things. He condescends to dwell in the lowly heart. He beautifies the meek with salvation. The scriptures abound with beautiful descriptions of the privileges and blessings which are the portion of every humble believer in Jesus. All who are truly convinced of sin by the powerful application of the law to their consciences; all who are led to see their awful state by nature, and to feel their need of Jesus as their only Savior; all who are enabled by the Spirit of truth to apprehend Christ by faith in all his offices and covenant relations, are clothed with humility.

Weaned from self-righteous dependencies, they trust in Christ alone for pardon and acceptance; and find rest unto their souls. Receiving a new taste and a spiritual appetite, they live upon Christ by faith, and derive daily strength and comfort from him. The love of Christ constrains them to obedience; and the language of their heart is; "whom have we in heaven but you, and there is none upon earth we desire beside you." To these humble souls the promises belong. They are the very members of Christ's mystical body; and it is their Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom. The world frowns upon them, but God shines into their hearts. The carnal mind hates them, but Jesus loves them with an everlasting love. The devil sets himself in battle array against them; but the Holy Spirit lifts up a standard against him, and compasses them about as with a shield. Though weak in themselves, they are strong in the Lord; though unable of themselves to overcome the least temptation, they become, through Christ, even more than conquerors.

Oh! Spirit of holiness, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, open my blind eyes to see the wonders of your grace. Quicken my dead soul to feel its sacred influence. Make me truly humble in heart, emptied of every self-exalting thought, which would oppose the freeness of your love. Mold my whole soul into the lowliness and meekness of Jesus. Preserve me from the subtle influence of pride and vain-glory. Keep me ever low in my own eyes. Root out every sinful, selfish principle; and give me a single eye which aims at nothing but your glory. Shed abroad your love in my heart; then will my understanding, will, and affections be light in the Lord, and each unite their powers in loving and obeying you.

Oh dear, anointed Jesus, All my hopes are fixed on thee; In your tender, sweet compassion, Cast a smile of love on me.

Come in all your full salvation, Deign within my heart to dwell;

Then, with all your ransomed people, Of unbounded love I'll tell.

Fill my soul with heavenly graces, Gently falling from above;

Meekness, patience, pure affection, Sweet humility and love.

Come, Oh blest anointed Savior, To your earthly temple come;

Until the hour of death remove me To my everlasting home.

03.67-67. ON MEEKNESS

67. ON MEEKNESS The apostle Peter exhorts us to put on "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." May I ever prize what Infinite Excellence esteems so precious! And yet, alas! how soon do we disfigure this holy ornament, when any little thing crosses our temper. This is highly sinful. We should not so readily cast away a diamond, because of some trifling opposition to our will. Oh! may I learn wisdom in the school of Christ, and seek for more grace from that Savior, who has so kindly said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find." The greatest part of our unhappiness in life arises, not so much from cross providences, as from cross tempers. The former only happen occasionally, to try our faith; while in some families the latter occur daily, to try our patience. Now, in proportion as we become truly Christians, in that proportion we shall resist and overcome these wasps which nestle in our bosom. He who torments others, torments himself; while he who labors to promote the happiness of his fellow-creatures, very greatly augments his own.

We see, then, how beautiful is the religion of Jesus, which is all love, and peace, and goodness. Wherever its influence is felt, there a little heaven is enjoyed. Where it is unknown, there darkness and discord reign. The world, proud and turbulent, despises this heavenly ornament, this workmanship of the Holy Spirit. May I have grace to esteem it above all those splendid ornaments, which dazzle and attract the admiration of mankind. "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart," was the condescending exhortation; "and you shall find rest unto your souls," was the gracious promise of the heavenly Savior. Rich blessings are, indeed, promised to the meek. "The meek shall inherit the earth." "The meek shall have abundance of peace." "The meek will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way." "The Lord will beautify the meek with salvation." To possess this sweet ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, I must be clothed with humility; for humility and meekness are inseparable. No mere nominal professor of Christianity ever possessed this celestial ornament. The world endeavors to counterfeit this lovely spirit by what is termed politeness; a kind of spurious meekness and humility. When slights or insults arise, this worldly gem soon discovers its worthless composition; while the Gospel jewel brightens by attrition.

Meekness, humility, love, and purity, form the Christian character. These graces, growing out of a true faith in Jesus, evidence a vital union to him, from whom every blessing is derived. As deformed people give no just idea of the beautiful symmetry of the human frame; so there are some professors of the Gospel, who have their minds so twisted by prejudice, and their wills made so crooked by obstinacy, that they exhibit a mere distortion of Christianity. Such people sometimes hold high doctrines, and talk much about election and final perseverance. They regard the humble, circumspect believer, as living below his privileges; and condemn his holy walk as legal, and beneath the liberty of the Gospel. Sin, they say, cannot hurt them; for they are not under the law, but under grace. They scruple not to charge their neighbors with hypocrisy; while they never, for one moment; suspect themselves.

What an awful perversion is this, of the beautiful religion of Jesus! How deformed, how unlike the new creature in Christ Jesus! In these unhappy people, we behold no ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, no garment of humility. They love to live in the storm, either of controversy or contradiction. Every word is misconstrued; every action is ascribed to some improper motive. Pride and uncharitableness mark their character. Others cannot please them; because their bosoms being the seat of conflicting passions, they cannot please themselves. Devoid of the mind which was in Christ, they resemble the ground which the Lord has cursed; yielding thorns and briars. But how lovely does the image of the Savior appear, when reflected by the spirit and conduct of the true believer. It resembles the sun shining with unbroken luster on the peaceful lake; while the wicked are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.

These angry, contentious, loud-sounding, presumptuous professors are spots and wens in the visible church; stumbling-blocks to weaker brethren, and scandals to the world.

Lord, preserve me from this awful state. Let me ever hold the truth in righteousness. Oh that I may ever dread that presumptuous spirit, which would seize on the sacred fruits of the tree of life, without one Gospel warrant so to do; which would dare, with sacrilegious hand, to divide the precept from the promise; and, under the impious idea of exalting free grace, sin, that grace may abound. Lord, give me a holy fear of falling into sin; a jealousy over my own deceitful heart; a cleaving unto you; a delight in keeping your commandments. Enable me to walk circumspectly and warily along the slippery path of life; to watch and pray always; to guard against the first approaches to temptation, and every incitement from my spiritual adversary to transgress your law. Put on me the lovely ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. Let all anger, bitterness, and evil-speaking, be put away from me, with all malice. Let love reign in my heart, and purity adorn my soul. Oh blessed Jesus, cover me with your spotless robe of righteousness, and make me all glorious within, through the renewing influence of your grace. Let me never forget whose I am, and whom I serve. Cause me to bear your cross with holy rejoicing; until, in your kingdom of glory, the cross shall be exchanged for the crown, and sorrow be swallowed up in everlasting joy.

Father of mercies, God of love, To you my wishes all aspire;

Descend, blest Spirit, from above, And guard and feed the sacred fire.

Preserve me from those thousand snares, Which Satan weaves around my path On you I cast my hourly cares; On you I look in humble faith.

Behold me at the bleeding cross;

Wash out, dear Lord, each guilty stain;

Oh may I count the world but loss - Your love, my great, my richest gain. In mercy help a feeble worm, Whose strength is all derived from You;

You can appease the wildest storm; And you can set the captive free. In cheerful hope my soul relies, Blest Savior, on your dying love, Until I reach the blissful skies, And strike the golden harp above.

03.68-68. ON PURITY

68. ON PURITY

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." What a wonderful change must pass upon a soul born in sin, before it can become pure. Wherever this change takes place, we must exclaim, "what has God wrought!" It is the work of Omnipotence thus to new-create the soul, and to transform the sinner into a pure and holy being. But great and radical as this work is, there still remains the seed of corruption, which would be continually budding in the heart, and bringing forth fruit unto death, were it not for the constant operation of divine grace, checking the growth of inbred sin.

Though unlike Adam, when in a state of innocence, and unlike the spirits of just men made perfect in heaven; yet, if true believers in Jesus, we are quite different from what we once were, and different from the carnal world around us. Old things have passed away; and behold, all things are become new.

We have, it is true, much to root out and destroy, so long as the law in the members wars against the law of the mind; yet, while journeying to the land of promise, we are favored with many delightful foretastes, and many cheering views of the celestial Canaan, to animate us to persevere.

Gospel holiness is therefore a progressive work. Like the process of vegetation, there is first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear. From the first workings of grace, to its full consummation in glory, there is a gradual advancement towards perfection. We read of little children, of young men, and of fathers in Christ; and are commanded to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But as we are equally exhorted to crucify the flesh, and to mortify our members which are on the earth, we learn that the old man is not yet dead, but dying; in a state of crucifixion, dying daily. Those who are best acquainted with their own hearts, and with human nature in general, being taught by the Spirit of God, according to the revealed truth of his holy word, know from painful experience that sin is still in them. They hate it, and fight against it; and in this hatred of sin, and warring against it, consists, in no small degree, that purity of heart which our Lord pronounces "blessed."

We cannot truly hate sin as being an offence to God, and resist it with the whole bent of our will, until we are born from above. We must love God as an infinitely holy and gracious Being, before sin can be so hated, as to be uniformly and strenuously opposed.

Therefore, though we cannot say, "I am pure from sin," under a consciousness of so much remaining corruption; yet, if conscience bears its inward testimony to our irreconcilable hatred of sin; if we groan under its burden, and resist its workings; we ought to take encouragement, and go on seeking strength from above, being assured that he who has begun the good work, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. No unconverted man, by any mere natural power of his own, ever yet hated and opposed sin as an evil directed against the majesty, holiness, and goodness of God.

As soon might water run up a steep ascent, contrary to experience and the laws of nature. If, then, I would bear the image of Christ in glory, I must bear his image now in holiness, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Oh how happy is that soul which is renewed in righteousness! Jesus dwelling in the heart by faith, is heaven begun. A holy light then irradiates the mind; a sweet glow of sacred love warms the affections; and all the powers of the soul are made willing to glorify him who is the chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely! Oh that I could feel my heart always alive to God! Man was originally made to glorify God. If, then, I do not live to his glory, I am not answering the great end of my being.

Here lies my guilt; that my heart, through the fall, is naturally averse from every thing that has God for its object. I am prone to sin - prone to earth - prone to depart from God. Hence my condemnation is just; and hell would be my deserved portion through a countless eternity. But how can I express the inconceivable love of God, in giving his only begotten Son for such a rebel; such an apostate creature! Oh that I could feel my whole soul burning in one constant flame of holy love for such amazing grace!

How beautiful is true religion. It commends itself to every man’s conscience, notwithstanding the natural enmity of the heart against it. There is something so amiable in Christian graces, so winning in the simple movements of Christian love, that even the bitterest enemies of the Gospel are compelled in their reflecting moments to acknowledge its intrinsic excellence. We have abundant evidence of this from the page of history, when Christians lived and acted under the high principles of their holy religion. The reason why so little good is done by professing Christians, may be owing to their own defect of character; to the lack of that purity of heart, from where all outward holiness proceeds. When we read the Acts of the apostles, and the Epistles which they wrote to the several churches, we cannot but be struck with the spirituality of mind, the purity of heart, the simplicity of spirit, the contempt of the world, the patience under suffering, the love of the brethren, the dependence on the Savior, which appeared so conspicuous in the primitive believers, and which caused them to shine as lights in the world. All who beheld them were constrained to confess that they were not as other men. They saw the change, and persecuted them for it. But now, the shades of difference between many professors of Christianity and the men of the world are so faint, that it often becomes difficult to discover the line of separation.

Inward purity, and outward sanctity, are the only true marks of God’s children, however rarely these marks are to be found. Jesus gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord; but every one who is pure in heart shall see God, and become an heir of God. Amazing inheritance! what mind can conceive the vastness of this eternal blessedness - an heir of God through Christ! The man that is pure in heart, shall inherit that glorious God as his portion, in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being; and by whose almighty power all things consist. He shall inherit him who fills heaven and earth with his presence, who is the fountain of felicity, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore. Oh my soul! you can never thirst enough after this exalted privilege. What are earthly kingdoms, crowns, and scepters, when compared with such a portion. Rejoice evermore, while this promise stands recorded in the page of truth.

Lord, perform your whole work of mercy in my heart. Let me never rest satisfied with any present attainment, but continually forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, may I daily press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, until I see you as you are, and love you as I ought in your everlasting kingdom and glory.

Make me simple and sincere, Keep, oh Lord, my conscience clear;

Lead me in the living way;

Bring me to eternal day.

Oh! preserve my soul from sin, Slay each rebel lust within;

Take away the heart of stone, Make me yours - and yours alone.

Jesus, you are all my trust; When consigned to native dust, Take, Oh take my soul to thee, And where you are - let me be.

Let me rise on wings sublime, Far beyond the scenes of time;

Rise, to meet my God and King;

Rise, your endless praise to sing.

03.69-69. ON GODLY FEAR

69. ON GODLY FEAR

Fear is a most powerful passion in the human breast. Its natural effect is painful; hence we instinctively fly from every thing which excites its agitating influence. Our minds are easily wrought upon by sensible objects, or imaginary evils; while those which are remote or unapprehended give us little concern.

If we receive the alarm of some approaching danger, how readily do we magnify the dreaded calamity beyond its real extent. Some people, indeed, are so bold and daring, that they seem to rise above the influence of every fear, and to face danger and even death in all its forms, with a coolness and intrepidity which are truly astonishing. Yet, in general, this natural passion operates in almost every case of serious apprehension but one, which of all others should awaken its sensibility.

We can fear almost any thing more than the wrath of God; and any event more than approaching death and judgment. Strange infatuation and obduracy! An unregenerate man will sit unmoved and unawed under the most awful displays of divine vengeance as exhibited in the preached word; while a slight shock of an earthquake, or the falling of a steeple, would cause him to start from his seat, and fly with fearful steps to some place of safety. Unbelief lies at the bottom of our indifference to eternal things; and is the true cause of that stupid unconcern, that fearless state of heart, which we manifest towards the infinitely important realities of a future world. There are, indeed, checks of natural conscience; but these are transient and seldom felt, except when our misconduct has sensibly affected our worldly prospects, our health, our reputation, or something of an earthly nature. The immediate apprehension of death and judgment may appall the sinner, and awaken all his solicitudes. Like Felix, the proud worldling sometimes feels an involuntary tremor, an inward misgiving of heart; but, like him, he labors to overcome the painful sensation, by removing, if possible, the cause of his uneasiness; "go your way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for you." Thus he goes on until death strikes the blow, and hurries him into the abyss of endless horrors.

Lord, deliver me from this most awful state. How distressing that my foolish heart should be so little affected by those rich displays of divine grace, and those tremendous exhibitions of divine wrath, which are revealed in the word of God. Blessed Lord! give me a stronger faith, that I may continually realize to my mind those great things which you have done, and still promise to do, for your believing people; and more solemn fear of those awful threatenings which you have denounced against thins enemies.

There is a fear, of which excellent things are spoken, and to which many precious promises are made. This holy fruit of the Spirit is peculiar to the children of God. It is one of the blessings of the new covenant, (Jer 32:39.) It is the beginning of wisdom, (Psalms 3:10.) It tends to life, (Pro 19:23.) In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence, (Pro 14:26.) "Happy, then, is the man who

fears aways;" who is in "the fear of the Lord all the day long." "The Lord’s delight is in those who fear him." He has promised to look with peculiar favor to him who trembles at his word. This heavenly grace is quite different from that slavish fear which tends to bondage. The fear which grace implants in the heart, harmonizes with love and joy. The first Christians, on whom the Spirit was poured in such rich effusion, walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. To such renewed souls the apostolic command is, "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread." The admonition of the Savior is most impressive; "I will forewarn you whom you shall fear; fear him, which, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say unto you, fear him." The Scriptures abound with exhortations to this duty. The most solemn appeals are there made to the heart and conscience; while promises of the most delightful nature are given to those who walk humbly with their God.

It is characteristic of the wicked, that "there is no fear of God before his eyes." If; then, I would form a part of the assembly of the saints, I must daily seek by fervent prayer a reverential fear of God. "Let us have grace (says the apostle) whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire."

John saw a multitude of the heavenly host, "having the harps of God; and they sang the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying; Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are your ways, Oh king of saints. Who shall not fear you, Oh Lord, and glorify your name? for you are holy; for all nations shall come and worship before you."

I must cultivate a cautionary fear. "Let us fear," says Paul, "lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." "Do not be high-minded, but fear."

I must possess a filial fear, which, combined with love and obedience, forms that spirit of adoption, which is the sweetest evidence of admission into the family of God. For perfect love, while it casts out that servile fear which has torment, cherishes a holy fear of grieving the Spirit, wounding the Savior, and displeasing the Father of mercies.

Oh blessed Lord, give me this holy preservative against falling into sin; that, fearing you from a principle of filial, reverential love, I may go on steadily in the narrow way of faith and holiness, until I reach with joy and gladness the holy hill of Zion.

How happy is the humble soul, Who lives in holy fear;

While troubles in succession roll, He feels the Savior near.

While others climb the dangerous steep, And build their Babels high;

He loves that lowly path to keep, Which leads him to the sky.

Content with all his God bestows, He needs not wealth nor power;

Perpetual blessing round him flows, Increasing every hour.

Rich with the riches of his grace Who saved him by his blood;

He views by faith the Savior’s face, And knows that God is good.

Through life’s uneven path upheld, Preserved from every ill;

He views at length the heavenly field, And reaches Zion’s hill.

Oh may I thus be sweetly blest, With humble souls below;

Then enter the eternal rest, Where endless pleasures flow.

03.70-70. ON THE BELIEVER'S AIM AND HOPE

70. ON THE BELIEVER’S AIM AND HOPE

How beautiful and glorious is the plan of human redemption! Angels may well desire to look into it. At the birth of our Emanuel, they declared its gracious design; even that of bringing "glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, and good-will towards men." The apostle felt the happy effect of this salvation in his own soul, when he could say, "To me, to live is Christ; and to die, is gain."

Jesus is the eternal spring of light, life, and glory. He made all things, and by him all things are held together. Dead souls are quickened to a life of faith and holiness by his almighty power; and through him they are preserved, in the midst of a wicked world, unto his everlasting kingdom. Oh my soul, is Jesus the source of your spiritual life? Am I looking to him, and living upon him daily by faith? Have I learned that by nature I am dead in trespasses and sins; that of myself I am unable to do anything that is pleasing unto God; that I may have a form of godliness, and a name to live, while destitute of saving grace? This religious complexion of my character may arise from education - the force of example - or a self-righteous principle. But this is not spiritual life. With every exterior of devotion, I may be spiritually dead. Can I in such a state say with the apostle, "To me, to live is Christ?" Surely not. If I am truly quickened by the Spirit of Christ, Christ will be the acknowledged source of my life. As I derive all my powers from him, so will those powers be devoted to his glory. I shall love him with a supreme affection.

Blessed Jesus! graciously communicate your saving strength to my soul. Raise me from a death in sin to a life of righteousness. Enlighten my dark mind. Warm my cold affections. Melt my hard heart. Subdue my stubborn will; and make me a new creature, that I may walk before you in newness of life.

Jesus is the great example to his people. "He that says he abides in him, ought himself so to walk, even as he walked." "He left us an example, that we should follow his steps." "As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him." "Let that mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." "If you love me, keep my commandments." "Follow me."

Oh that I may have grace to set the Lord always before me, and to contemplate the meek and lowly Savior with increasing admiration, until my soul is transformed into his likeness. While treading in his steps, and copying his example, I shall enjoy the light of his countenance, and the consolation of his Spirit; for the precious promise is, "if any man loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." The great end and aim of the believer’s life, is to promote the glory of Jesus. Paul declared to the Philippians, that the one object of all his labors and sufferings was, that Christ might be magnified in his body, whether it be by life or death. And then he adds, "for to me, to live is Christ, to die is gain." Those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, will be anxious to glorify him with their bodies and their spirits, which are his. All their desire will be to him, and the glory of his name. Is this my happy experience? Am I seeking to promote the interest of the Redeemer’s kingdom? Do I esteem every

enjoyment joyless, which is not sweetened by his love; and every effort useless, which is not connected with his glory? If Jesus is the author of my spiritual life, light, and fruitfulness; if he is the great example, ever present to my mind; if the promotion of his glory is the one aim of my united powers; then may I say with the apostle, "To me, to live is Christ." What object so noble - what end so glorious, as thus to live simply and entirely to him who is Lord of lords, and King of kings! While thus living, I may join with Paul in his happy experience, and say, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

While thus living, I may scripturally take the full comfort of his joyful expectation, and exclaim, "To me, to die is gain." "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory;" for he has said, "Because I live, you shall live also," "Where I am, there you shall be also," "Father, I will that they also, whom you have given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory." Glorious hope! blessed expectation! To every humble believer death will be everlasting gain. It is only a quick transition from earth to heaven. To be absent from the body, is to be present with the Lord. No wonder, then, that the apostle longed to be dissolved, that he might be with Christ. How happy is the death of every true believer in Jesus! That dreadful sting, which gives death all its terror, was extracted by the Savior, when, expiring on the cross, he exclaimed, "It is finished." "He bore our sins in his own body on the tree." "Through death, he destroyed him that has the power of death, that is, the devil." No dire foreboding no agonizing fears of approaching dissolution, rend the heart of the humble believer; or accelerate the wasting disease. Hope bears up the heir of glory amid all his sufferings. Faith pierces the veil; which hides the heavenly world from mortal eyes; while love burns brighter, as it reaches the source from where it came.

Oh my soul, are you prepared to die? Have you fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you in the Gospel? Are you washed from your sins through the blood of the Lamb? Have you experienced a new and divine change? Have you passed from darkness unto light, and from Satan unto God? Oh blessed Savior, perform in me all the good pleasure of your goodness, and the work of faith with power.

Death is gain to the believer, because it will increase his knowledge beyond all that he can now conceive. Here we see as through a glass, darkly. We behold spiritual objects as in a mirror, through the medium of natural things; but in heaven, we shall behold the adorable Savior, not as now veiled under figures and emblems, but face to face. We shall see him as he is, and be made like him in the beauty of holiness. Oh what a vision will that be! Who can describe the glorified person of our Emanuel? Who can paint the resplendent Sun of righteousness, whose beams gladden and illuminate all the realms above? The apostles were favored with a glimpse of his glory on Mount Tabor, when the Savior shone as the sun, and when his clothing was white as the light. John was permitted to enjoy a rich display of the Redeemer’s glory, when an exile in the isle of Patmos. But how faintly does human language set forth the glories of that Being, from whose presence the heaven and earth shall flee away; who inhabits eternity! If all created glories are thrown into the shade, when Jesus is revealed to the soul, while dwelling in a house of clay; how will they be lost amid those radiant perfections which shall hereafter be revealed, when the believer, admitted into the Savior’s presence, shall behold all heaven unveiled to his sight! Well might the apostle count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his

Lord.

Oh blessed Spirit of wisdom and truth, give me an increasing knowledge of Jesus and the glories of his kingdom. Impart unto me a spiritual, experimental knowledge of that love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that I may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Death will be gain to the believer, because it will increase his holiness. Here on earth, we have to contend with an evil nature, although subdued by almighty grace, and changed in a considerable degree through the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet the Canaanites are still in the land. The remainders of corruption require continual watchfulness and circumspection, lest they increase and regain their former possession of the heart. Sin still dwelling in the believer, causes that warfare, which must never cease until this body of death is laid in the grave, never more to harass the disembodied spirit encircled with heavenly glory.

Oh that I may daily hunger and thirst after righteousness! I want to be holy, as God is holy; to have my will swallowed up in his. I feel sin daily working within me, but Oh, may I hate and abhor it! May I ever feel it to be my grief my burden, and my cross; and rejoice at every victory obtained over it through the blood of the Lamb.

How unspeakably blessed must heaven be, where sin can gain no admittance; where every object shall administer the purest felicity; and where Jesus himself will be the eternal source of joy!

Death must, then, indeed be gain to the believe; for it shall put him in complete possession of everlasting happiness.

Here on earth we groan, being burdened. Here we live in an enemy’s country, through which we must pass, contending every inch of our way to Zion. Here we live as in a great hospital, between the dying and the dead. Here we are surrounded with all kinds of natural and moral evils flowing from that poisoned source - the fall of man. Here we must drink the bitter waters of Marah - made still more bitter by our love of ease; our lack of resignation to the will of God; our selfishness of spirit; our rebelliousness of heart to his disposals. The believer, it is true, experiences daily mercies which compass him about; for the Lord will not forsake his inheritance in the waste howling wilderness. His supplies, like the ancient manna, are continually falling around his tent. He has light in his dwelling, and can, therefore, rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of his salvation. He glories in tribulation for Christ’s sake; and, like the martyr of old, can kiss the fagot, which, as another chariot of fire, is appointed to convey his soul to heaven. But still his happiness is greatly interrupted through the vestiges of indwelling sin, the wickedness of mankind, and the malice of Satan. He, therefore, looks forward with joyful expectation to that glorious period, when his happy spirit will take its station near the throne of his beloved Savior; and rejoices in hope of the glory of God.

How passing strange, that dying, sinful worms of the earth, should ridicule and despise such a hope and end as this! Oh almighty Spirit! descend into my soul. Banish every thing which is contrary to your holy nature, and obstructive to my spiritual progress towards the realms of bliss. Fill me with light and love - with joy and peace. Take me under your guardian care. Guide me by your unerring hand through all the dangerous mazes of this mortal state, until brought to the full fruition of your glorious Godhead, through the all-sufficient merits of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

How happy is the dying saint, Whose sins are all forgiven; With joy he passes Jordan’s flood, Upheld by hopes of heaven. The Savior, whom he truly loved, Now cheers him by his grace; A glory gilds his dying bed, And beams upon his face.

Ecstatic joy and heavenly bliss Swell his enraptured heart;

He views the premised land of rest, And pants for his depart.

Terror and dread are both unknown;

Sweet peace and hope appear, To guide the blessed traveler home, And all his footstep cheer.

Angels of light attendant wait His spirit to convey Beyond this drear abode of night, To realms of endless day.

Oh! may I live the life of faith, Abound in holy love, Until death shall bear my joyful soul To Zion’s courts above.

03.71-71. ON TRUE HAPPINESS

71. ON TRUE HAPPINESS

There is one important truth which cannot be too deeply engraven on the heart - that TO BE HOLY IS TO BE HAPPY. This truth, being once admitted, accounts for the misery of thousands who are in search of happiness. They mistake its real nature, and the way which leads to it. They thirst, indeed, for the refreshing stream, but find it not; because their minds being unholy, they cannot discern (nor even relish, if they could discern) the true felicity of man.

Where, then, is this sacred treasure to be found? What shall we answer to the thousands who inquire, "Who shall show us any good?" The blessed Gospel reveals the important secret. While worldly minds are toiling through the valley of life to reach the envied spot, the imaginary paradise of affluence, where happiness is supposed to dwell; the humble Christian, living day by day on Christ by faith, enjoys the real blessing in every situation and condition of life.

Riches cannot confer happiness. Grace can, and does. Herein is the goodness of God strikingly manifested, that true happiness is not the result of human wisdom, power or grandeur. The poor may enjoy it, while the most wealthy are destitute of it. The illiterate may discern its excellence, while the wisest philosophers may be blind to its beauty.

We see this continually verified. The rich rejecting the true riches; the wise of this world despising the true wisdom; the men, who are struggling after happiness, refusing that Gospel which alone can make them happy. And why is this? Because man is naturally blind to the things of God, and his own true interest, until enlightened by the Spirit of God. Truly, man by nature is dead in trespasses and sins. He is alive indeed to evil, and active in the pursuit of earthly good; but towards God he is dead. His heart has no impulsive feeling of love and gratitude. His will has no holy bias in childlike simplicity and obedience to his great Creator. He is averse from God. The carnal mind has not only no desires towards God but is rooted in enmity against him. This is the true state of man by nature. He is up in arms against his Maker. Hence he is an object of deserved condemnation. His natural conscience testifies indeed against him. But he breaks through all restraints, and sins with awful determination. The Almighty could, by a single volition of his will, consign the rebel to eternal death. But Oh! how sweetly do grace and mercy shine! yes, how wonderfully does mercy rejoice against judgment! Jesus descends; satisfies the demands of the law; removes the curse, and opens the kingdom to all believers. To believe this mystery of love; to receive Christ into the heart by faith; to live under the abiding influence of this heavenly truth, is to attain the grand secret of happiness. All else is but vanity and vexation of spirit; for there is no peace, says my God, to the wicked. It is evident, then, that true happiness consists in being at peace with God, through Jesus Christ; and in the habitual enjoyment of that peace in the conscience, through the power of the Holy Spirit. This delightful state of reconciliation with God is connected with inward purity, as the blessed fruit of the Savior’s death; for holiness is an essential part of Christ’s salvation. Thus peace and purity felt and enjoyed, form that happiness which creates a heaven in the soul, and prepares the soul for the enjoyment of heaven. In proportion to

the clearness of our views of Gospel grace, and the strength of our faith in the atonement of Jesus, will be our victory over sin, and the abundance of our peace and joy. All believers are not equally happy, because all are not equally strong in faith, or equally advanced in inward holiness. When, therefore, we are dejected and fearful; when we find an uncomfortable restlessness within, corroding and damping our spiritual enjoyment; or when we feel a dread of the judgment to come; we should look well to ourselves, lest there be some root of bitterness, some secret sin indulged in the heart, which, as it grieves the Holy Spirit, never fails to intercept the smiles of our heavenly Father, to becloud our evidences, and to mar our joy.

Happiness is inseparable from holiness, and cannot exist without it. Some constitutions are prone to melancholy; and if any pious people have such a natural predisposition to sadness, the world immediately ascribes it to religion. But surely this is most unjust, and shows how readily we throw the blame on what we do not love.

How perverted is man in his feelings and affections! He smiles when he should sigh; he laughs when he should mourn; he appears gay and sprightly when he should be of a sorrowful spirit. But Oh! the blessed change which takes place, when the Gospel comes to the heart, not in word only, but in power, in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance. He sighs and mourns over his guilt and misery; but his sorrow is turned into joy. Jesus, who is anointed to preach glad tidings unto the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted, and to comfort all that mourn, gives him beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. He can now rejoice in the Lord with joy unspeakable and full of glory; a heavenly light shines into his soul, and he delights himself in the abundance of peace.

Oh happy, blissful state! who would not long to be a genuine disciple of the blessed Jesus, who has assured his obedient people, that he will manifest himself unto them as he does not unto the world; that he will come, and make his abode with them? What heart can be unhappy, in which Jesus deigns to dwell? to which he manifests his grace and love?

Such favored souls are the temples of the Holy Spirit; the habitation of God through the Spirit. They are led by the Spirit into all truth; are preserved from the corruption which is in the world through lust, and bring forth the fruits of righteousness. They ripen daily for the paradise above, where they shall eat of the tree of life, and walk in white with him whom they love above every created being.

Oh my soul, receive with joy the reconciliation. Nothing can make you happy, but a simple laying hold of Christ by faith.

Oh what a blessing is the simplicity of faith! Lord, enable me to look to you as revealed in the Gospel, and to rely with unshaken confidence on your atonement and intercession.

If I believe with the heart unto righteousness, I shall be saved, saved from guilt and condemnation; saved from the power and pollution of sin. If thus saved, I must be happy; happy in the love of God, and happy in the sweet assurance of being with my Savior forever and ever.

Lord! I believe - help my unbelief. I would credit your word. It is unerring truth. Now let its sacred power be felt in my heart. From this moment seal your pardon to my soul, by the indubitable impression of heavenly love. Who can describe the holy joy, The calm that reigns within; When

Jesus speaks the pardoning word, And breaks the power of sin!

Sweet peace, composing all the mind, Bids angry passions cease;

Graces descending from above, Like flowing waves increase.

Dear Savior! let your healing beams In softest radiance shine;

Let humble fear and love abound, To prove the work divine.

Then will my grateful heart each day Its Ebenezer raise, Until angels teach me, near your throne, Eternal songs of praise.

03.72-72. ON TRUE RELIGION

72. ON TRUE RELIGION

True religion neither courts the observation, nor seeks the applause of men. It grows and thrives most in retirement. Its effects, indeed, are widely felt, and its blessings extensively diffused; but its salutary streams are fed by communion with God, by holy meditation, fervent prayer, and much converse with the holy Scriptures. It aims at the glory of God. Jesus Christ is its sum and substance; and to promote the happiness of the whole human race, is its delightful occupation.

True religion is the very opposite to hypocrisy and formality. It is made up of truth and sincerity, and its love is without pretense. It hates every false glare, all ostentatious parade, all desire to be seen; and labors to approve itself to Him who looks at the heart, and examines the motives of men.

True religion is founded on the truth of God’s holy word. There, man is declared to do not be only guilty, but unable to save himself; and wholly indebted to the sovereign grace of God for life and salvation. To know God in his word, to love him in the heart, and to honor him in the life, is the daily work of every real believer. Hence, to love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, is the essence of true religion.

Many fatally deceive themselves respecting the nature of genuine Christianity.

True religion does not consist in having a name to live; a reputation for godliness. "You have a name that you live, and are dead."

It does not consist in outward forms, however excellent. "Having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; from such turn away." "The kingdom of God is not food and drink; but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."

It does not consist in attending divine ordinances. "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." "My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain."

It does not consist in outward profession. "They profess that they know God, but in works deny him."

It does not consist in the mere performance of moral duties. "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

It does not consist in head knowledge, great gifts, liberality to the poor, or even martyrdom itself. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels; though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains; though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor; and though I give my body to be

burned, and have not charity, it profits me nothing." The religion of the Bible is pure, spiritual, experimental, and practical. It is the devotion of the heart; for God is a spirit, and requires those who worship him to worship him in spirit and in truth.

It is then evident, that the whole of evangelical religion may be summed up in four short words - "Faith working by love." Without love, faith is dead, like a tree destitute of sap. Without faith, love can have no existence; for the sap cannot exist, if the root be wanting. Good works are the blessed fruits of faith, and prove the existence and soundness both of faith and love.

God, in grace, as in nature, is the Creator of the root, the sap, and the fruit. He gives life and fertility. Without him, we are nothing, and can do nothing. Hence, believers are called "trees of righteousness, of the Lord's planting, that he may be glorified;" - and branches in Jesus Christ, the true vine; who has said, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he that abides in me and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit; for without me, you can do nothing."

True religion is exemplified in the conscientious discharge of all the social and relative duties. It fills the domestic circle with peace; and every community where it reigns, with unity and concord. The Christian's life is a life of desire and enjoyment. His desires are ever on the wing towards Jesus, and at times he enjoys the smiles of his Savior, which gladden his heart, and quicken his desires after a perpetual increase of this blessedness.

He pants continually after true happiness in the exercise of true religion; and every taste of this sweet refreshing fountain, while it alleviates his thirst after earthly pleasures, only serves to increase his desires after more spiritual communion with his God and Savior. Thus he proceeds, until his most enlarged desire is satisfied in that blessed region where all the saints are led to living fountains of water, proceeding from the living God.

How little is the Christian's life known by the world in general! How little is it valued even by those who profess to esteem it! How true the apostolic declaration; "All men seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." The warrior, pursuing fame even to the pinnacle of glory, braving all the horrors of the blood-stained field; the man of letters, deeply entrenched in ponderous folios, seeking by research to immortalize his name; the busy merchant, stretching out his arms, and holding in his wide embrace a world of traffic to enlarge his fortune and enrich his family; ten thousand times ten thousand human beings of every rank and station, all feel, while unrenewed, a secret wish that Scripture truth may not be true. Else why dispute the plain, yet awful declarations of the word of God? Why argue, contradict, and gainsay, yes, deny the solemn revelation of his will, whose word is truth, whose nature is unchangeable, whose counsel shall stand, and who will do all his pleasure?

How inveterate is the natural enmity of the human heart to true religion! Hence every call from earth to heaven is neglected and despised. The heart, deeply rooted in the earth, derives its nourishment from thence; and finds no relish in enjoyments or pursuits, which stretch beyond the boundaries of time, or bid the worldly mind forsake the groveling pleasures of this passing scene. The religion of Jesus is unalterable in its very nature. It is founded on the perfections of Jehovah, and on the necessities of man. Its promises and precepts, its prospects and privileges, are the same now, as they ever were. Then why is the face of the Christian world so changed? It is owing to the prevalence of that evil heart of unbelief against which Paul so feelingly cautions the Hebrew

converts; and which occasions our present luke-warmness, slothfulness, and departure from God.

There are four evils which mark the decayed state of Christians in general; their love of the world - their love of ease - their fear of man - their distrust of providence. The primitive believers were just the reverse of all this. They despised the world, and its flattering allurements; they took up the cross, and denied themselves; they boldly confessed Christ, and suffered for his sake; they trusted God for all things, and so took joyfully the spoiling of their goods. And what was the blessed fruit? They abounded in consolation; they grew in grace; they shone as lights in the world; they felt joy and peace in believing. But now we see professing Christians, even many of whom we charitably hope well, languid in their graces, timid in their confession, fearful of consequences, and fearful of offending. Sad symptoms these, of spiritual decay! Hence the spirit of the Gospel is not exhibited. Its character is not exemplified, and Christ is not glorified. No marvel that the work of evangelizing the world has proceeded so slowly, since the power of true religion is so little felt by the bulk of professing Christians. An awful charge of guilt thus rests upon the visible Church of Christ. But as the Church is composed of individual members, so each must take his share of criminal supineness and neglect. And you, Oh my soul, must stand condemned before that gracious Savior, whose love demands the exercise of all those powers which he himself bestowed upon you. Oh that the Lord may quicken his people, and revive his work in the midst of the days!

Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me." This cross is heavy to bear when earthly affections, or pride, or unbelief work in the heart. But when the heart is filled with love to the Savior, then the greatest cross is light, and even pleasant to endure. Thus the apostles "counted it all joy, when they fell into diverse temptations." They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. Multitudes of loving believers gloried in tribulation, and sealed the truth with their blood. If Christianity can effect such wonders in the hearts of sinners, how powerful, and yet how beautiful, is true religion! As God will be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty unto the remnant of his people; so his people shall be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God. But while we admire the work of grace, it is to be deeply deplored that the world has made such sad inroads into the territories of the visible church. The love of ease, of splendor, of worldly distinction, of family comforts, has greatly destroyed that spirit of martyrdom which should practically operate in every believer in Jesus.

Every Christian should he a martyr in spirit. He should be ready to leave all, and sacrifice all for Christ. That excellent reformer Oecolampadius, writing to a friend, said, "The greatest happiness of this life is to venture for the sake of Christ." Many will venture their all in some profitable speculation, which promises a large increase of worldly property. But happy indeed is that man who can venture all for Christ in faith and love. He may lose all that the world calls great and good; but he shall receive, through the merits of the Redeemer, a crown of glory which fades not away.

It is easy to rejoice at the bestowment of temporal favors, and sometimes of spiritual mercies; but are we as ready to render thanks unto the Lord for pains and trials, for losses and crosses, endured for righteousness’ sake, or in the wise dispensations of a good and unerring Providence?

Now the apostolic command is, "in every thing give thanks." But Oh! how little of this primitive spirit is there among us. Who can bear with joy the loss of all things for Christ’s sake? Who can glory in tribulation?

"Blessed Lord! pour out your Holy Spirit upon your drooping church, that it may "flourish like grain and blossom like grapevines." Oh that I may sit loosely to the world and its passing enjoyments, and be ready to arise and follow you wheresoever you call me, either to labor or endure. Make me sincerely thankful for hourly mercies; and with these mercies, be pleased to bestow a heart weaned from creature comforts, and supremely devoted unto you. Increase in me true religion; that so, amid the manifold and sundry changes of the world, my heart may surely there be fixed, where alone true joys are to be found. Give me that spiritual perception, and that spiritual relish for heavenly truths, which are the experience and portion of your children here, and which form the delightful foretaste of their eternal blessedness in the world to come."

Oh! you in whom all comfort lies, The source of all my inward joys; To you I look, to you I call, My only hope, my life, my all. With you, Oh God, is holy peace; Your flowing mercies never cease;

They fill the spacious courts above With odors sweet of grace and love.

Blest Savior, with delight I dwell On themes no mortal tongue can tell; The glory of your cross exceeds All human, all angelic deeds.

Oh! may the love which brought you down Continue still your work to crown;

Until every nation shall confess Your grace, your blood, and righteousness.

03.73-73. ON ELECTION

73. ON ELECTION

It is very dangerous to indulge a spirit of curiosity respecting the deep things of God. There are mysteries in the kingdom of grace, and in the kingdom of nature, which surpass the highest powers of created intelligence to comprehend. But, as in the natural world, enough is made level to our capacity, to render us comfortable and happy with respect to food, clothing, and other temporal conveniences; so likewise in things pertaining to the spiritual world, sufficient is revealed to make us wise unto salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ. That desire of being wise above what is written, which is the effect of a proud, unhallowed curiosity, is strongly reprehended in the holy Scriptures. Our blessed Lord frequently repressed this spirit of curious inquiry which is so natural to us. When one asked him, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" his practical answer was, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." As if he had said, "trouble not yourself about the secret counsels of heaven; take heed to yourself; or you shall likewise perish." At another time, when his disciples asked him, saying, "Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in his own power." When Jesus had been foretelling Peter by what death he should glorify God; Peter, seeing John, the disciple whom Jesus' loved, felt a curiosity to know what would become of him also; and said, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" Jesus said unto him, "If I will that he tarry until I come, what is that to you - follow you me." Thus we see how pointedly our Lord checked that prying into secret things, which, if indulged, would take us from the plain path of childlike obedience, and draw us into labyrinths, where our minds would soon be "in wandering mazes lost." But although we cannot fathom, we are nevertheless to believe from the heart, the mysterious truths of God. Should any of these truths seem to contradict each other, it arises altogether from the finite nature of our own mind. Instead, therefore, of laboring to reconcile the apparently opposing statements of eternal truth, by systems of human invention; it is the part of humility to receive each, in the simplicity of faith, as God has been pleased to reveal them to us in his holy word. By adopting this mode, we shall not be shackled by human opinion, nor be afraid of inconsistency, while we state the simple truth as it is in Jesus.

How rich, how full, and how extensive are the blessings which Paul declared to the Thessalonian church. They reach from everlasting to everlasting, and are calculated to animate all true believers to works of faith, labors of love, and patience of hope; since he, who has promised, is faithful, and will never forsake the work of his own hands.

"We are bound to give thanks always to God, for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth, whereunto he called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2Th 2:13-14.)

Some may ask; how could the apostle know that the Thessalonians were the chosen of God? Had he ever been favored with a view of the book of life? Had he ever seen their names written in

heaven? had he ever explored the secret decrees and counsels or the Almighty? No. This eminent servant of Christ searched another book, even the volume of grace, the revealed word of God. There he discovered the clear marks and evidences of God's redeemed people. And being himself under the immediate inspiration of the holy Spirit, he was enabled to draw just conclusions respecting the state and character of those who embraced the Gospel. In the first chapter of this Epistle to the Thessalonians, the apostle displays in glowing colors the faith, love, patience, zeal, and hope of this infant church their readiness to receive the word; their professed subjection to the Gospel; their cheerful waiting for Christ, and their joy under manifold afflictions. Hence he drew the conclusion, that they were the chosen of God; "knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." Whether these words mean God's choice of them; or their choice of God, it comes to the same thing; for, "if we love him, it is because he first loved us."

All, then, who truly believe in Jesus, and who are renewed in the spirit of their minds through the power of the Holy Spirit, evidence their election of God. "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." But another work of grace is mentioned by the apostle; they were effectually called by the Gospel. (2Th 2:13.)

Thousands are called, by the faithful preaching of the Gospel every Sabbath day, to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on the hope set before them in a crucified Savior. Yet how few obey the call, and come unto Jesus, weary and heavy-laden with the burden of their sins.

How few are effectually called. The great mass of baptized Christians hear the words of life, but regard them not. They love the world, and cling to it. They love sin, and will not part with it. They love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. And if it be asked, why do they thus act? the answer is given by Paul himself; writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; "If our Gospel is hidden, it is hidden to those who are lost. In whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of those who believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

We may therefore conclude, that all, who believingly obey the call of mercy, and draw near unto God through Jesus Christ, evidence their election of God, according to the plain, grammatical meaning of the apostle's declaration. The other blessing mentioned by Paul, and which crowns the whole, is, the eternal glorification of all who are thus effectually called, and evidence their election in Christ by faith and holiness; "Whereunto he called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Our divine Master has declared, "He that endures unto the end, shall be saved." Peter assured the Christian strangers who were scattered abroad, that they were "kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation."

Hence it follows, that all who are effectually called by the Gospel, shall finally obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, being preserved through faith unto God's everlasting kingdom. Thus grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. The Gospel is designed to stain the pride of human glory, and to lay man in the dust of humiliation. "By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not of work; lest any man should boast; for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them." Such is the humbling, yet delightful language of the inspired apostle. The carnal heart rises against these abasing, purifying doctrines of the cross,

which strip the sinner of all self-righteous dependence, and strike at the root of all fleshly indulgences. The proud sinner must become a fool in his own estimation, and feel himself to be nothing, before he can receive with gratitude these stupendous blessings offered for his acceptance in the Gospel.

Divine grace alone can effect this mighty change. But what cannot the power of Omnipotence accomplish? "From eternity to eternity I am God. No one can oppose what I do. No one can reverse my actions" is the voice of a Sovereign, "who works all things after the counsel of his own will;" who has said, "my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

Man, if left to himself, would never seek after God. His language is, "I have loved strangers, and after them I will go." But when God says, "LIVE;" - the soul shall as assuredly live, as when at the creation he said, "Let there be light, and there was light." The chaotic mass was formed to order and beauty, when the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the deep; and so shall the disordered soul be transformed after the divine image, when Almighty Grace puts forth its new creating power. "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." When the leper said, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean;" Jesus replied, "I will, be clean; and immediately his leprosy departed from him." In Jesus, we behold "the mighty God" - "God manifest in the flesh," exerting his benevolent power in healing diseases, in stilling the raging elements, in casting out devils, in multiplying provisions, in raising the dead, in revealing men’s thoughts, in forgiving sin. And now that he is in glory, and reigns as sovereign Lord; no darkness of the understanding, no hardness of the heart, no rebellion of the will, no alienation of the affection, no outward opposition, or inward repugnance to the truth, can prevent the conversion and final salvation of that soul, whom God loves with an everlasting love, and draws with loving-kindness to the cross of Christ.

"This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins." This is the wonderful announcement of the messengers of peace. As believers in Jesus are declared to be "chosen in him before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy, arid without blame before him in love;" so the change which passes upon the soul when brought by the Spirit to the love and practice of holiness, as evidential of its election in Christ, is described in Scripture by the boldest figures.

"And you has he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." "You were once darkness, but now are you light in the Lord." "Giving thanks unto the Father, who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son, that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, and behold, all things are become new." This blessed conversion from sin to holiness is thus declared by the apostle to the Romans; "You were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." To the Thessalonians; "You turned from idols to serve the living and true God." To the Corinthians; "Know you not, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? and such were some of you; but you are washed; but you are sanctified; but you are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." The way and means of the church’s salvation were also foreordained. Jesus is declared to be the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Faith is

the divinely-appointed instrument, by which the sinner is enabled to lay hold on Christ. The Holy Spirit is promised to all who ask for this unspeakable gift. "Ho, every one that thirsts, come to the waters," is the gracious call. The Gospel is designed to be a universal blessing; for the command is, "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." The invitation is general - the command to preach the Gospel is unlimited. None are excluded but such as, through unbelief, exclude themselves; for "God desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live;" "he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;" "he will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

Such are the views which Infinite Wisdom and Love has given us in the pages of inspired truth. Eternal misery is there declared to be the fruit of man’s willful apostasy and rebellion; and eternal happiness the free gift of sovereign grace through Jesus Christ. Thrice happy, then, are they who experience the saving grace of God; who hear in faith; who obey the call of mercy; and who follow the Lord fully and perseveringly in filial obedience.

These are the objects of the Savior’s love and care; theirs are the promises; and to them belong the glories which shall shortly be revealed. Oh happy people! saved by the Lord.

"Blessed Savior, draw my heart sweetly and powerfully to yourself. Oh make me your temple! May your word reach my heart, and your love constrain my soul to love and obedience. Like Matthew, may I cheerfully obey your call, leave all, and follow you. Subdue every rebellious inclination; and let nothing dwell within me that is contrary to your will. Root out of my heart all evil affections, and fill me with the fruits of righteousness. May my happy position ever be at the foot of the cross. There wean my heart from earthly things, and bind me to yourself by cords of everlasting love. Oh let me never, never wander from you; but preserve me to your kingdom and glory for your infinite mercies’ sake."

Dear Shepherd of the chosen flock, I love to hear your voice; When full of kind redeeming love, You bid my heart rejoice.

Oh, let me never leave the road, That leads to your abode!

Oh, suffer not my feet to stray From you, the living God!

It is your delightful work to save, Your pleasure and your joy;

Then let your praise each fleeting hour My grateful thoughts employ. A stranger, Lord, I will not know, Through your preserving grace; But follow you with cheerful steps To heaven, your dwelling-place.

03.74-74. ON SPIRITUAL VISION

74. ON SPIRITUAL VISION

It is a pleasant thing for the eye to behold the sun, and all the varied objects which are illuminated by its rays. If the natural eye be such a precious gift of providence, the eye of faith must be an invaluable gift of grace. Through the weakness of the natural eye, distant objects are dimly seen; but, by the eye of faith, we can pierce the veil which bounds our sight, and view the unseen glories of the heavenly world.

Lord, impart unto your servant this spiritual vision, that I may daily contemplate the wonders of eternity, and the blest abodes of heavenly purity and joy. When I look with an eye of faith towards heaven, what do I there behold? The glorious habitation of Him who fills all space with his presence, who dwells in the light which no man can approach unto. I there behold the throne of grace and mercy, in the midst of which appears a Lamb slain, even Jesus, the friend of sinners, the advocate of guilty man.

I there behold myriads of glorified spirits hymning the praises of Him, who was, and is, and is to come. They appear as flames of fire, burning with zeal and love. Their outstretched wings express their readiness to fulfill the mandate of their God.

I there behold rivers of pleasures, mansions of bliss; yes, more than tongue can speak or heart conceive. There dwells the great, the glorious God-Man, Emanuel, God with us. Around him are assembled all his faithful ministers and people; clothed in white, with palms of victory in their hands, singing to their golden harps, the praises of redeeming love. To be ever near this gracious Savior; to behold his glory; to experience the fullness of his love; to enjoy his smiles; to be filled with his Spirit - is the heaven, the felicity, the glory of the saints in light. When from these high abodes I cast my eyes upon this earth on which I tread, how wretched does it appear. The believer may at that very moment be treading upon a scorpion, but he feels not its painful sting; some acute disorder may be striking through every nerve, but his exalted views of heavenly glory benumb the pain, and blunt the edge of suffering. Through the power of his realizing faith, he is even more than conqueror. He can glory in tribulation, and triumph in death. The world may frown, but it troubles him not. It may smile, but he regards it not. His whole soul is full of heaven, of Christ, and of eternal glory.

Oh you ever-blessed Spirit of grace and truth, impart this precious faith - this realizing view of Jesus - this sweet foretaste of everlasting bliss. Give me to know and feel my interest in his atoning blood. Make me more active for Christ - more devoted to his cause - more attached to his people - more alive to his honor - more simple in my dependence - more sincere in my professions - more simple in all my aims to glorify my God and Savior. When I look into the grave, what do I there behold? The dire effects of sin; the vanity of all created things; the end of pomp and pride. But when, with the eye of faith, I look beyond this cold and dreary mansion of the dead, what awful scenes present themselves before me! There I behold the rich man, who, when on earth, fared

sumptuously every day, lifting up his eyes in torment, without one cooling drop to quench his flaming tongue. And why does he thus suffer? Because he trusted in his riches, and forgot his God. The grave is the concluding scene of splendor and magnificence. There, the now pampered body must become the food of worms! There, the body now arrayed in purple and fine linen, must be covered with corruption!

Methinks this humiliating end of human greatness would convince the fondest worldling of the vanity of earthly things. And surely it would impress the mind, and deeply too, if men would but consider. Vain, thoughtless man! ah! when will he be wise? The opening grave creates a slight alarm, when some beloved object is laid within its cold embrace. But soon the transient tear is wiped away, and every serious thought, like writing on the sand, is rapidly effaced by the world's returning tide of business or of pleasure.

Lord, grant that it may not be so with me. Teach me so to number my days, that I may apply my heart unto wisdom. Preserve me from the folly of building the fabric of my hopes upon so mutable a foundation as human life. Oh may I never boast of tomorrow, but labor to improve today. Oh may I seek you now while you may be found, and call upon you while you are near; for now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. May I learn wisdom from the folly of others; and pray that they also may become wise unto salvation. Remembering that the end of all things is at hand, may I be sober and watch unto prayer. May I live in a constant preparation for a dying hour, and find the last retiring moment the happiest of my life, being brightened by faith in Jesus, and an assured hope of glory. When I look around me in the world, what do I there behold? A scene of complicated misery - an Aceldama, a field of blood; a huge hospital filled with all manner of diseases; an asylum full of maniacs, fancying themselves immortal in the region of mortality, and happy in a valley of tears.

I behold a multitude of faithful prophets, now blowing the brazen trumpet of the law, and now the silver trumpet of the Gospel; each laboring to alarm or to allure this miserable, this dying crowd. Some few, through grace, are arrested in their mad career; their eyes begin to open, the scales drop off they stand confused and amazed, they look around in terror, and cry out - "What must we do to be saved?" Through grace, they behold the Savior; through grace, they repent and believe; through grace, they love and obey the Gospel. They now lament the dreadful situation of their poor companions, and become themselves the objects of derision.

Lord, what is man! how astonishing your forbearance; how surpassing thought your boundless grace and mercy!

Enable me to see the madness and folly of living at a distance from you. Lead me from the ways and customs of the world. Fix my heart more steadfastly upon heavenly joys; upon Christ, the fountain of bliss; upon Christ, the hope of glory; upon Christ, your well-beloved; upon Christ, the adoration of angels, the joy and portion of the church on earth, the bliss and glory of the general assembly and church of the first-born in heaven. In those blest regions of delight, Where Jesus is unveiled to sight, No mortal tongue can e'er express The ransomed sinner's blessedness. His joys are all alike unknown, As seated on Emanuel's throne, He drinks the living streams of bliss, And views all heaven's joys as his.

Amazing grace! stupendous love!

Oh! may each warm affection move;

Until all my soul is knit to thee, In time and through eternity.

You of all joy the center art;

Oh, never from my soul depart;

Blest Jesus! let your saving love, Like dew, drop gently from above.

Blow on your garden, fairest one;

Oh, be my bliss, and you alone;

Let sweetest spices ever flow To beautify your church below.

03.75-75. ON HEAVEN

75. ON HEAVEN

Come, Oh my soul, and meditate on the joys and glories of the heavenly world! Lift up your eyes unto the hills from where comes your help; those everlasting hills, where all the precious flock of Christ will eternally feed, and where the great Shepherd of the sheep immediately dwells. Nothing tends more to ennoble the mind, and refine the faculties of the soul, than frequent and pious contemplations on the grace of Jesus, on the love of the Father, on the communion of the Holy Spirit, on the felicities reserved in heaven for all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. When the mind is once filled with these stupendous, yet endearing subjects, how contemptible and trifling do all earthly things appear! The word of God reveals much that is captivating to the soul, respecting the abodes of glory; yet language cannot describe, nor the mind conceive, the blessed reality. What heaven really is, we must die to know. All the glories of kingdoms, all the beauties of gardens, all the splendors of palaces, yes, all the riches of creation, form but a faint sketch of the sublime original.

Earth can only afford a shadowy representation of heavenly glory. The Holy Spirit reveals far sweeter views to our minds, than those which are drawn from sublunary scenes.

HEAVEN IS A STATE OF REST. "There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest." How delightful is rest to the weary traveler, to the sons and daughters of affliction; to those whose bodies are "chastened with pain;" or whose souls are "filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud."

How cheering is the prospect of rest to the persecuted followers of Jesus, who find no abiding city here, being driven from place to place by the rude hand of arbitrary power. How happy was the exchange for Lazarus, when carried by angels from a leprous body, wasted with hunger, to Abraham’s bosom, to the mansion of the blessed, the paradise of God.

HEAVEN IS THE ABODE OF PEACE. Pleasing thought indeed, to those who are constrained to dwell with Mesech, and have their habitation among the tents of Kedar; who are compelled to say with David, "my soul has long dwelt with those who are enemies to peace, whose tongues are sharp swords," wounding the feelings, and destroying the happiness of all around them. But in heaven all is harmony and love. There, every heart vibrates in unison, and swells with pure affection. The sons of peace shall dwell with their heavenly Father, who is the God of peace; with Jesus their Redeemer, who is the Prince of Peace; with the Holy Spirit, whose fruit is peace. The Triune God will cause their peace to flow like a river fed by a perennial spring, whose waters fail not; ever issuing, clear as crystal, from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

HEAVEN IS A STATE OF PERFECT HOLINESS. How ardently does the true believer in Jesus pant after perfect holiness. Here, indeed, he cannot attain unto it. Every moment bespeaks his infirmity. Too often, alas! his deep corruption, inwardly felt and deplored, makes him cry out in bitter anguish of spirit, "Oh! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" In heaven, he shall be

forever delivered from the workings of inbred sin. In heaven, he shall he perfected in holiness. He loves, therefore, to anticipate the bliss of heaven, which consists in seeing God in all his unutterable glories; in being made like him in the perfection of beauty; in being forever with him in the enjoyment of his love. In heaven, he will he pure as God is pure, holy as God is holy; not, indeed, in degree, hut in nature. All the loveliness of the Savior will be reflected from the heavenly bride, when, adorned with every grace and clothed in the righteousness of her beloved Lord, she shall shake herself from the dust at the morning of the resurrection, and arise and shine in the full splendor of eternal glory.

Oh! how glorious will that period be, when all the elect of God shall be gathered in; when not a grain of the precious seed shall be lost; when every, even the feeblest lamb shall be housed from the storm.

HEAVEN IS A STATE OF UNMIXED HAPPINESS. No tears bedew the cheeks, no sorrow rends the hearts of its blissful inhabitants. In those celestial regions there is no pain, neither painful separation of kindred souls. All is blooming health and immortal vigor. There, death shall strike its dart no more; for death is swallowed up in victory.

Sin, which now embitters every blessing, cannot shed its baneful influence over the glorified spirits surrounding the throne of God. Satan can find no admittance into those realms of bliss. The world, and all which it contains, shall have passed away. Every enemy shall be destroyed; and Christ shall reign forever and ever.

HEAVEN IS A STATE OF NEVER-ENDING BLISS. This stamps a value, which all the gilded happiness of this world cannot boast. "The perpetuity of bliss, is bliss." Here, in this present world, all is transitory and unsatisfactory. The utmost point of earthly enjoyment is vanity and vexation of spirit. He who grasps the most, grasps only a delusive shadow. Nothing beneath the eternal source of blessedness, God in Christ, can give abiding peace or joy. How endearing, then, are the words of the Savior; "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace." "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you; and that your joy might be full."

HEAVEN IS THE ASSEMBLAGE OF ALL THAT IS LOVELY AND EXCELLENT. There dwell the cherubim and seraphim; the angels and archangels; principalities, thrones, dominions, and powers. There will all the friends of Jesus, who have lived in successive ages of the world, meet in blissful harmony and adoring praise. There all the holy intelligences will have one mind, one voice, one will, one spirit. All will be filled with the love of God. All will be holy, and all will be inexpressibly happy. The divine image, which is the real excellence and beauty of the moral creation of God upon earth, will be seen in all its glory, when the bride, the Lamb’s wife, the church triumphant, shall be presented to the heavenly Bridegroom, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.

Oh! my soul, rest not day nor night, until the Lord makes you fit for the inheritance of the saints in light. To taste something of the blessedness of heaven, I need not travel in imagination over mighty kingdoms, or picture to my mind the varied beauties of are and nature; I must descend into my own heart, and there, in "secret silence of the mind," contemplate by faith the infinite loveliness of the Savior, until a flame of holy love warm every affection, and a beam of holy joy gladden every power of my soul. Such glimpses of uncreated glories; such tastes of redeeming grace; such views

of Jesus and his great salvation, purifying the heart, and raising the transported spirit above this poor, polluted world; may well be called - a heaven begun below.

If it be heaven to behold God without a veil; to bear his image; to dwell in his presence; then the preparation for heaven, and the foretaste of it, must consist in beholding God now by the eye of faith, as revealed in his holy word; in being now transformed by the renewing of the mind; and in holding daily converse with him by a diligent perusal of the Scriptures and by prayer. This is the life of faith. All profession of religion, without this, is mere delusion. Such barren profession may be full of words, while destitute of works; full of notions, while devoid of holy affections; full of zeal for doctrines, while empty of all saving graces. But Oh! how calm and tranquil is the humble Christian, who enjoys an assured hope of glory! He resembles a person standing on some mighty eminence. Above him shines the sun, without an intervening cloud; while far beneath his elevated station, roars the dreadful thunder. The great mass of mankind is compared in Scripture to the sea. This emblem is most accurate. The sea is always varying in its form; ever restless, ever fluctuating. Its waves, at one time, rage with tremendous fury; at another, they undulate in gentle motion, or subside into a peaceful calm. Thus the heart of man is compared to that element, which, with the most appropriate significance, denotes deceitfulness, instability, and change. In the blessed world of glory, which John saw, when wrapped in vision in the isle of Patmos, "there was no more sea." No turbulent elements, no ungovernable passions, no wild uproar to disturb its everlasting rest, no bar to communion or sweet communion among the heavenly hosts. The true Christian is a citizen of the New Jerusalem. He daily walks with God by faith. His heart is separated from a vain and noisy world, through which he is indeed hastening, but to which he does not belong. He needs not to busy himself about its passing vanities, or to contend about its fleeting honors. He shuns the angry disputes of fiery politicians, and the crowds of maddening multitudes. He feels the force or the prophet’s exhortation, "Let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth;" and seeks to lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty; well knowing that this is good and acceptable in the sight of God his Savior.

He has a nobler conquest to obtain than that which occupies the worldling’s mind. He labors to obtain the conquest over himself; since "he that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit, than he that takes a city." He has to contend against those very evils which are fostered by the world, and which lead the heart directly from God.

He honors and obeys the laws. the cheerfully submits to the powers that be, not only because of punishment, but also for conscience’s sake. He regards his neighbor’s welfare as his own, and studies to be quiet, and do his own business. He wishes to "owe no man any thing, but to love one another." Love, he considers to be a debt which he should always be laboring to discharge, although he knows it can never be fully paid.

Such is the believer in Jesus. Such is the heir of glory. He is a son of peace, and is hastening to the mansions of peace. As his life is, so is his death. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace."

There is a world of rich delight, Where warm affections glow; Where reigns the everlasting light, Where crystal waters flow.

Those happy saints securely dwell From Satan’s deadly power; Their bliss no mortal tongue can tell, "Unfolding every hour."

They dwell with Jesus, and behold The beauties of his face Secure in the celestial fold, And crowned by sovereign grace. From earth, and all it’s empty joys, Blest Jesus, set me free;

How vain the worldling’s painted toys, Compared with heaven and thee!

You are my hope, my way, my bliss, My glory, and my crown;

Descend, Oh blessed Prince of Peace, And make my heart your throne.

03.76-76. ON THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE SAINTS

76. ON THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE SAINTS The book of Revelation contains not only the most important prophecies respecting the church of Christ, to the end of time; but also unfolds to us the happy and glorified state of true believers in the heavenly world. The apostle John saw a door opened in heaven; and scenes of the most solemn, grand, and delightful nature were presented to his view. "Oh, blessed Savior! you who are the light and glory of the heavenly world, take away the scales of unbelief and ignorance from my eyes, and enable me to look through the veil, and contemplate with delight those joys which are prepared for your people, that my affections may be fixed upon things above, where you sit at the right hand of God." From the book of Revelation I find what graces of the Spirit accompany the believer to the celestial Canaan. Love, joy, peace, gratitude, humility, adoring awe, and an ineffable delight in the triumphs and glories of Jesus, form part of that felicity which the redeemed experience in the presence of God and the Lamb. The seed is sown, and the bud is formed here; but the flower expands, and the sacred fruits ripen under the eternal beams of the Sun of righteousness. The more my soul is filled with these graces, the more shall I be assimilated to the spirits of just men made perfect in heaven.

Pride can find no entrance into heaven. There, the saints are all humility. Boasting is forever excluded. They are filled with that charity which boasts not itself, is not puffed up. They sing unceasing praises to him who washed them from their sins in his own blood. Casting their crowns before the throne, in token of their own unworthiness, they cry, "Worthy is the Lamb." Every motion to pride is the effect of the fall. The whole scheme of redemption is calculated to humble the sinner, while it exalts the glory of Jehovah Jesus and promotes the sanctification of every believing soul. From the interesting vision vouchsafed to the apostle as recorded in the 7th chapter, I learn that the blessings of salvation are not confined to any particular age or nation; for multitudes out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and having palms in their hands.

Jesus, therefore, may justly be called "the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world;" once typified by the lamb, sacrificed every morning and evening on the Jewish altar; and symbolically represented by "a lamb slain" in the apocalyptic vision.

I here behold the amazing honor which Jesus puts upon his people. The apostle saw three circles round about the throne; and, wonderful to contemplate! those blessed angels who never sinned, composed the outer circle! No envy or jealousy lurks in their holy bosoms. It is only on this polluted earth, that such unhallowed fires are found to burn. Oh! that every unholy flame may be quenched in my soul.

Blessed Jesus, impress your sacred precepts on my heart. Weave them into the very texture of my soul. You have said by your apostle, "be clothed with humility." Oh! make me humble; and, under an abiding consciousness of my own unworthiness, may I ever esteem you above all created beings, and my fellow sinners better than myself. The Christian’s life is affectingly described by the Elder, who spoke to John. The words are few, but comprehensive. "These are they who came out

of great tribulation." Yes! those who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution. It is through much tribulation that we enter the kingdom. This tribulation is both inward and outward.

Outward trials may vary in different periods of the world. In our days, we are privileged to worship the God of our salvation under the protection of a mild and paternal government, not making us afraid. There have been ages, and those not a few, when believers, of whom the world was not worthy, were compelled to seek an asylum in mountains, and dens, and caves of the earth, being destitute, afflicted, tormented. The danger, with respect to Christians, now is, lest outward prosperity and the absence of persecution should produce inward languor and spiritual decay. The graces of the Spirit generally thrive best in tempestuous seasons, when the saints are driven, as it were, to their place of refuge, by the brandishing sword of tyranny or superstition. But God is all-sufficient, who can impart grace equal to the day either of ease or trouble. In every age, the believer will experience inward trials arising from his own heart, and the busy temptations of Satan. He will find himself surrounded with snares and dangers, whether he be in outward prosperity, or adversity. Hence he will always stand in need of watchfulness and prayer. Like David, however, he may "encourage himself in the Lord his God," since all things shall work together for good, while, in the exercise of faith and love, he labors in patience to possess his soul. From this sublime vision I learn, that salvation is all of grace. The blood of Jesus freely and gratuitously poured out upon the cross, is the sole procuring cause of eternal salvation. The soul of the heavenly saint, once guilty and polluted, was pardoned and purified through faith in the atonement of Jesus. On this account, and on this only, does he stand before the throne of God. All human righteousness is forever excluded. He that glories, must glory in the Lord. None will ever he admitted into the presence of God, but those whose robes are washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.

None will ever be admitted to sing the praises of self. All the redeemed unite in one grand everlasting chorus; "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever." The employment of redeemed saints is also described in this glorious vision. "They shall serve God day and night in his temple." Idleness is not happiness. The rest of heaven is not inaction; for "absence of occupation is not rest." Activity characterizes the heavenly world. Here, we are soon wearied, even in the sweetest seasons of devotion. The spirit is often willing, when the flesh is weak. But in heaven, the believer shall serve God without weariness and distraction. Here on earth, we often groan, being burdened; and at the close of a blessed sabbath, have to mourn over a dead and lukewarm heart. But in heaven, the soul shall be filled with ecstasy and delight, while serving the eternal Jehovah day and night in his temple.

Oh! the happy state of that glorious world, where sin and its baneful influence shall molest the ransomed soul no more!

How awfully do those people deceive themselves, who hope for happiness in heaven, while averse to holy meditation and praise! The disposition of the saints in light must now be wrought in every believing soul. The exercise of heavenly graces forms the beauty and happiness of the saints on earth, as well as their qualification for the enjoyment of the heavenly felicity.

What tongue can describe the blessedness contained in these few words; "He that sits upon the throne, shall dwell among them." When Jesus manifests himself to his people but for a short period, he makes their delighted spirits like "the chariots of Amminadab." They are borne aloft upon the wings of fervent love yes, like Elijah, they are carried to heaven in a chariot of fire. But for Jesus to dwell among them, and that forever and ever; Oh ! what heart can conceive the unutterable bliss! Here, indwelling sin often grieves the Holy Visitant, and quenches the sacred flame; but in heaven it is not so. "Lord, fit and prepare me for this glorious state, crucify every wrong desire, and make me a humble follower of the Lamb." In heaven, the believer will be removed out of the reach of evil. Those happy souls, who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, "shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun beat on them, nor any heat." "God himself shall be with them, and be their God. He shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away." The ransomed host who stand upon Mount Zion as conquerors through the blood of the Lamb, shall be admitted to the enjoyment of the highest good. They shall eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God. "They shall eat of the hidden manna; and receive a white stone, in which is written a new name, which no man knows, only he who receives it." "They shall be clothed with white clothing, and their names shall not be blotted out of the book of life." "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of water." "They shall inherit all things," and "reign with Christ forever and ever." Such is the blessedness of the saints. To this blessedness, the Spirit and the Bride say, "come - and let him that hears say, come; and let him that is athirst, come; and whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

"Almighty Redeemer! make me willing to receive with joy and gratitude these rich blessings of your grace; so dearly purchased, and so freely offered. Impart your whole self to my longing soul; and enable me to give my whole self to you. Oh! grant that I may possess you as my present and eternal portion. With inextinguishable desire may I seek your face and favor. Never let me rest in outward forms, nor in any of your appointed means of grace; but, ever bearing the blessed end in view, may I labor to apprehend that for which also I am apprehended by your grace, until I attain at length the prize of the high calling of God, even eternal life, through the exceeding riches of your love and mercy. You have said, ’surely I come quickly’; amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus."

Though billows of sorrow should roll, And surround me on every side;

Yet you can the tempest control, My Savior my Refuge, and Guide. Your smile makes the soul to expand, And graces celestial to grow; With rapture I gaze on the land, Where pleasures Incessantly flow.

It is there my dear Savior resides, In fullness of glory and grace And there the pure river that glides Through regions of joy and of peace. The life-yielding tree there shall spread Its branches luxuriantly round; The saints robed in white shall be fed With fruits from Emanuel’s ground.

How deep is the mystery of grace, The theme of bright seraphs above; To see the sweet beams of his face, To dwell in the essence of love! My Father! your nature is love; In Jesus, your image I view;

Oh may I behold him above, And praise him eternally too. May this my delight ever be, On earth his rich grace to record; And when from these temples set free, With joy ascend up to the Lord.

03.77-77. ON CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE

77. ON CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE

Obedience to the divine command is essential to the character of a child of God. "A son honors his father. If, then, I be a father, where is my honor, says the Lord of hosts?" "If you love me, keep my commandments." "He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me." How far removed from the truth as it is in Jesus, are those who consider it legal to enforce obedience to the moral law! The life of Christ was an undeviating display of perfect holiness, and sinless obedience to the will of his Father. From the manger to the cross, he has left us an example that we should follow his steps. The obedience of Christ was without reserve; "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which has sent me." "My food and drink is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work." "Oh my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, may your will be done." Oh, that we may have grace to drink deeply into the spirit of our divine Emanuel, and under every suffering dispensation to say, "The will of the Lord be done."

What blessedness is treasured up in this single petition; "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." If we could live under the daily influence of believing prayer, we would indeed be happy. Our wills being molded into the will of God, we would acquiesce in all the divine dispensations. With Eli, we would say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seems good to him." With Aaron, we would hold our peace. With Job, under the deprivation of earthly comforts, we would exclaim, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." With David, our language would be; "I was dumb, I opened not my month; because you did it." With Habakkuk, we would sing, "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains." Thus, with holy Paul, we would learn, in whatever state we are in, therewith to be content. Oh how happy we would be, if we never felt in our hearts one desire or affection contrary to the will of our heavenly Father! It is the lack of perfect conformity to the commands of God, which occasions so much darkness and distress, so much sin and suffering in the world. The more we resemble Jesus, in his life and spirit; the more we are made willing to do and to suffer the holy will of God; the more of joy and peace will dwell in our souls. If the will of God were done on earth as it is in heaven, what showers of blessings would descend upon it! Then would be realized the glowing descriptions of the latter-day glory, when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever. As pilgrims, journeying through a darksome wilderness, our heavenly Father has provided for us a lamp, to lighten our path, and to cheer us on our way. David prized this blessing; "Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Oh how greatly should we value it, now that it contains the full revelation of the will of God to man! Let us daily study and pray over the book of God; then the word of Christ will dwell in us richly in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, and make us fit, through the Spirit, for the inheritance of the saints in light. Are any asking, what does

the Lord require of us? Hear, and your souls shall live.

1. "God commands all men everywhere to repent." Acts 17:30. "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his son Jesus Christ." 1Jn 3:23. Have we done the will of God, by turning away from all our iniquities and receiving Christ as our only Savior? Repentance and faith are the gifts of grace; "Jesus is exalted to be a prince and a Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." "He is the author and finisher of our faith." Under the conviction of our own helplessness, and his fullness of power and love, have we prayed to him for strength to repent and believe with the heart unto righteousness? What evidence do we possess of having obtained help from the Lord? Is our stubborn will subdued? Are our earthly desires mortified? Have we renounced our own righteousness, and thrown ourselves upon Christ for every blessing, as the fruit of his perfect atonement, and obedience to the law for man? Are we willing to be nothing, that Christ may be all in all?

2. "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you." John 15:12. Sweet and delightful precept! - To a renewed mind, the commandments of Jesus are not grievous; his service is perfect freedom; his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. Holiness would be our happiness, were it not for that carnal mind which is enmity against God. Love reigns, wherever Christ dwells. God is love, and he that dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him. Oh what a happy world would this be, if love governed every heart, and directed every action. Are our hearts alive to the welfare of our fellow-creatures? Passing over the boundaries of kindred, sect, and nation, can we feel a Christian affection for all, of every climate and of every color, who bear the Savior’s image, who are the objects of his love, and the subjects of his kingdom? Does our charity manifest its indwelling by acts of kindness, liberality, and sympathy; by spiritual communion, and intercessory prayer? Is the love of Christ to us the pattern of our love to others? Lord, shed abroad your love in our hearts, that we may prove our discipleship by dwelling in the element of holy love.

3. "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you." Difficult and self-denying duty! Oh how counter does this precept run to the stream of natural corruption! And yet, divine grace can enable us to practice this command of love also. It is true, we cannot, nor are we required to love our enemies, if they be enemies for the Gospel’s sake, as we would love our dear Christian friends; yet, we must feel towards them a love of compassion for their souls; we must pray for their conversion; and requite them good for evil. We must resemble him who makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

4. "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." 1Th 4:3. The great design of Christ’s coming into the world, was to save sinners; to save them from their sins; from this present evil world; and from the wrath to come. Having made atonement for us by his death upon the cross, and ascended up, far above all principality and power, he now sheds forth the Holy Spirit, to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous foe good works. He has promised, and encouraged us to pray for the Spirit of truth, the Comforter. Are we daily seeking after this blessing by fervent, believing prayer? What evidence have we that our prayer has been answered? Have our minds been guided into all truth? Are we lead by the Spirit out of ourselves to the cross of Christ? Do we walk in the Spirit, under the daily power of his sanctifying grace? Do we seek the extermination of every bosom-sin, and labor to crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts?

5. "In every thing give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." 1Th 5:18. Gracious command! Truly God wills the happiness of his people, when he wills that they shall have a thankful heart. Who is so happy as the rejoicing believer, saved through the blood of Jesus? How varied soever be his crosses and trials, he can bless God for them all, because on each he can read, in legible characters, "whom the Lord loves, he chastens." As the affliction abounds, the consolation does also abound; for when all around him is storm and tempest, he can sing, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Thus he rejoices in the Lord always, and in everything gives thanks. Have we thus done the will of God, endeavoring, through the Spirit, to maintain a praising frame? Filled with gratitude for the blessing of redemption, do we delight in speaking good of his name, and telling of his salvation from day to day? Oh what happiness we lose, by not cultivating a thankful spirit! Were we deeply sensible of our deserts, as sinners, we would be overwhelmed at the sight of our mercies, so freely and abundantly poured out upon us through Jesus Christ. May the Lord make us duly thankful; then, we shall devote all our powers to his service and glory, who has redeemed us at so rich a price.

"Come, Oh Spirit of holiness, come into our hearts, and make your abode within us. Come, precious pledge of all spiritual and eternal blessings, and be within us, as the witness of our adoption into the family of God; the seal of our salvation. Make us willing to welcome your approach, and to receive you with joy and gladness. Mold our souls into the image of Jesus; conform our wills to the will of God. Fill us with the light of truth, and the fire of love. Oh give us a foretaste of celestial happiness, by the inward manifestations of your favor. Teach us to know ourselves. Guide us into the way of peace. Preserve us from the wiles of Satan, the deceitfulness of sin, the corruption of the flesh, the allurements of the world. Arm us for the spiritual combat. Strengthen us by your power, and make us more than conquerors through him who has loved us, and given himself for us. Sustain us, as we pass through the valley of the shadow of death, and bring us, with songs of triumph, into the heavenly Zion. To free, sovereign, boundless love, be all the praise."

Gracious is our heavenly king, Let us each his praises sing, Ever loving, ever kind, Seek - for all who seek shall find.

Let us seek Him in his Son, Who by grace our hearts has won;

Seek him, through the Spirit’s power, Wait the soft refreshing shower.

Lord, to us yourself impart, Cheer and bless each longing heart;

Keep us all from evil free, Make us live for heaven and thee. May we all your love possess, Traveling through this wilderness, Until we reach your dwelling place, And behold you face to face.

03.78-78. ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

78. ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

He who said, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done," will soon appear seated on his great white throne, as the glorified God-man, the judge of the living and the dead. How all absorbing should the consideration of this period be! And yet, alas! how little does it interest the minds of thoughtless millions! Occupied with ten thousand vanities, men seldom think upon, much less prepare for death and judgment. The ever-varying concerns of life fill up each fleeting hour, until, reaching the verge of their earthly existence, they are hurried, in all their unpreparedness, into the presence of their God. Oh! that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end. The day of judgment will be a day of final separation. Now, the wheat and the tares grow together; but then, we shall discern between the righteous and the wicked between him that serves God, and him that serves him not. Many who were first in the estimation of men, will be found last in the sight of God; while many who were last in the esteem of the world, will be exalted in the presence of saints and angels. The once flaming professor of godliness will be cast into outer darkness, when his secret thoughts shall be revealed to an assembled world. Self-love, spiritual pride, vain-glory, and a thousand unhallowed springs of action, will then be disclosed to his utter confusion, and prove the worthlessness of his boasted righteousness.

What self-reproaches, what gnawings of conscience - that worm which never dies - will tear the hearts of those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, yet apostatized from the faith, through the fear of man or love of the world; thus manifesting that their hearts were never right with God. What dismay and anguish will be seen in the countenances of others, who, when on earth, despised the riches of divine mercy, or trifled away their day of grace. The man of business, whose time was engrossed in amassing wealth as his chief good; the voluptuary, who devoted all his powers to sinful pleasures; the man of ambition, who sacrificed his conscience to the idol of worldly greatness; the man of science, (falsely so called,) who disdained to bend his reason to divine revelation, - will each be found to be a fool and a madman; while the holy, self-denying believer in Jesus, whose life was counted madness, and his end to be without honor, will appear most glorious when his lot is among the saints. "Remember me, Oh! Lord, according to the favor that you bear unto your people; Oh! visit me with your salvation, that I may see the felicity of your chosen, and rejoice in the gladness of your people, and give thanks with your inheritance." Would we be found among the redeemed in the day of judgment, we must be willing to drink of their cup. Jesus was a man of sorrows arid acquainted with grief; and his people have ever been an afflicted people. The offence of the cross has not ceased, for, "as he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." The poison of the old serpent is as active and deadly in its nature as ever. It is only through the restraining power of God, when its destructive effects are checked. "If the world hates you," said our blessed Lord, "you know that it hated me before it hated you." "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute

you." Oh! then, you servants of Jesus, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and, after that, have no more that they can do. Your souls are safely guarded by your almighty Savior; because he lives, you shall live also. This world is designed to be a place of trial. The enemies of Jesus may, for a season, be permitted to harass his church. But He who is in the midst of her, is omnipotent. The very storm which threatens her destruction shall be overruled to promote her stability and purity. The triumphing of the wicked is short. Oh! what fearfulness will seize upon the enemies of Zion, when her king shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, to take vengeance on those who know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; and when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all those who believe. Then will the pilgrim's sigh be exchanged for the song of heaven.

"The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised." But, Oh! how awful the thought; some shall awake to "shame and everlasting contempt." This doom Jesus pronounced when on earth; "whoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." Ashamed of Jesus! Yes, - thousands of 'decent Christians', who, while they dread to commit acts of gross immorality, lest a stain should be affixed to their character, are not afraid to deny Christ before men. They are ashamed to appear in the rank of his faithful followers; they shrink from the imputation of being righteous over-much. They are willing to conform to the duties and decencies of religion, as far as the world approves, and common custom sanctions; but beyond this, they dare not go. They love the praise of men, more than the praise of God.

Oh! all you Christians of this highly-favored age, who refuse to deny yourselves, to take up the cross, and to follow Christ through evil report and good report, how overwhelming will be your condemnation! When standing before his judgment-seat, methinks the glorified Savior will say - Behold, you cowardly professors, that noble army of martyrs, now standing at my right hand, who lived in the days when PAGAN ROME bathed its sword in the blood of my saints. In the view of racks and tortures, of savage beasts, of flames and crosses, they confessed me, their God and Savior. When the awful crisis came - deny or die - they freely yielded up their lives to death, for my sake and the Gospel's. See also this glorious company of the faithful, who lived in the days when PAPAL ROME issued its bloody mandates against my chosen flock. These also chose to die, rather than bear the mark of the beast, and worship his image. But you, double-minded professors, denied me in the midst of outward peace and personal security, when my Gospel was faithfully preached, and my followers were protected by the laws of your country. What, then, deterred you from confessing me before men? Was it something more dreadful than racks and flames? Hear, Oh heavens, and be astonished! These wretched souls denied me, only lest they should encounter the shyness of friends, the cold looks and unkind speeches of carnal relatives, the raillery of unbelievers, the sacrifice of some temporal gain, or the crucifixion of some beloved lust. They preferred sin and the world to my favor and heaven; therefore, they shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.

Such will be the doom of all faint-hearted and false-hearted professors of the Gospel, who shrink from suffering, who dread to sustain the consecrated cross. The word of God, which cannot be broken, expressly declares that "the fearful and unbelieving, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." The day of judgment, so full of horrors to the wicked, will be a day of blessedness to the righteous. The voice of the

archangel, and the trumpet of God, will announce the joyful hour of deliverance. Their sleeping dust shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. They shall be made like unto Christ's glorious body, and dwell forever with the Lord. Oh blissful state, when sin shall no longer defile nor sorrow distress; when Satan shall never again be permitted to tempt or terrify the sheep of Christ. The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. When men are saying peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, and they shall not escape. As it was in the days of Noah, so shall the coming of the Son of man be. How important, then, is a spirit of watchfulness and prayer! Blessed are they, who, with their loins girded, and their lamps burning, are waiting for the coming of their Lord; yes, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God. But let us remember the foolish virgins. Have we oil in our vessels with our lamps? Without the indwelling Spirit, an outward profession will avail us nothing. Oh! how awful was the cry when the approach of the Bridegroom was announced, "Our lamps are gone out." They slept in carnal security, and awoke to endless horrors. Then would they have entered the heavenly mansion, but "the door was shut;" and, being once closed, was closed forever.

Nothing will stand the test of death and judgment but the religion of the heart, a real union to Christ by faith. Every earthly thing, when weighed in the balance of eternity, is less than nothing, and vanity. Yet, strange to tell, the smallest trifle can drive futurity from our minds, until taught the value of the soul at the cross of Christ. Have we experienced the converting grace of God? How wonderful is the power of the Spirit in the regeneration of a sinner! He turns the wilderness into a fruitful field, and makes all things new. Do we loathe our once beloved sins, and love the once neglected Savior? Are our affections tending heavenward, which before were buried in the earth?

How happy is the believer in Jesus! He is filled with joy and peace. Knowing in whom he has believed, he can repose with calm reliance on the faithfulness of his Redeemer. While journeying through the wilderness, he feeds upon the heavenly manna, and is refreshed by living water from the smitten Rock. The pillar of fire, and the cloud, guide and protect him. Underneath and around him are the everlasting arms. He realizes the sweetness of the promise, "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him, and the Lord shall cover him all the day long." And as he approaches the banks of Jordan - the cold stream of death which rolls between him and his promised rest - he hears a voice from heaven proclaiming, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them." Full of faith and hope, he falls asleep in Jesus, and enters into the joy of his Lord. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.

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