

Of the Church in Its Pure, Declining, and Declined State, and Recovery

by Isaac Penington

The sermon discusses the true and false church, the declining state of the church, and the recovery of the church through the power of Christ and the restoration of the ministry.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 5:29, Deuteronomy 30:19, Isaiah 61:1, Isaiah 63:7, Jeremiah 31:20, Jeremiah 44:4, Romans 9:20, 1 Timothy 4:14, Revelation 15:4, Revelation 21:2, Revelation 22:17

Topics: "Church Decline", "Gods Grace"

Description

Isaac Penington preaches about the state of the church in its first pure state, its declining state, its declined state, and its recovery. He emphasizes the importance of faith in receiving the gospel and the need for obedience and righteousness in the new covenant of life. Penington explains that God's grace is freely given to all, but it is the individual's response to the grace that determines its effect in their life, leading to either justification or condemnation.

Transcript

OF

THE CHURCH

IN

ITS FIRST AND PURE STATE,

IN

ITS DECLINING STATE, IN ITS DECLINED STATE, AND IN ITS RECOVERY

WITH THE WAY OF SALVATION IN THE COVENANT OF LIFE OPENED, AND SOME STUMBLING-BLOCKS REMOVED OUT OF THE WAY OF THE SIMPLE-HEARTED

LIKEWISE SOME QUERIES CONCERNING THE NEW COVENANT WITH AN EXHORTATION TO ALL PEOPLE, BUT MORE ESPECIALLY TO SUCH AS ARE DESOLATE AND DISTRESSED

Whereunto is added

A Visit of tender and upright Love to such as retain any Sincerity towards the Lord

Also a brief Account of the ground of Certainty and Satisfaction, which it hath pleased the Lord to establish in my heart, concerning Religion, and the things of his Kingdom

And a Question answered about the way of knowing the Motions, Doctrines, and Teachings of Christ's Spirit

With somewhat relating to the Gospel Rest, or Sabbath

And some Queries to such as complain of want of Power to become the Lord's and serve Him

By one who testifieth what he hath seen and heard and tasted and handled of the Word, and Life eternal,

ISAAC PENINGTON

[1668]

THE PREFACE

THE true church is a mystery, and so is the false also; neither of which the outward eye of man's understanding is able to discern; but he alone who is enlightened and taught of God. Who can see how the Spirit of God works, changing men's hearts, gathering them into his truth, and building them up into an holy temple in his Son? And who can discern how the spirit of deceit works with an outward knowledge, doctrine, and form of religion, persuading or compelling men thereunto, and so builds up a false church? Yea, who can tell when the Spirit of the Lord withdraweth from the church, which was once his, leaving it to the other spirit to re-enter and possess; from which time it becometh a synagogue of Satan? There was need of the anointing of God's wisdom and Spirit to try Jews and apostles (for there were such, even in the apostles' days, as said they were so, but were not); and there is also need of the same wisdom and spirit to try churches, whether they be indeed the churches of Christ (in and of his Spirit and power) or only in the name and outward profession of the thing, without the nature, Spirit, life, and power thereof.

The apostle Paul (who was the apostle of the Gentiles, and knew what was likely to be their future state), writing to the Romans, tells them, that the Gentiles were cut out of the olive-tree, which was wild by nature; and were, contrary to nature, ingrafted into the true Olive-tree, and so came to partake of the root and fatness thereof. But withal he tells them, that unless they did continue in the faith, and the goodness of God, keeping out of the highmindedness and conceitedness of their own estate and condition, in the fear (which makes the heart clean, and preserves it in the cleanness from that which would defile, and cause it to depart from the Lord) they likewise should be cut off. Rom. 11:17, and 20, &c.

Now it would be seriously considered, whether the Gentile churches did abide in the faith, and in the goodness and power of the Lord, which gathered them? Or whether they grew high-minded, holding their estate in a presumption (as if the promise was so to them, that they must needs be the church for ever) out of the fear, and so were cast off by God, and cut off (according to the apostle's words) from God's Spirit, and so have not partook of the root and fatness of the Olive-tree, for many generations? It would also further be inquired (if it prove thus upon true search and examination, that they have been cut off), whether they can partake of the root and fatness of the true Olive-tree any more, till he that cast them off,

gather and build them up again?

It is true, there have been witnesses against the corrupt state, even a seed who have been persecuted by it; and these have, in some measure, partook of the root and fatness of the Olive-tree, all this time of the degeneration. But hath the church-state of the Gentiles, which provoked God, and was cast off, and persecuted the witness of the Lamb, his holy seed, who could not but, in his nature and Spirit, testify against their corruption, -- have they partook of the root and fatness of the Olive-tree, or have they not rather grown up from, and drunk in of, the sap and juice of another stock?

The same apostle speaks of the man of sin, that wicked one, the son of perdition; who should get into the temple of God, sit there, and show himself as God; and yet oppose and exalt himself above all that is truly called God, and that of right ought to be worshipped. 2 Thes. 2:4. Now when he gets into the temple, doth not he leaven it with his wicked spirit, making it become wicked, like him that sits and reigns in it, and is the head of it? And doth the church or temple, all the while he sits in it, partake of the root and fatness of the Olive-tree? (Of Christ its former Vine, of Christ its former Head?) Or doth it not rather suck in, and partake of, the venom and poison of this new head? And how long is this new head, this false head of the church, to sit in the temple? Is it not from the very time of his getting in, till Christ, by the Spirit of his mouth, consume and scatter him; and by the brightness of his appearance and coming, utterly destroy him? ver. 8.

This is certain (as certain as ever there was a true church in the days of the apostles), that after the apostles' days there got up a false church, which the Spirit of the Lord calls the great whore (indeed she was far bigger, by multitudes of degrees, than ever the true church was). This great whore had a golden cup in her hand, wherewith she made the kings and inhabitants of the earth drunk. And she sat upon many waters; which waters are peoples, nations, multitudes, and tongues. Did ever the true church do thus? That was a little flock, gathered out of peoples, nations, multitudes, and tongues, reigning in the Spirit and power of the Lord, over them only who were thus gathered; but never sat upon whole peoples, nations, multitudes, and tongues, as this great whore hath done. Rev. 17:1-15.

Now it would be worth the inquiry what this cup is (this golden cup, which appears like gold). And what this wine is, wherewith she made the kings and inhabitants of the earth drunk. Ask her, and she will tell you: It is the cup of salvation, and her wine the wine of the kingdom, even the doctrine and discipline of holy mother-church; out of which, and without which, no man can be saved. But ask the Spirit of the Lord (or hear what the Spirit of the Lord said to the churches concerning it), and he will tell you, it is the wine of fornication, the cup of destruction, full of abominations, and filthiness of her fornication; and that she shall be so far from saving others, that she shall be destroyed and perish herself; and whoever drinks of her wine shall perish, unless he vomit it up again, and drink of the pure blood of the Lamb after it. See Rev. 17 and also chap. 18 and chap. 14:9-11.

Now one word, in the love and truth of God, to all that have separated from this church. Have ye separated fully? Have ye separated wholly? Have ye separated from her in nature and spirit? Have ye waited for the building which God alone can rear; for the church which he alone can frame? Or have ye built up another church, in the resemblance and likeness of that ye separated from? This is a weighty thing: ye must answer it to God, and stand by his judgment therein. I beseech you consider it. "What will it profit a man," saith Christ, "if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" So say I in this case: What would it profit you, if ye could make your church stand, and be approved in the sight of the whole world, if the Lord disown and disallow it, and they that are gathered into it perish by it? If it be not of God's building, if it have

not his presence, virtue, Spirit, and power in it, it cannot save. Oh, hear, hear! for the Lord will strip Babylon, and fill her with dreadful plagues and judgments; and she shall appear naked as she is, and become the scorn of every eye, and the reproach of every beholder: and that which hath been reproached, scorned, hated, and persecuted by her, the Lord will honor.

Now consider, and wait on the Lord, to know the extent of Babylon; that ye may not be found by the Spirit of the Lord (nor by his angels, which pour out his plagues upon her) within her limits. For the great whore is not Babylon only, or alone; but she is the Mother of harlots, and all her daughters are harlots also; even all that have built up churches, like her (in her spirit, with her materials) out of the leading, guidance, and power of the Spirit of truth.

OF THE CHURCH

I. Of the CHURCH in its First and Pure State, when it was clothed with the Sun, had the Moon under its Feet, and was crowned with a crown of Twelve Stars, travailing to bring forth, and brought forth the Man Child, which was to Rule all Nations with the Rod of Iron

IT pleased the Father to send his Son into the world (in his name, power, and authority), to gather out of the world; and to manifest his name to the men whom he should gather out of the world. The Jews, for all their great profession, and high esteem of themselves, were but a worldly polity, having but worldly, elementary shadows of the good things to come, and to be set up in the kingdom of the Messiah. John preached that, the kingdom was at hand; Christ said, it was come: John prepared for it; Christ brought it. He came in the Spirit, in the life, in the virtue, in the dominion of the Most High; and he gathered disciples unto him, by the word and power of the Father. And those that continued in his word, were his disciples indeed; of his gathering; such as the Father had sent the Son out to seek; even the new sort of worshippers, who should worship neither at Samaria, nor Jerusalem; nor with reference to any other outward place; but in Spirit and in truth. They should meet together in that name, wherein Christ had gathered them; and meeting so, he would be in the midst of them, and they should feel the presence, power, and authority, which belonged to his church.

Now, if any would know what kind of persons these disciples are, Christ giveth many descriptions of them. They are such as are born from above, such as are changed by the name and power which gathers them. They are Jews inward, circumcised inwardly; such as are baptized with the Holy Ghost, and with fire; squared stones, hewn by the Spirit, for the spiritual building; not old, rough, fierce, cruel, implacable, unregenerate, unholy spirits; but meek, gentle, lowly, tender, poor in spirit, merciful, peaceable in themselves, and making peace among men, renewed, and sanctified in spirit; holy in conversation, suffering (both from the heathenish, and from the worldly-professing spirit) for that power of truth and righteousness, which they profess and bear witness to. They are the salt of the earth, having that in them which seasoneth their own hearts, and which hath virtue in it to season others. They are the light of the world, having that in them which casts rays of light, conviction, and demonstration, wherever they go. They being changed into the leaven of the kingdom, become a leaven, and so a weight upon iniquity; testifying against, yea, bowing down and afflicting, that spirit, as the power of life springs in them and breaks forth through them.

Now, if the church be thus; if it be a gathering by the power into the power; by Christ, who came in the name, into the name in which he came; must not the ministry needs be much more thus? Must not they be

grown in the name, be grown in the power, who are to minister to those who are gathered into the name, who are gathered into the power? Must not they be well grown in the Spirit, if they be able ministers of the Spirit? Did not Christ, when he sent out his disciples to preach in his name, give them of his Spirit and power? And afterwards, when he was to go away, and they to succeed him, what were they to succeed him in? Were they not to succeed him in his Spirit and power? And did not he bid them wait for it, and receive it, before they went forth to preach and set up his kingdom? And was it not by this the church was gathered? And can the church be preserved by any thing beneath this? Yea, falling short of this, is it not in a degenerated and fallen estate?

After that those who had been gathered in the name, had waited as Christ directed them, for the holy Spirit and power, and after it had fallen upon them, then the glory began, then the ministry shined, then the church (or people gathered in the Spirit and power) shined; then great life was in them all, then great grace and holiness was upon them all; then faith (which springs from the Spirit and power) was fresh, then love abounded; then they minded not earthly things, but the kingdom, the life, the glory, which was come upon them in power; then Satan's kingdom fell down like lightning, and they went on (in and with the Spirit which led them) conquering the Jewish professors, and the heathenish worshippers also; none being able to resist the power and Spirit wherein they spake and ministered. Read the scriptures of the New Testament, and wait on God for the opening of the true eye in you, and these things will be manifest and plain to you therein; for the sweetness, freshness, preciousness, and beauty of that state, may abundantly be read there, by those whose eyes the Lord opens. To instance in some places.

Peter writes two general epistles, in one whereof he speaks of their having received like precious faith with them, 2 Pet. 1:1. and in the other, that they did rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. 1 Pet. 1:8. Yea, he speaks also of their being as lively stones, built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood (mark; all God's people who are gathered into the name, who are of the faith, who are in the life and power, are priests unto him), to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. 1 Pet. 2:5. Now, was it a small thing to be a priest under the law, to offer up the outward sacrifices thereof? What is it then to be a priest in the Holy Spirit and power of life?

John also writes a general epistle, wherein he divides Christians into three estates, -- children, young men, fathers, -- speaking great things and glorious of them all. He said, "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth," Paul had said, The night is far spent, and the day is at hand; but he said, the night is past, and the day is come. 1 John 2:8. And he writes to all, -- children, young men, fathers, -- as being passed from the darkness, and in the light of the day.

The little children had had their sins forgiven them for his name's sake, and had known the Father. ver. 12-13. The young men were strong, and the word of God did abide in them, and they had overcome the wicked one. ver. 14. The fathers knew him that was from the beginning, ver. 13-14. and knowing that, they knew enough; for that was it which appeared to save, and that was it which was to be preached, even that which was from the beginning, the light which was with God, the light which was in God, the light which was God, in which is no darkness at all. chap. 1:1,5.

Yea, the little children had an unction from the Holy One, and they knew all things; and John wrote not unto them as not knowing the truth, but because they knew it, chap. 2:18-21. Yea, they had received the anointing, and it did abide in them, and they needed not that any man should teach them, but as the same anointing taught them of all things; and it so taught them, as that no seducer nor antichristian deceiver could impose or prevail upon them, they keeping to it. ver. 18, 26-27.

What a glorious state was here, when the little children were thus advanced in the strength and power of life! Sure that promise was now made good indeed, "Ye shall be all taught of God," when the little children were thus taught. Yea, and they were taught to abide in him, so as they might not sin; for how could they, the anointing abiding in them, and teaching them of all things, and they being in subjection thereto; for that preserves out of sin the vessel in whom it dwells and reigns.

Sin is a transgression of the law; but they that are in the anointing, taught by the anointing, subject to the anointing, are far above the righteousness of the law, even in the righteousness of the Son; the righteousness of whose nature is far above the righteousness which the law requires of man's nature. And let men talk and imagine what they will, the sinner is not in the redemption and power of righteousness which is by Jesus Christ. For that which is born of God doth not commit sin, but the seed remaineth in him which is born of God, preserving him from the nature and spirit of the devil, and from the works which flow from that nature and spirit, chap. 3:4, &c.

Yea, they might so walk as that their hearts should not condemn them; but that they might have confidence towards God. ver. 20-21. And as Christ said to the Father, "Father, thou always hearest me;" so could they say, "Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight," ver. 22. even as Christ had said, "He that sent me is with me," &c., "for I do always those things that please him." John 8:29. Yea, these little children, having received the anointing, were able to try spirits, and had tried and overcome them (notwithstanding the subtlety and strength of all their deceits), because that light, life, Spirit, and power which dwelt within them, was greater than that which was in the world. chap. 4:1,4.

And can the less overcome the greater, the greater keeping to its strength? Nay, nay: these that are of the love, and dwell in the love, are, by the power and virtue of the love, kept out of all the snares and devices of the enmity; for the enmity cannot enter the love, nor the soul that abides in the love; but only him that departs out of it. Here is a munition of rocks, here is safety indeed; let him that hath an ear hear, and let him that hath a spiritual eye read and consider.

What should be said more of them? They were in the love which keeps the commandments, of the birth to which the victory is given, and in the faith which gives the victory. chap. 5:3-4. Yea, did they not so keep themselves, as that the wicked one could not touch them? ver. 18. How could he, when they had overcome him, and abode in that which overcame him? Satan falls like a flash of lightning before the power of truth, before the living faith; the faith which is from and stands in the power. And if the devil would fly from those that resisted him, how much more would he fly from those that had overcome him, and stood armed with that armor which is painful and dreadful to him!

Again, the apostle that writeth to the Hebrews, speaketh of their work and labor of love (which advanceth the soul apace towards the kingdom), and of their patient enduring the trials, persecutions, afflictions, and crosses, through which perfection is attained. James 1:4. Heb. 6:10. and chap. 10:32-33. Yea, he speaketh expressly concerning them, that they were come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, chap. 12:22-24. and that they had received, or were receiving, a kingdom which could not be moved. ver. 28.

There is another place in my heart to mention, which speaks great glory and a high state, in the sense of my spirit, attributing glory and dominion to Christ for his loving them, and washing them from their sins in his own blood, and making them kings and priests unto God and his Father. Rev. 1:5-6. What is he who is both a king and priest to God? Surely he is washed, surely he is clothed with the priest's raiment, surely he is in the dominion and purity of life, who reigns and offers up therein holy sacrifices to the Father.

Thus far have instances been given in reference to the general state. Now it is also in my heart to give some instances in particular churches, wherein testimony is given to the freshness of life in them, and of their precious state therein.

First, I shall instance in that church at Jerusalem: in what a beauteous glory and lustre did they spring forth! Acts 2:41, to the end. Consider the place well, and tell me, if this was not the beginning of the spiritual and heavenly Jerusalem; if the glory of it did not descend upon his new-gathered people and converts? So likewise see chap. 4:31, &c.

The church at Rome, the apostle Paul says, were beloved of God; and that their faith was spoken of throughout the whole world. Rom. 1:7-8. Now what a glorious precious state was this! For by faith is water drawn out of the wells of salvation: and how much might they draw, who abounded in faith! True faith springs from the power of life, and it brings the power of life into the soul in which it springs, according to the degree and growth of it. He that is beloved of God, and abounds in faith towards him, what glory, what life, what virtue, what power can he want?

The same apostle, writing to the church at Philippi, saith, he did thank God, upon every remembrance of them: making request for them with joy always, in every prayer of his for them all, for their fellowship in the gospel (which is power and life to them that have fellowship therein) from the first day until now. Phil. 1:3-5. And he calls them dearly beloved and longed for, his joy and crown. chap. 4:1.

So writing to the saints and faithful brethren at Colossus, he gives thanks for their faith, and their love to all the saints, chap. 1:3-4. And saith further concerning them, that the word of the truth of the gospel had brought forth fruit in them, since the day they heard and knew the grace of God, in truth. ver. 5-6. To what then were they grown? Surely very far into the mystery of life in Christ; in whom they had been circumcised and baptized, and were complete, abiding in him, and drinking in of the life, virtue, and power which floweth from him.

Likewise he writes to the church of the Thessalonians, as being in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thess. 1:1. Ah! how excellent and glorious was the state and condition of Christ, to be in the Father! How glorious is the state of that church, which is both in Christ and in the Father! He speaks also of their work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope. ver. 3. Yea, he writes to them again as such. 2 Thess. 1:1. Surely they did abide in the vine; they did dwell in the name and power into which they were gathered; and so did feel the dews from above, and the springs from beneath; so that their faith did grow exceedingly, and their love abound; and the apostles did find cause of glorying in them, in the churches of God, for their patience and faith in all their persecutions and tribulations that they endured. ver. 3-4.

Writing also to the Ephesians, he giveth a high expression of the goodness of God to his people in those days, and of the blessedness of their estate, in that God had blessed them with all spiritual blessings, in heavenly places in Christ, chap. 1:3. That is hard to be understood; yet this may be sensibly said: in the heavenly places in Christ, the spiritual blessings are received; and they that are raised together with him, and live in and with him, do also sit with him in the heavenly places in him, even in the mansions which he

hath prepared, and is preparing; for he raiseth the soul higher and higher, from glory to glory, at his pleasure. The apostle also saith that they were fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and were built together in Christ, for a habitation of God, through the Spirit. chap. 2:19,22.

So the church of Smyrna; Christ owneth her works, and tribulations, and poverty, and pronounceth her rich. Rev. 2:8. Christ knoweth how to value things.

And the church of Philadelphia was in a very precious state indeed; Christ owning her works, and having set before her an open door, which no man could shut; and promising to make those who made a profession of the truth (of being Jews) but were not in it, to come and worship before her feet, and to know that he had loved her; as also that he would keep her in the hour of temptation, because she had kept the word of his patience. Rev. 3:8. &c. Thus it is manifest that the church in general, and many churches in particular, was once in a pure, fresh, living, powerful, glorious state.

II. Of the Church in its declining and falling Estate

BUT all the churches were not thus; nor did those who were thus always continue thus: but there was a declining and falling from this glorious estate by degrees, even from the light, brightness, purity, and power of the day, into the darkness and corruption of the night again.

And thus the apostasy came in; to wit, by not keeping to the anointing, by not abiding in that Spirit, life, and power whereinto they were gathered; by not keeping singly to the voice of the Shepherd. For then another ear got up in them, and that itched after new and strange things; not being contented with the simplicity of truth which is in Christ, with the plain heavenly bread. For truth is a naked simple thing to look at; not answering man's wisdom at first, nor ever afterwards: but in the cross to that, its power is felt, and its beauty seen. But if the wisdom of man get up from under the cross, if it be not still kept down by that, it will presently be judging the wisdom of God, and the plain way of truth, foolishness, and be listening after somewhat else.

Thus the church of Corinth, who did abound in spiritual gifts, yet were apt to run out, and be lifted up above their measures, and think they reigned as kings, without (if not beyond) the apostles; and so came into danger of hearkening to false spirits and ministers of unrighteousness. 1 Cor. 4:8, &c. 2 Cor. 10:11.

And the churches of Galatia, which began well, and very zealously, even so as they could have plucked out their eyes for Paul's sake; yet were afterwards so far bewitched and prevailed upon, that the apostle professed he stood in doubt of them, and was afraid lest he had bestowed upon them labor in vain. Gal. 4:11,20.

When the enemy could not prevail in open battle, by manifest afflictions, oppositions, persecutions, &c., then he tries by deceit, getting into the form, to see what he can do there, how he can please and satisfy men therewith, and so work them from that power which redeems. And those that do not eye the power, keep to the power, walk in the power, and judge by the power, to be sure he catcheth this way. "The false prophets," saith Christ, "which come in sheep's clothing," (with the good words, as ministers of Righteousness; but not with the living, powerful fruits of righteousness) come with so subtle an appearance, as, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect: but God keepeth that eye in his elect open, which cannot be deceived; but all else are. They that depart from the power, they that err from the faith, they that are in the highmindedness and conceitedness, out of the fear, -- they easily hearken to seducing spirits, and drink of their poison. And Peter plainly foresaw that these would be many. 2 Pet.

2:1-2.

See also what complaint Paul makes to Timothy, about the declining of many from the truth; he exhorts him to "keep faith and a good conscience; which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck; of whom is Hymeneus and Alexander." 1 Tim. 1:19-20.

Again, he speaks of some that were "already turned aside after Satan." chap. 5:15. And of some that had "erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." chap. 6:10. Again: "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me." 2 Tim. 1:15. Likewise he speaks of some, who "would increase unto more ungodliness," and whose word "will eat as doth a canker," chap. 2:16-17. and that "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." chap. 3:13. Yea, "the time will come," saith he, "when they will not endure sound doctrine." chap. 4:3. "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved the present world." ver. 10. "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works." ver. 14. "At my first answer, no man stood with me, but all men forsook me." ver. 16. Surely love was grown very cold, iniquity likely to abound, and the apostasy from the truth to increase.

And among the churches of Asia, how many of them were warping! Ephesus, though she had much good remaining in her, yet she had left her first love, and was fallen from her first state and works, Rev. 2:4-5. Pergamos also had them which held the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing Christ hated. ver. 15. Thyatira, she likewise suffered the woman Jezebel, which called herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce God's servants. ver. 20. (Now, this she ought not to have done, the churches having the Spirit, the holy anointing, to try spirits and prophets by; yea, to try apostles; which will faithfully discover which are truly such, and which are not, as ver. 2). Sardis had a name that she lived, but was generally dead; there being but a few names left in Sardis which had not defiled their garments. chap. 3:1,4. Laodicea was lukewarm; neither cold nor hot; in the profession, in the form and appearance of truth; but without zeal, without life, without power. ver. 15. Now being in this state (having the form and appearance of all), she judged herself rich, and increased with goods, and to have need of nothing. ver. 17. This indeed is a pleasant state in man's eye, but very loathsome to God, ver. 16. This church seemed to have all, but indeed had lost all, and wanted the gold, the raiment and the eye-salve; and so was wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. ver. 17-18.

In this declining state some fell from the doctrine of truth, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils. 1 Tim. 4:1. Some from the fellowship and worship; it being the manner of some to forsake the assembling themselves together, Heb. 10:25, which the church, when first gathered, was very diligent in. Acts 2:42,46. Some held the form of knowledge and profession, but fell from the life and power. 2 Tim. 3:5. Yea, many ways did the wolfish, false spirits drive and scatter from the flock, as they could get entrance into men's minds.

Obj. But how could the church decline thus in the apostles' days; the Spirit of God being so powerful in the apostles, and being also so generally then bestowed upon believers? as Gal. 4:6.

Ans. It is true, they had great advantages of standing, by reason of the presence and power of the spirit with them. But yet withal, the Spirit of the Lord is tender, jealous, and might be grieved and provoked by neglects (his warnings being slighted, and his motions quenched), and so might draw back from such, as either received not the truth in the love of it, or grew cold and careless afterwards; and then the spirit of darkness and deceit thereby had advantage to blind them, gain upon them, and enter into that part of

them, which the Spirit of the Lord had before recovered and possessed. Now, the enemy, having got entrance, prevails and captivates more and more, unless the Lord, in tender love and mercy, visit it again, lifting up a standard for the soul, and so drawing it back by degrees into his light and power again.

Besides, it is easy to decline (easy for any soul, easy for any church); but there is need of much care, fear, faith, obedience, watchfulness to the Lord, and against the enemy, &c., to preserve and keep the estate of a heart, or the estate of a church, chaste and pure. "Ye are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation." Can any thing preserve a soul or church, but God's power? And doth God preserve any soul or church, but in the way he hath appointed? A church is like a garden, needs digging, dressing, watering, sun-shine, to cause it to thrive and flourish. Do not weeds easily spring up in a garden? yea, ranker weeds than in common ground; which spread apace and over-run it faster, if it be not looked to and kept by the gardener? Read the figure, and understand. Are not spiritual weeds as corrupt and spreading as the outward? Are they not like leaven; have they not a poisonous, infecting nature in them? "Know ye not," saith the apostle, "that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" 1 Cor. 5:6. If but one root of bitterness spring up in a church, it may defile many, and trouble the whole. Heb. 12:15. And as one corrupted person, so also one corrupted church, may infect and poison many more. Yea, was it not thus in the apostasy? When it once got head, did it not break in and overflow apace?

III. Of the declined and fallen State of the Church

WHEN antichrist (or that spirit which wrought against that spiritual appearance of Christ, and power of his truth) was revealed, and got into the temple, appearing and being acknowledged there as God, then, without controversy, was the declined state. He had been a long while working under-ground by his agents and ministers, appearing as ministers of righteousness, in a form thereof, out of and against the power; but the power (in the true apostles and ministers) stood in his way, and wrought against him, so as he could not for a long time get up. Yet he prevailed more and more in the corrupt part in men, till at length he drew many of the very stars from heaven after him; and then fighting an open battle, gets rid of the true church, vomits out a flood after her, as if she were an harlot, and not worthy the name of Christ's spouse, and so gets into the temple, and is owned there (as Christ) in the stead of Christ.

Object. Will any man own antichrist, worship antichrist, and acknowledge antichrist (instead of Christ) to be God.

Ans. Read 2 Thess. 2:4. and see if it be not so. See if he do not get into the temple, and sit ruling and governing in the temple (that which was once so, and ought still to be so), till the very coming and appearing of Christ in his Spirit and brightness. ver. 8.

Quest. But how could this possibly ever be, or how can it be?

Ans. He doth not directly get up, nor show himself directly as he is; but in a mystery of deceit. He doth not appear as antichrist, crying up all manner of filthiness, abomination, and contrariety to Christ, in direct words, but as Christ, preaching righteousness, crying up scriptures, ordinances, church-ministry, holiness, &c. Yet, for all these words, and fair pretences, he is not the true spirit, but the false, the antichristian; and those that receive him, or bow to him in any of these, they bow not to Christ, but to him. He hath a mark, he hath a name, he hath a worship, he hath a church, he hath a ministry, he hath laws and ordinances of worship; which whosoever receives, worships not the Lord Jesus Christ, but that spirit which, under a disguise, thus appeareth, which hath horns as it were of a lamb, or like a lamb; but not the Lamb's horns, nor the Lamb's nature, nor the Lamb's Spirit, nor the Lamb's meekness; but the old nature of the dragon,

who gives him both subtlety and power.

Now mark: when Christ brought forth his church, it was a pure, holy, spiritual building, built up of renewed spirits; such as were new-born, such as were washed, such as were sanctified, such as were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. Christ's church was Zion, even the holy seed, built upon the holy hill of God, into a holy city or temple. But antichrist's church is Babylon, which hath the wisdom and order of man in it, such as man's eye judgeth right, but is foolishness and confusion in the eye of God. Now, the Lord hath most terrible plagues to pour out upon this antichrist, and upon his Babylon; yea, upon every one that hath his mark or name, or that which amounts to his name, though it be not directly so called. Therefore, oh, fear the Lord God! and ye that love the peace of your souls, pray to be delivered from that which his wrath is to; for the dregs of the cup of trembling are to be poured out on antichrist inward and outward, and on Babylon inward and outward. Let him that readeth understand the tender warnings, which are given forth in the tender nature and Spirit of the Lord; for the day of mercy spreads apace, and the night of anguish and tribulation hastens.

The true church of Christ was gathered by his Spirit into his name and power, and was a spiritual building, or building of spirits therein; wherein the Spirit of the Lord was as present spiritually, as ever he appeared in the outward temple or ark outwardly. And the ministers of the New Testament were made by the Spirit, and sent forth by the Spirit, and in the power. "Stephen," though but a deacon, "was full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost;" and if any man taught in the church, he was to "speak as an oracle of God." Flesh is to be silent there, and only the Spirit's voice to be heard in the spiritual building. But now, in the apostasy, the ministers there, are as wells without water, clouds without rain, who have only the show of the thing after the flesh, but not the truth of the thing after the Spirit; and so being not in the thing, nor in the Spirit, they despise the dominion, and speak evil of the dignities which are of the Spirit, and for advantage' sake cry up the dominions and dignities which are of the earth.

In the apostles' days, the ministers of the church were not of man, nor set over the flock by man; but made by God, and set over the flock as overseers by him. Acts 20:28. For the same Lord who gave apostles, prophets, and evangelists, gave also pastors and teachers. Ephes. 4:11. And though the hands of the presbytery were laid on those that were made ministers; yet that was not done suddenly, or lightly, but by a guidance of God's Spirit; and there went a gift and power of the Spirit along with it, according as Paul said to Timothy: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." 1 Tim. 4:14. But now, in the declined, fallen estate, there is no such thing; but an empty form, a form of worship, a form of godliness, a form of ministry, a form of doctrine, a form of discipline; without the life, without the Spirit, without the power, from which the true form came, and whereby alone it could be preserved.

This declined state hath been a very sink of iniquity, wherein the Christian love hath not only grown cold, but hath been quite dead, and plucked up by the very roots; yea, wherein all that filthiness which was sprouting forth and getting up in the declining state hath reigned in power, defiling the very name of Christianity, oppressing the good seed, and corrupting the earth. Read 2 Tim. 3:2, &c., and see what a generation of Christian professors were to grow up (and did grow up) in the time of the apostasy.

IV. Of the State of the Church in its Recovery; or what State the Church shall be in after it is recovered out of the Apostasy.

THE state of the church after the apostasy, is to be like the state it was in before the apostasy, for purity, power, brightness, and glory, &c; yea, shall it not be more glorious, after its coming through all this darkness, and shining over it, than it was before? The New Jerusalem is to come down from God out of heaven; the bride is to be clothed and adorned as the Lamb's wife, meet for the delight of her husband. The power and Spirit of the Lord, which cleanseth away all this rubbish, will make his truth shine, his church shine, his suffering lambs, that come out of the great tribulation, shine more than ever before. The Lord God Omnipotent will take his great power unto him to reign, and will reign according to his power in the hearts of his children, and over the earth. He will break that which stands in his way with a rod of iron; and he will embrace and exalt that which boweth to and kisseth the sceptre of his Son, who is to appear upon the holy hill of Zion: and the law is to go forth out of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem; the power whereof shall break down the power of iniquity, and bring up the suffering seed into the dominion and glory of life.

In this restored state antichrist shall be worshipped no more, nor the beast, nor the dragon, who gave his power to the beast; but the Lord God shall be worshipped and magnified over all. It shall be said no more, Who can make war with the beast? after the Lamb hath overcome him; but, Who is like to thee, O Lord, O King of saints! who hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned, and dost reign; who hast brought down this lofty city, and trod it under the feet of the poor, and made the steps of the needy to pass over it; who hast made it an heap, (the city fenced by all the might, wisdom, and power of man), a ruinous heap, a place no more for thy dear children to be captived in and oppressed; but a habitation of dragons, and a cage of every unclean and noisome bird for ever? -- Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy; for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest. Rev. 15:4. Thou hast judged down Babylon, which was exalted; thou hast pitied Zion, which lay in the dust for many ages and generations, and hast raised up thine holy building again, and wilt give to thy children to be clothed, and to walk before thee in pure white linen (which is the righteous nature and Spirit of thy son) for evermore; and the darkness shall never come over them again, but the beast, dragon, and false prophet shall be cast into, and bound down in, the lake; and the springs of life shall open, and whosoever will may come freely, and drink of the water of life. And the people in heaven shall say, "Hallelujah! salvation, and glory, and honor, and power unto the Lord our God."

And the voice of great multitudes, and the voice of many waters, and the voice of mighty thunders, shall say, "Hallelujah!" and shall be glad, and rejoice, and shall give honor to the Lord, for the bride's marriage with the Lamb, and for her rich adorning for her bridegroom. Yea, the earth shall rejoice, and the multitudes of the isles be glad. Why so? Because the Lord reigns, who is tender even of the earth, and hates the oppressing not only of his seed, but also of his creatures: for he will reign and judge in righteousness, and tenderness, and much mercy to all that is of him; and none shall feel his judgment and severity, but that which is contrary to him, and joineth to his enemy. For the Lord will make war with that spirit, which is contrary to his life and nature, for ever and ever. And he that joineth to that spirit, shall find woe, misery, and tribulation (tribulation and anguish shall light upon every soul that continues in the evil doing); but he that comes from under that spirit by the leadings of God's Spirit, bowing to and kissing the Son, shall taste of the Father's love to the Son, and partake of the mercy, peace, and reconciliation which is treasured up in him. Amen.

THE WAY OF SALVATION IN THE COVENANT OF LIFE OPENED

And some stumbling-blocks removed out of the way of the Simple-hearted

THERE are many whom the Lord hath raised up, in this day of the manifestation of his power, and of his everlasting love, to bear witness to his truth; among whom I also (who was an outcast, and miserable beyond expression) have obtained mercy to partake of the virtue, life, and power of his precious truth, which redeems from the bondage of sin and iniquity; and am also many times moved by the Lord to testify of that which he hath made known unto me, and given me to experience.

This brief touch sprang in me by way of preface. Now to the thing itself.

The Father, in whom is the whole virtue and power of redemption, sent his Son to gather the scattered and lost sheep of the house of Israel; and not only so, but he gave him also for a light to the Gentiles, that he might be his salvation to the ends of the earth; and sending him, he sent his Spirit and power with him: for that which is begotten by the Father is not able to do the work, unless anointed and assisted by the Father: therefore the Father, who sent him to preach the gospel, anointed him, and filled him with his Spirit, that he might preach the gospel according to that scripture, Isai. 61:1-3: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of our Lord, and to comfort all that mourn," &c.

Quest. But how came these meek, these broken-hearted, these captives, these bound in prison, these mourners, to meet with the redemption and blessings which he is anointed to preach to them? Or which way do they come to receive and partake of them from him?

Ans. In faith. This all his outward healings did signify, being thus dispensed. ("If thou wilt believe, thou shalt see the glory of God. Thy faith hath made thee whole. O woman! great is thy faith! be it unto thee according to thy faith.") And thus all his inward healings are bestowed upon and received by the soul; to wit, in the faith.

Quest. But how came they to have faith? Or how cometh any man to have faith in the redeeming power?

Ans. It is bestowed upon them by God, in the sense which is from him. His Word goeth forth from his mouth; there is a witness of him in the heart, towards which it reacheth. Now, it reaching to the witness, immediately it brings into a sense, and in that sense begets faith; and being mixed with this faith (which is of its own begetting) in them that hear it, begins the work of life and redemption in that heart where it is not yet begun, or carries it on in that heart wherein it is already begun. Thus faith hath a work, a work from the beginning of the heart's turning to God even to the end; which he that abides in the faith till the end, finds accomplished.

Obj. But this faith is bestowed on some few whom God hath elected, not on all men.

Ans. God hath sent his gospel to be preached to every creature, and his Word is able to reach the witness, and work sense in every creature; and in whomsoever there is a sense wrought, they listening to God in that sense, he works faith in them; and waiting on the Word, hearkening of the Word, and staying their minds there through on the Lord, he will speak peace to them, and keep them in peace, daily removing them more and more out of the reach and power of that which troubleth them.

Quest. Doth the new covenant lay all upon God, and require nothing of the creature? Or is there something required by God of the creature, in and by virtue of the new covenant?

Ans. Consider well; Doth not God require of the creature in the new covenant what he gives in the new covenant? Doth he not require the faith, and the exercising of that faith, which he himself works and gives in the sense, from the power and demonstration of his truth, to the soul? The new covenant requires more of the creature than ever the old did; but it requires them not of the creatures as weak in the fall, but as taught (strengthened and enabled) to walk with God in and by virtue of the covenant. Yea, all manner of holiness, and righteousness of heart, life, and conversation is required in and by the new covenant: for as the Lord works out of all therein in the creature, so the creature works out all thereby in the Lord, according to that known scripture, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." And as the creature is able to do nothing that is good of itself; so being grown up into the life and ability, which is of God, it is able to do all things through Christ that strengtheneth it.

Quest. But why is it said that Christ was anointed to preach the gospel to the poor, the meek, the broken-hearted, the captives, the bound in prison, the mourners (for want of righteousness, life, and peace)? Did not God give his Son in love to all? Was he not made a ransom and propitiation for all? Yea, was he not anointed to preach the gospel to all? How then comes it here to be thus limited and restrained to some?

Ans. It is true, God had a general respect to mankind, in the gift and anointing of his Son: but yet there are some in a better capacity to receive; already in the sense of the want of him, and panting and longing after him. Yea, there are some, who are grievously sick in soul, and deeply wounded in spirit; the sadness and misery of whose condition cries aloud for the help of the physician. Now the eye and heart of the Lord is more especially towards these; and so he bids his prophets be instructing and comforting these, concerning the salvation, the healing, the oil of gladness, the Messiah to come; and when he comes, he sends him up and down to seek out these, to keep company with these, to help and relieve these; having given him the tongue of the learned, to speak a word in season to these weary, distressed ones. These are not like the common, rough, unhewn, knotty, rugged earth; but like earth prepared for the seed, and so easily and naturally receive it. The gospel is preached to others at a distance; which, it is true, they may have, if they will hearken to it, and wait for it, and part with what must first be parted with; but they have a great way to travel thither. But these are near the kingdom; these are near that which opens, and lets in life; these are quickly reached to, melted, and brought into the sense, in which with joy they receive the faith; and with the faith the power; which brings righteousness and salvation to their souls. Though also the enemy is exceeding busy, to darken, disturb, and bow down these; that he might still keep them in the doubts, in the fears, in the chains, in the fetters, in the prison-house, from the liberty and healing which the word of the anointing brings.

Now mind. God is real towards all; he desires the life and salvation of all; not the destruction of any one soul that ever he created: it is unnatural to him. And the way that he holds forth, he stands ready to meet any man in. Whom is it that he doth not draw? And who is it that may not come in the drawing? Is not his word a hammer? And whom can it not break? Is it not fire? And whose corruption can it not burn up? Is it not water, wine, and blood? And whom cannot it wash and nourish? Therefore, let no man think to lay the blame upon God, because of his perishing; for he will be deceived therein: and God will prove true, who saith, Man's destruction is of himself; and every man a liar, who layeth any blame on him, for not giving him further assistance with his power. Neither let him blame God for hardening him; for God hardeneth no man, but him who first refuseth and grieveth the power and love which would melt and soften him. It is true; we are the clay, and God the potter: and may not the potter make what vessels he will of his clay?

This parable came from the Spirit of the Lord to Israel of old: but what use did the Lord make of it? Did he say to them: Do what ye will; some of you I will cast off, and others of you I will show mercy to; for I have determined so? Nay, not so: but I have this power over you; therefore do not provoke me. [Read Jer. 18.] Was not God exceeding tender to the outward people, in that outward covenant? Did he ever give them up to pain and sufferings, without great provocations on their parts? "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. Wherefore doth a living man complain; a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord." And the Spirit of the Lord never failed to do what was his part, towards the turning them from iniquity, towards the Lord, in that covenant.

And when they did believe, consent, and obey, and did eat the good of the land, was it not pleasant and delightful to him? And when they provoked him to jealousy, and drew down judgments upon their heads, was it not irksome and painful to him? [Read Deut. 5:29. Isa. 5. Ezek. 20. Jer. 44:4 and chap. 31:20. Isa. 63:7. to ver. 15.] And will God fail to do his part towards any man for the salvation of his soul, which is so precious, of so great concern, and the loss whereof he knoweth to be so invaluable? No, no; the Spirit of God suffers, in every man upon the face of the earth, that sins against him; and is grieved and wounded by their unjust and unrighteous conversations, from day to day, against the testimony of somewhat of him in them, which is contrary thereto. Now this is of a precious nature; and being so despised and rejected by men, can it be wondered that God doth not proceed to make it more manifest, and to work more in men by it? Nay, may it not rather be wondered that God doth continue to manifest it so much? What man could endure to behold a thing so precious in his eyes (as this is in God's) so continually abused by, and to suffer so much from, that which is so far beneath it, as God daily doth? Therefore, if there come a day of reckoning for this, with all men upon the face of the earth (for who hath not had a talent from God; even of the pure eternal light in him, witnessing in his heart and conscience against the darkness?), there will be no cause of wondering at it. And is not this light and Spirit (which shines in all men's darkness in some measure, stirring and witnessing against it, and endeavoring to persuade and draw the mind from it) the very same, in nature and kind, with the light and Spirit of the Father, which appeared in that person of Christ? And, if hearkened unto, and followed, would it not bring into union and fellowship with him, and into a partaking of the benefit of all he did in that body? Yea, would not the Spirit reveal whatever is necessary to be known, to that soul which receives and follows it? Oh, what hath God done (in his rich and tender mercy towards all) for mankind! And how clear will he be, when he opens and manifests the righteousness of his judgment! He will not clear himself after this manner; that he hath disposed of them to destruction, according to the power and prerogative of his will; but that they have run headlong into destruction, against the light and leadings of his will and power; to which it is natural to save, but not to destroy. That is the act which is proper to another nature and spirit, but strange to his.

Object. But could not God save any if he would? Who can resist his will or his power? Who can stop or resist him in the work of redemption, or destruction?

Ans. God can so put forth his will and power, as none can resist. Yea, the will and power of God, which offereth to save, and standeth ready to save, will bring destruction upon all that so dally with it, as to neglect and let pass the day of their visitation: and thus none can resist his will, or his power. But in the way wherein he appeareth, and hath chosen to work out life and salvation, Satan, and man's corrupt heart and mind, may and do often resist the will and power of the Lord. Now, that which resisteth is not of God, but against him; yet it is the patience of the Lord, to suffer it. I find drawings in my heart from God, or I durst not open these things. For I dare not hold out to men what the Lord hath given me to know and experience, but only what he giveth and chooseth for me to hold out: and that will be life to them that

receive it. But if I should hold out any thing of myself, that would not reach to life, but only feed the wrong part in men; and so help to build up that, which God will again throw down, before he saves that soul which is built up with the knowledge of things after this manner.

There is somewhat springs up in my heart, which may perhaps open this thing further to the minds of some.

Cain was the first wicked man that we read of; and how tender was God towards him! even him that sacrificed not after the Spirit, but after the flesh, and slew his brother Abel. Now, can any man lay Cain's wickedness either upon the will, or upon the decree and counsel of God? Might he not have done well? Might he not have sacrificed to God in the faith, as well as his brother Abel? And if he had done well, and offered in the faith, had he not found forgiveness and acceptance with the Lord? God accepteth no man's person: God rejecteth no man's person; but there is a seed he hath chosen; and to gather man into this seed, is his delight and work; as it is the delight, nature, and work of another spirit to scatter from this seed.

Now, in this seed he doth accept, and not out of it. Yea, in this seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed, as they are gathered into and abide in it. And this seed is a word nigh in the mouth and heart, both of Jew and Gentile; which, as it is hearkened to, writes the law of the spirit of life in the heart, either of Jew or Gentile. And as they become sons, so the Spirit of the Father is poured out upon them; even the Spirit of adoption, which crieth Abba, Father, either in Jew or Gentile. And this is the gospel of the kingdom, which is preached more sparingly, or abundantly, by the mouth of the seed, as the Lord pleaseth.

For God's power, wisdom, mercy, love, goodness, patience, long-suffering, &c. is his own; and he may sow of it, or exercise it, more sparingly or abundantly, as he pleaseth. Yea, he doth exercise it more abundantly towards the vessels of mercy; so that the cause of their salvation doth not so much arise from their embracing of mercy, as from God's exercising of it. He visiteth nations as he pleaseth, and persons in nations as he pleaseth; and who may say unto him, What dost thou? Why art thou so good and kind here? or, Why art thou so sharp and severe there? But still in the way, and according to the path, of the covenant, doth the Lord walk, in and towards all: and his mercy endureth for ever towards the seed of the righteous, and his justice and indignation for ever towards the seed of the evil-doer: and man (simply considered) is not either of these; but as he is gathered into, and brought forth in, the root and spirit of either of these. Now, every man hath a day for the life of his soul; and power and mercy is near him, to help him to travel from death to life. Happy is he who is taught of God to make use of it.

And let not men puzzle themselves about the mystery of election and reprobation; which cannot be understood by such as are out of the thing wherein it is made manifest. Only thus at present: Pharaoh and Israel, Esau and Jacob, Ishmael and Isaac, &c. were parables, signifying somewhat inward. What was Pharaoh? Was he not the oppressor of God's Israel? What was Esau? Was he not the first birth, which sold the birth-right and inheritance? What was Ishmael? Was he not the birth after the flesh? These are rejected, and cast off by God for ever; and the spiritual Israel, the spiritual Jacob, the spiritual Isaac, are accepted.

Shall I speak out this thing yet more plain? Why thus then: it is not the creature which is rejected by its Maker; but somewhat in the creature, and the creature in that. Nor is it the creature (simply) which is elected; but somewhat in the creature, and the creature in that. And as any man comes into that, the

election is begun in him: and as any man abides in that, he abides in the election: and as that is made sure to any man, his calling and election are made sure to him. But as any man departs from that, he departs from the election into the reprobation: and going on in that into the full impenitency and hardness, he will for ever miss of the election; and the reprobation, and sealing up to condemnation, will be made sure to him. For God is no respecter of persons; but everywhere, he that receiveth his holy seed, and therein worketh righteousness, is accepted of him. And he that receiveth the wicked seed, and therein worketh wickedness and unrighteousness, is with it rejected.

Obj. But (may the honest heart say) this may be truth for aught I know; but indeed I did not apprehend things to be so: for I thought man and his works had been wholly excluded by the covenant of grace; but this seems to take both him and them in upon a consideration.

Ans. Man is wholly excluded the covenant of grace, as in himself; as he stands in himself, and in his own ability, out of the newness of life and ability which is of the new covenant. But he is not excluded as he is renewed, and receiveth a new being, life, virtue, and ability, in the new covenant. But here much is required of him; and whatever he thus doth is owned, acknowledged, and accepted by God. Here the true Jew hath praise of God. He is commended for his faith, and for his obedience in the faith: for his loving the Lord his God with all his heart, and his neighbor as himself: for his washing his garments in the blood of the Lamb, and keeping them clean in the same blood, while others defile theirs: for his merciful nature and actions to Christ in his members, while others are rough and cruel: for his watching against snares and temptations, while others are running into them: for his crucifying that in himself, which others feed in themselves: yea, for his denying and turning from all ungodliness and worldly lusts, even of the flesh, eyes, and pride of life; all which are not of the Father (whom he is born of and seeks after), but of the spirit of the world, which the earthly-minded man is born of, and seeks to please. So that (mark) though man is excluded in his corrupt nature and state, yet not the new man, not man in the regeneration. But man must be regenerated; and thus man must enter into the covenant of life; and thus man must abide and be found in the covenant of life, in the nature, in the righteousness, in the holiness, in the power thereof, if ever God own him.

Obj. But this seems to lay difference on man's act, and not wholly on the grace of God. For the grace, in itself, is equally powerful towards all; but it is my receiving of it, which maketh it effectual unto me; which others not receiving, it is not so to them.

Ans. The grace, in itself, is of its own nature everywhere. This is true. And that it hath power in it everywhere, and that this power is over and above sin; this is true also. But yet there is a greater or lesser proportion of it given, according to the pleasure and good-will of the giver: and according to the measure of it (which is freely given), and the soul's growth therein, so is the power of it manifested in the heart.

Now, the difference in every man is by the grace: not of himself; for he can do nothing that is good, as of himself; but only by the grace, which is alone able to work that which is good in him, and to cause him to work in it. Yet thus it is: as the grace reacheth to him, draweth him, quickening and causing him, in the virtue, life, and obedience of the grace, to answer the grace; so doth the work thereof go on in him. And there is matter of condemnation to him who doth not answer the grace; and there is matter of justification and praise to him who doth answer the grace. Yet this whole ability arising not from himself, but from the grace, the acknowledgment of what is effected thereby doth of right and due belong to the grace. And therefore they who are justified, sanctified, and crowned by the grace, do of right and due cast their crowns at the feet of the Lamb, at the throne of grace; giving honor and glory to him who is worthy, and to

his grace which hath wrought all in them.

Now, if any man would know this thing groundedly and certainly, let him not run into disputes of the mind and brain, but come to heart experience. Hast thou ever found the work of God's grace in thy heart? Hast thou found thy heart, at any time, believe and obey, in and through the strength of the grace? Hast thou found thy heart, at another time, negligent of or rebellious against the grace? When thou were rebellious, wert not thou condemned, and that justly too? When thou didst believe and obey, to whom did the honor thereof belong? to thee, or to the grace? Canst thou answer this? Why, as it is in thyself, between thee when obeying and disobeying, the same is the state of the case between godly and wicked men. There was a difference between thee whe

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