

**MEDITATIONS
ON THE
MINISTRY
OF THE
GOSPEL**

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**MEDITATIONS ON MATTERS OF
CHRISTIAN FAITH AND EXPERIENCE**

MEDITATIONS ON THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL

I.

Among the various subjects of divine truth which at different times have come before our mind, and more or less occupied our thoughts, that of the ministry has not been the least frequent or the least important. As we have ourselves been engaged in it for more than thirty years, and have thus known something experimentally of its cares and anxieties as well as of its blessings and benefits, we may hope, with the Lord's help and blessing, to examine the subject not only as presented to our view in the Scriptures of truth, but be able to bring some lengthened experience to bear upon its consideration, and thus handle it not as a mere question of doctrine or speculation, but as a matter of personal interest and practical knowledge and possession. We have felt inclined, therefore, to bring the subject before our readers as a part of those Meditations which we have ventured, in the strength of the Lord, for some little time past, to cast as our mite into his treasury.

It is indeed a most difficult and delicate subject rightly to handle, and a feeling sense of this difficulty and of our own inability to treat it with that clearness and fulness, that faithfulness and decision, that authority and power, which it demands and deserves, would have almost deterred us even now from making the attempt, had we not hoped to experience the same gracious help from the Lord in unfolding it which, we trust, has been given to us upon the other branches of divine truth which we have thus far brought before our readers, and the same kind consideration and patient indulgence from them. We shall, therefore, venture forthwith to launch our little bark, freighted with many cares as well as many treasures, and spread our sail to waft it over a not altogether unknown sea; and though we may meet storms and cross currents, side winds and threatening gales by the way, may the gracious Lord guide us with his eye and direct us by his word. May our eye be single to his glory and his people's good; may the Scriptures be our chart, and a personal, experimental knowledge of the truth our compass; may no seductive breezes or a desire to sail in smoother waters divert us from our course; and, above all, may the blessed Spirit grant a favourable gale, that we may reach the

desired haven—the approbation of God in our own conscience, and a place for his truth in the consciences of our gracious readers.

In handling any subject, especially when it is both long and difficult, some degree of order seems requisite. Order is to a subject what it is to our books, letters, papers, and even the commonest implements of the factory or the forge and the furniture of the parlour or the kitchen, not to say the accounts of the merchant or the goods of the tradesman. "Order," says the poet, "is heaven's first law;" and a higher authority than he, viewing with enlightened eye the order of God as displayed in creation, and speaking with inspired tongue, has declared: "Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth; they continue this day according to thine ordinances; for all are thy servants." (Psa. 119:90, 91.)

But though we intend to lay down, and hope to preserve, some such orderly arrangement of our subject as may preserve us from confusion and repetition, yet we do not mean thereby to tie ourselves rigorously down to a certain fixed path. A marked-out, definite road is necessary to reach safely and comfortably the end of a journey; but it need not be as straight and as level as a railway, still less so hard and so confined—the way so rigid, the transit so rapid. It may wind through a wood, or steal through shady hedges where the flowers bloom and the birds sing; it may stretch over the breezy heath where the lark soars and the sheep-bell tinkles, and may yield quiet resting-places during sun or shower, or even for a night's abode, without hurrying us on, amid clouds of steam and smoke, to our destination. Pardon this little sportive spurt. It may have a deeper meaning than you may attach to it; it may be an emblem of our journeying together, and the incidents of the way in our present subject of meditation. Our gracious Lord has not disdained such figurative language in the invitation given to his beloved bride: "Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth; there will I give thee my loves." (Song Sol. 7:11, 12.)

We shall, therefore, hope to consider our subject under these five points of view.

I. The *foundation* of the ministry of the gospel.

II. Its *nature and character*.

III. The *ends* for which it was established.

IV. The promised *blessings* which accompany it.

V. Its *trials and exercises*, with its *comforts and encouragements*.

Before, however, we launch our ship, it may be as well to dispose of an objection which may present itself to some of our readers—the comparative *narrowness* of the question. They may say, "Such a subject as you now propose to handle is limited to a few, comparatively, of the Lord's people. None are interested in it but ministers, who, however highly we may esteem them in love for their work's sake, form but a small part of your readers. Why do you not take some subject of a wider range, in which we shall all feel a general interest?" With your leave, kind objector, the matter does not stand exactly as you have put it. The subject is of wider interest than may at first sight appear. It is true that the ministers of experimental truth are few, and, sad to say, getting every day fewer and fewer, and their hearers many. But have not their hearers an equal if not a greater interest in the ministry than the ministers themselves? If you were a pauper, and depended on alms for a supply of bread, would the nature, quality, and quantity of the loaves which were given be of no interest to you? Who would have the greater interest in the bread distribution—the bread distributor or the bread eater? So, as in some measure dependent on the ministry for a supply of the bread of life, is it nothing to you whether you get a loaf or a stone? sound, solid, nourishing bread, or an indigestible lump which hunger itself can scarcely persuade you to touch or taste? Thus the hearer has really quite as much an interest in the subject of the ministry as the minister himself; for if he has no personal experience of the exercises and blessings of the preacher, he has of the exercises of a soul when starved under it, and of the blessings of a soul when under it comforted and fed.

We shall now, therefore, without further preface, address ourselves to our subject, "The Ministry of the Gospel;" and our first point shall be to show,

I. The *foundation* on which it rests.

The most prominent feature of the gospel ministry is, that it is peculiarly *an institution and an ordinance of the New Testament*.

Instruction in the truth was always requisite for its preservation on earth. That it might not die with the individual or the generation to which it was first revealed, it was absolutely necessary, unless God should again and again discover it afresh, which would not have been in harmony with his plans as we

find them, either in providence or in grace, that the father should hand it down to the son. This patriarchal mode was, in consequence, the earliest, as it was the simplest. We find, therefore, the Lord thus speaking of Abraham: "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." (Gen. 18:17-19.) One of the main purposes of God in the call of Abraham was to make known in him and by him his truth, and by giving him a godly seed, in whom it might be maintained, as Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, to preserve it from that loss and corruption which it had suffered since the time of Noah, through the rise and prevalence of idolatry involving the descendants of Shem, and even the immediate ancestors of Abraham. (Gen. 31:30; Josh. 24:2.) This patriarchal method was preserved down to the time of the Exodus from Egypt, when the Lord made a covenant at Sinai with the children of Israel, and a new mode of divine instruction was instituted and inaugurated. A written word was given; sacrifices and priesthood were, not indeed for the first time instituted, but put upon a new foundation; a tabernacle set up, and daily ministrations in it prescribed, and an order of men specially set apart to teach the people, as the Lord speaks by Malachi: "And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the Lord of hosts. My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips; he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." (Mal. 2:4-7.) By this written code of laws, by these sacrifices, and by the Levitical priesthood, the people were instructed; and, as the Apostle speaks, had the gospel preached unto them: "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them; but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." (Heb. 4:2.) Thus the children of Israel had, in a sense, a preached gospel given to them; and yet, as we shall see by-and-by, quite distinct from the ministry of the gospel now existing as a New Testament ordinance. After they had reached and been settled in the land of Canaan for a considerable time, as the priesthood had become corrupt, (1 Sam. 2:22-36,) and idolatry very prevalent, (Judges 2:11-13, 17; 3:6; 17:3, 4,) it pleased God to raise up a new order of men, commencing with Samuel, who continued to

the close of the Old Testament canon, viz., the *prophets*, through whom the Lord himself specially spoke to the people. Then came the reading of the law and of the prophets in the synagogues, commenced by Ezra,* which we find still carried on in the time of our Lord.

We have thus hastily sketched the mode of instruction under the Old dispensation, that it may help to throw a clearer, broader light on that instituted and enjoined in the New.

We have laid it down as a primary, fundamental element of the ministry of the gospel that it is purely an institution and an ordinance of the New Testament. In fact, there were no good tidings to preach until the promised Seed was come, and by his death and resurrection had finished the transgression and made an end of sin, had made reconciliation for iniquity, brought in everlasting righteousness, and sealed up (that is, by accomplishing, put an attesting seal upon) the vision and prophecy, and was anointed as the most holy by his exaltation to the right hand of God. (Dan. 9:24.) There was everything to prophesy, but nothing to preach. But when the work was finished which the Father had given him to do, when he had put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, then there was room for a world-wide proclamation of the joyful tidings which Paul preached at Antioch in Pisidia: "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Acts 13:38, 39.) But before we proceed to prove the truth of our assertion by testimonies from the word of God, let us drop a few words as to the *foundation* itself, for that is the point in hand, and which, therefore, we desire to make as clear and firm as possible.

* At first the law only was read; but as that practice was in the time of Antiochus prohibited, and nearly all the copies seized and destroyed, the reading of the prophets was introduced, which, when Mattathias, the father of Judas Maccabaeus, restored the reading of the law, (B.C. 166,) was still continued, the former being read at one part of the service, and the latter at the other.

The death, resurrection, ascension, and glorification of the blessed Lord, as they are the subject, so are they the foundation of the ministry of the gospel. A moment's consideration will show this. But for his death, there could have been no propitiation for sin; therefore no proclamation of reconciliation,

pardon, and peace for those who believe in his name. But for his resurrection, there could have been no open, visible declaration that he was the Son of God with power, (Rom. 1:4,) and no justification; (Rom. 4:25;) therefore no preaching Jesus as the Son of the Father in truth and love, no testifying how a sinner is justified by his righteousness; for "if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." (1 Cor. 15:17.) But for his ascension, there could have been no intercession at the right hand of the Father; therefore no Mediator to be set forth between God and men, (1 Tim. 2:5,) and no message from, no access unto the Father. (Eph. 2:18.) Unless he had been glorified, he would not have received the Spirit as a gift for us; (John 7:39; 16:7, 13-16;) therefore there would have been no power of the Holy Ghost to make the ministry of the gospel effectual to the calling of sinners or the comforting of saints. We see, therefore, how the foundation of the ministry of the gospel is laid in the death, resurrection, ascension, and glorification of the Lord Jesus.

But you will, perhaps, say, "Was not the gospel preached before the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, not only typically and ceremonially, as you have pointed out under the Old Testament, but in the days of Christ, before his death and resurrection?" Yes; most certainly, both by the Lord himself and by his disciples; for we read: "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom." (Matt. 4:23.) The Apostle, therefore, writes: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?" (Heb. 2:3.) So also the Lord sent forth the twelve apostles, at a very early period of his ministry, to "go and preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 10:7.) But all this was merely in a foreview of his death and resurrection, and as it were a preparation for it, and an intimation of its character and nature, as certain good news to be in due time brought. In this way it much resembled—resembled, we say, for it was not the same as, the ministry of John the Baptist, whose mission was to prepare the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight, as the angel testified of him: "And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:17.) So the Lord's ministry, and that of his disciples, till after his ascension, was a ministry of preparation. But a preparation for an event is not the same thing as the event itself, any more than the preparation for the last supper (Luke 22:7-13) was the same thing as Jesus sitting down and breaking bread to the disciples.

It was not, then, till after his resurrection that the ministry of the gospel was instituted as a permanent ordinance of the New Testament; and its gracious and glorious charter we may read in those memorable words which the Lord spake unto his disciples just before his ascension into heaven: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matt. 28:18-20.) "Go and teach" (or "make disciples of"—*margin*) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." This was the divine command, this the authoritative institution of the ministry of the gospel. And the attendant promise both testifies to its permanence and insures its blessing: "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." Almost similar is the language of Mark, recording the same commission: "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15, 16.)

But it will be observed, that though this was the institution of the ministry of the gospel, yet it was not to commence at once. The parting words of the Lord, as recorded by Luke, clearly show this: "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:45-49.) Thus, though the apostles were already divinely commissioned, the commission was not to take effect or be acted upon till the Holy Ghost, as a fruit of Christ's glorification, was poured out. We, therefore, read in that last interview with his disciples before his ascension, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles: "And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." (Acts 1:4, 5.)

Having thus seen the foundation of the ministry of the gospel, first as laid in the death, resurrection, ascension, and glorification of the Lord Jesus, and

secondly as instituted by the Lord himself after his resurrection, we shall perhaps be better prepared to consider some other scriptures which testify to the same purport. One of the most clear and striking is that of the Apostle in the Epistle to the Ephesians, 4:7-16. As we shall have occasion to dwell much upon that portion of the word, we merely quote a part of it for the present, as confirming what we have already advanced as the foundation of the Christian ministry: "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph. 4:8-12.) The Apostle here quotes Psa. 68:18, with a little verbal alteration which is of no consequence, as the meaning is the same, for the Lord received that he might give. Without these gifts of the Holy Ghost received by him and given to us, the ministry would have been merely in word, without efficacy or power; a barren, unprofitable proclamation; not in itself, but barren to the souls of men as too deaf to hear it, too blind to see it, too dead to feel it.

We thus see four leading points in connection with the source and origin of the gospel ministry: 1. Its *foundation* in the death, resurrection, ascension, and glorification of the Lord Jesus; 2. Its *institution* by the Lord just before his ascension; 3. Its *permanence* as a standing ordinance of the New Testament; 4. Its *power* as accompanied by the Holy Ghost to the souls of men. We find, therefore, that the disciples, according to their Lord's command, waited at Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high. They kept together as a little band, and "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication," but did nothing except choose by lot a successor to Judas that he might take part of the ministry and apostleship from which that traitor by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. (Acts 1:14-26.) But now comes the setting up of the ministry of the gospel as a visible fact, a realisation of the promise given to the disciples by their risen Lord: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:1-4.) The sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, the cloven tongues of fire sitting upon each of them,

their speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance, were so many visible signs and marks that the Holy Ghost was come upon them. And what was the effect? The opening of the mouth to preach the word: "Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and said unto them," &c. This was the first gospel sermon preached upon earth. Then, for the first time, did a gospel minister stand forth as an ambassador of Christ divinely commissioned, spiritually equipped, and enabled to preach Christ crucified, Christ risen, Christ exalted, Christ as having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, and having visibly shed him forth in his gifts and graces. And what was the effect of that first gospel sermon by a gospel minister? The call of three thousand souls! O what a testimony to the power of a preached gospel. What a demonstration that Jesus was at the right hand of the Father. What a visible fruit of his intercession and mediation. Before this day there was no preaching, in the New Testament sense of the word, but now there was good news to tell to poor perishing sinners, whether Jew or Gentile; for he who is our peace had made both one, and broken down the middle wall of partition between them. Now the types were all fulfilled, the sacrifices of the law accomplished in the one great sacrifice, and therefore useless and virtually abrogated; and the legal dispensation come to an end by the bringing in of a new and better covenant. There was now an open field in which to preach the glad tidings of salvation, for the door of mercy was set open to the Gentiles, as intimated by the gift of tongues, and in pursuance of the Lord's command to go and teach all nations. Poor Gentile sinners, who had been aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world, were now made nigh by the blood of Christ. (Eph. 2:12, 13.) And those who were sometime alienated and enemies in their mind by wicked works he had reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present them holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight. (Col. 1:21, 22.) It is true that in harmony with all his dealings with Israel, after the flesh, to them the gospel was first preached, as Peter declared: "Ye are the children of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first, God having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." (Acts 3:25, 26.) But they, except a remnant according to the election of grace, (Rom. 11:5,) rejected the gospel, blasphemed its doctrines and divine Author, persecuted its preachers, and filling up the measure of their sins, soon brought upon themselves swift destruction. But O what a confirmation did God give to those who by grace received it, that the gospel was a message from himself. The miracles which the apostles wrought

(Acts 3:1-8; 5:12-16; 9:36-41; 14:8-10), the divers tongues with which they spake; (1 Cor. 14:18;) the sufferings which they endured with such holy joy; (Acts 5:40, 41; 16:24, 25;) their undaunted boldness and faithfulness; (Acts 4:8-20; 5:29-32;) and above all, the power and authority which attended their word; (Acts 6:10; 8:5-8; 11:21-24; 1 Thess. 1:5-10;) all proved that the gospel which they preached was from God, and that he had commissioned and qualified them to preach it. What they preached we shall see more clearly and fully when we come to our second point, *the nature* and character of the gospel. At present we are engaged with the *foundation*, which we desire to make as plain and clear as we can, not only as affording a strong and broad basis for the rest of the superstructure which we hope to build upon it, but for the comfort and encouragement of the servants of God, who are often cast down by the trials and temptations of the ministry, a sense of their inability, and the want of that success in it which is the crown of all their labours. Now it may be good for them to consider, with the Lord's help and blessing, the foundation on which their ministry rests. And we would direct their attention to the four points which we have thus far brought forward.

1. First, let them consider that the *foundation* of their ministry is laid in the death, resurrection, ascension, and glorification of the Son of God. What strength and firmness are here. What an immoveable foundation; for let them bear in mind that the foundation of their ministry is the same as that which God has laid in Zion. For was not this the foundation of Paul's ministry? "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 3:10, 11.) So it is of ours, if we preach Paul's gospel with any measure of Paul's grace. If we have been allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel; (1 Thess. 2:4;) if God has committed unto us ("put in us," *margin*) the word of reconciliation; (2 Cor. 5:19;) if he has in any measure separated us unto the gospel of God, (Rom. 1:1,) the foundation of our ministry is already laid for us. And O what a foundation. Nothing less than the Son of God, as crucified, as risen from the dead, as gone up on high, as even now at the right hand of the Father interceding for us.

2. And consider also its *institution*. No command of man, ye servants of God, no invention or institution of Pope or prince, no appointment of prime minister or bishop, has commissioned you to preach the gospel. The Lord himself, the risen Jesus, the great Head of the Church has appointed that the

gospel should be preached, that a proclamation might be made of his Person and work, blood and obedience, grace and glory, that those who believe might be saved.

3. Consider, further, the *permanence* of the gospel ministry, and the promise which ensures not only its continuance, but its ever-abiding blessing: "And lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." The ministry of the gospel did not die with the apostles. Like the fire upon the brazen altar, like the light in the holy place, it was never to be quenched or put out, sink down for want of fuel, or die out for lack of oil. "The end of the world" is not yet come. Until that time, then, God shall never want a servant, Christ an ambassador, or the Church a minister. With a little change we may adopt the words of Berridge on the death of Whitefield:

"As one Elijah dies,
True prophet of the Lord,
Shall some Elisha rise,
To blaze the gospel word.

And fast as sheep to Jesus go,
Shall lambs recruit his folds below."

This is your strength, hope, and confidence, ye servants of God, that the Lord is with you. What the angel of the Lord said to Gideon, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour," may be said to and of you. And if any, in the despondency of his heart say, "If the Lord be with me, why is all this befallen me, and where be all the miracles which our fathers told us?" may the gracious Lord look upon him in all the beauty, blessedness, and strength-giving light of his glorious countenance, and say, "Go in this my might. Have not I sent thee?" (Judges 6:12-14.)

4. And lastly, may they bear in mind the *power* which the Lord has promised shall accompany his word: "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goeth forth 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 whereto I sent it." (Isa. 55:10, 11.) The gospel still is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." (Rom. 1:16.) And as we witness the power which attends it still to the souls of men, we may say with the Apostle: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word

of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." (1 Thess. 2:13.) It is true that we are fallen on evil days, when little power for the most part attends the preached gospel. And yet there may be more good done than we are aware of, or are permitted to see. Much of the blessing that the word is made to the people of God is hidden, wisely hidden, from the servants of the Lord. Pride is so deep and so fruitful a root that, to hide pride from man, many of the servants of God are not permitted to see the fruit of their own labours, or to harvest their own crop. O that those whom the Lord has himself taught, equipped, commissioned, and sent forth to preach his precious gospel may still go on holding forth the word of life, that they may rejoice in the day of Christ, that they have not run in vain, nor yet laboured in vain. (Phil. 2:16.) May none of us be weary in well doing, whether we labour with tongue or pen; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not. And may I not add, as a fellow-labourer and a fellow-helper? "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor. 15:58.)

II.

We attempted, in our last paper, to show the *foundation*,—~~he~~ strong and broad foundation, on which the Ministry of the Gospel rests. To have clear views of, to be well established on, this foundation, is not only most desirable, but almost indispensable, both for minister and people;—~~for~~ the minister that, feeling the firmness of his standing, he may preach the gospel with authority and power, and for the people that they may receive the word from his lips in faith and love, as a message from God to their souls. To lose sight, then, of this foundation will ever bring with it loss both of power and of comfort; and it is hard to say which, in such a case, suffers most, the people or the minister. Wherever man is, there is weakness; wherever the Lord is, there is power. Now, in the ministry of the word, above most other things, there is a continual temptation to look too much to man, and too little to the Lord. As poor wretched man is always in extremes, some of the Lord's people think too much, others too little of the minister; but whether too much or too little, the effect in both cases is much the same,—~~to~~ look to the man, and to lose sight of the Lord. You that are young may so admire, if not idolise, your minister as to think that he can scarcely speak anything that is wrong; you that are old may see so much infirmity in him that you can scarcely receive from him even what you know to be truth. Both of you are in grievous fault; and though you

so widely differ, the cause of your fault is the same; it is from looking off the foundation, and looking at the ministry of the gospel more as a thing of man than of God. The minister also falls into weakness the moment that he loses sight of, or gets moved off this foundation. Nor is he less in extremes than the people. Some ministers think much too highly of themselves, feeding on their own gifts and the flattery of their admirers, often the weakest and least exercised or discerning of the flock, until, forgetting they have nothing that they have not received, they are full, they are rich, and reign as kings, able to bear no rival near their throne, and full of jealousy against the most honoured of the Lord's servants, if they approach too near their own little dominion. (1 Cor. 4:7, 8.)* Others, again, of the Lord's servants see and feel so much of their own inability, infirmities, shortcomings, and the inward stream of pollution which defiles every thought, word, and work, that their heart sinks, their hands droop, and they cannot stand before the people and deliver their message with that holy boldness and firm confidence which they should maintain as servants of the living God. They, too, are looking off the foundation, and looking at self in its weakness, as the proud and puffed up at self in its strength. We see, therefore, even from these few hints, that the foundation of the ministry of the gospel is not a mere doctrinal speculation or theological theory, only fit to be discussed by divines in their studies, but a solemn truth of such practical influence, and living effect and operation, that without it the ministry is but an empty noise, of no more real value to the souls of men than a course of lectures at a Mechanics' Institute. It is for this reason that, in our last paper, we took so much pains and devoted so much space to lay this foundation plainly and clearly before our readers' eyes; and as the whole of the superstructure which we hope, with God's help and blessing, to build up will rest on this foundation, we would affectionately suggest to those who are desirous or willing to receive any instruction from us, carefully to read again what we have written on this point, and compare it and all we shall advance in connection with it, with the word of truth, that we may have the sweet privilege of seeing eye to eye, and the blessed comfort of walking step by step, during the rest of our journey together.

* There is a wonderful opening up and laying bare of this point in 1 Cor. 3, 4, which will amply repay examination and meditation. We will just furnish the key-note to those of our readers who may desire to see the mind of the Spirit in these two chapters. It is the contrast which the Apostle draws between himself and the teachers who had supplanted him at Corinth, with the effects produced on the people by their ministry.

II. We shall now, therefore, pass on to consider the second point that we proposed to examine,—the *nature* and *character* of the ministry of the gospel.

On all subjects connected with our most holy faith, it is most desirable to have clear views. Every point of divine truth is laid down with the greatest clearness and precision in the word of God. The darkness, the ignorance, the confusion which prevent us from seeing it are all in us. But as we search the Scriptures, (John 5:39,) as we meditate upon them, (1 Tim. 4:15,) as we by prayer and supplication draw light, life, and wisdom out of Him "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;" (Prov. 2:3-6; James 1:5; Col. 2:3;) and, above all, as we mix faith with what we read, (Heb. 4:2,) there is often, if not usually, a gradual breaking-in of light; and as we follow up its heavenly rays, it shines more clearly and broadly, and the truth stands out more fully and prominently before our eyes. This is the only way in which we can be "filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding," (Col. 1:9,) and thus be established in the faith, abounding therein with thanksgiving. (Col. 2:7.) To understand the Scripture, to see in it the mind of the Holy Spirit, to be deeply penetrated with, and inwardly possessed of the heavenly wisdom, holy instruction, and gracious revelation of the counsels and will of God unfolded therein, demands much and continual patient and prayerful study. As in business, diligence and industry lead on to prosperity and success, and sloth and idleness are the sure road to ruin, so in the greatest, most serious, and important of all business, the concerns of the soul, there is a holy diligence, a heavenly industry, whereby it thrives and grows, and there is a slothful indolence whereby it becomes clothed with rags. (Prov. 23:21.) No slothful member was ever a pillar or an ornament to a church; no slothful minister was ever a benefit or a blessing in a pulpit.

In opening this part of our subject, we shall keep as closely as we can to the Scripture, not only that we may not darken counsel by words without knowledge, but that we may speak, as far as we know and understand it, after the mind of Christ, and according to the teaching and testimony of the Holy Ghost in the word and in the heart.

The plainest, simplest idea of the nature and character of the ministry of the gospel is, that it is a *service* put into the hands, and committed to the trust of chosen men of God. We hope to show in due time what should be considered a call to the ministry of the word, but for the present let it suffice to say with the Apostle: "No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." (Heb. 5:4.)

We shall assume, then, that the ministers of the gospel are men chosen of God, to this high and honourable employ, and by him especially qualified, commissioned, and sent to preach the word of life. By being thus chosen and set apart, they become servants of Christ and ministers of the New Testament. They are not the servants of men, (1 Cor. 7:23,) though servants to the Church for Jesus' sake; (2 Cor. 4:5;) yea, though free from all men, are willing to make themselves servants to all, that they may win souls to Christ. (1 Cor. 9:19.) Still less are they servants of sin, for "to whom men yield themselves servants to obey, his servants they are to whom they obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." (Rom. 6:16.) Their grand distinguishing mark, their highest honour, their dearest privilege, is to be servants of God and of his Son Jesus Christ. Such was Paul; (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1;) such was Peter; (2 Pet. 1:1;) such was Jude; (Jude 1;) and such was John; (Rev. 1:1;) and to show that this title and office were not confined to the apostles, we find that such were Timothy and Epaphras. (Phil. 1:1; 2 Tim. 2:24; Col. 4:12.)

There is, however, a broad and marked distinction between being a servant of Christ and being a minister of Christ, which it may be worth while to notice. The term "servant" expresses and includes all that they are to God; the term "minister" all that they are to man. Let us more fully open this, as the distinction between the two terms may not have occurred to some of our readers, and yet important practical conclusions follow from it.

1. As "servants of Christ," he alone is their Master. It was he and he alone who chose them, qualified them, commissioned them, and sent them. To him and to him alone they look for direction, instruction, food, and maintenance. His will must be their will, his word their warrant, his guidance their path, his displeasure their dread, and his approbation their reward. In proportion as they believe, feel, and realise this, will they preach his word with holy boldness, and move on in their rough and rugged path in sweet liberty and gracious confidence. There is no service so bondaging, burdensome, and miserable (that to sin only excepted) as service to man; there is no service so free, noble, and happy as service to God. Just in proportion, then, as we feel that we are servants of God, do we rise up above fear and bondage; and just in proportion as we become servants of man, do we sink down into darkness and chains.

2. But they are "ministers of Christ" as well as "servants of Christ." Observe

the distinction between the two. As redeemed and called, (1 Cor. 7:22, 23,) as followers of Christ, (John 12:26,) as taking his yoke upon him, (Matt. 11:29,) as having the kingdom of God set up in their heart, (Rom. 14:17, 18,) as of that chosen seed which is accounted to the Lord for a generation, (Psa. 22:30,) all the saints of God are his servants; (Rev. 2:20;) but all are not the servants of God in the higher sense of the term, as serving him in the gospel, and, therefore, not ministers. The word minister, as distinct from servant, means one to whom is committed a service for the use and benefit of others. This may, at first sight, seem to be a distinction without a difference; but it will be found not to be so when we look at its bearings and practical results. Thus, as regards their choice, commission, and qualification, the preachers of the gospel are *servants* of Christ; but as this service is committed to them for the benefit of the people of God, they are *ministers* of Christ. They are, therefore, servants *to* the Church, and *for* the Church, but not servants *of* the Church. They are Christ's servants, not the Church's servants, for as Christ alone called them, qualified them, commissioned, and sent them, it is nothing but anti-Christian tyranny and a vile usurpation for any church to claim and treat them as its servants, and therefore make them servants of men. But as this is a narrow point, and many churches here greatly err, considering, because they choose and pay their minister, they are as much his master as a banker is to a clerk, or a draper to an assistant, we shall treat it somewhat fully, and as fairly as we can for both sides, for a minister may as much err in claiming to be a lord over God's heritage, as a church may err in degrading him into its servant.

The Lord, then, by his grace, chooses and calls men to be his servants, that they may be employed in his service for the benefit of others. He is their sole and only Master, but he uses them to accomplish his gracious purposes. This is beautifully illustrated in the instance of Paul, who seems to have been selected as the pattern of a minister, as well as of the longsuffering of Jesus Christ to them which should hereafter believe in him to life everlasting. (1 Tim. 1:16.) He received a ministry from the hands of the Lord, when he first called him by his grace: "But rise, and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee." (Acts 26:16.) He therefore says of himself: "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood;" (Gal. 1:15, 16;) and again: "Whereof 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." (Eph. 3:7, 8.) Nay, so urgently was it laid upon him that he says: "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me." (1 Cor. 9:16, 17.) Now, we do not mean to say that we are all to have our call as clear as his, or our credentials as indisputable. We have instanced him as a pattern to show in the brightest and clearest light what is meant by a minister of the gospel, and that he is a servant of God for the use and benefit of his people. If we follow Paul from the first day when he preached Christ in the synagogues at Damascus that he is the Son of God, (Acts 9:20,) to his last testimony when, having fought a good fight and finished his course, his departure was at hand, and he was looking and longing for his crown, (2 Tim. 4:6-8,) his whole life and labours were for the good of others. He was ever the Lord's servant, ever "free," (1 Cor. 9:1,) and to those who would bring him into bondage, he would give place by subjection, no, not for an hour. (Gal. 2:4, 5.) With him it was a small thing to be judged of any man's judgment, (1 Cor. 4:3,) and he ever stood fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made him free; (Gal. 5:1;) and yet, though thus fully and blessedly free from all men, he made himself servant unto all, that he might gain the more. (1 Cor. 9:19.) The more that Paul's life and labours, experience, example, and words are studied and meditated upon, the clearer will be our views of the ministry of the gospel, and the more distinctly shall we see the line which separates the true ministers of Christ from the false apostles, the deceitful workers, who transform themselves into the apostles of Christ. (2 Cor. 11:13.) We see in him the union of the highest liberty with the lowest service; of the fullest freedom from man with the greatest devotedness to man; of the most glorious revelations of Christ with the most toilsome labours, severe sufferings, painful privations that could be endured for his name's sake; and though not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles, yet in his own eyes ever less than the least of all saints and the chief of sinners. (2 Cor. 11:5; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:15.)

The word "ministry," then, as we have pointed out, and conspicuously seen in him, implies a service for the benefit of others. It is now, therefore, necessary to show its *nature and character*.

Its leading feature and grand distinguishing character is that it is the *ministry of the New Testament*; in other words, that it is a gracious means of

communicating the blessings of the new covenant to the souls of men. In 2 Cor. 3 the Apostle, by contrasting in various points the law and the gospel, very clearly and beautifully unfolds what the nature and character of the ministry of the New Testament is. If we carefully examine this chapter, and trace out the line of argument contained in it, we shall see that the Apostle lays down six or seven points in which the ministry of the two covenants stands in broad contrast and visible distinction from each other. He prefaces this contrast by the words: "Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament;" and closes it with: "Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not." (2 Cor. 4:1.) We have thought, therefore, that we could not, in opening this part of our subject, better break ground than by tracing out the points of distinction laid down by the Apostle.

The different points of contrast thus laid down are these: 1. One is letter, the other spirit; 2. One killeth, the other giveth life; 3. One ministers condemnation, the other righteousness; 4. The one genders to bondage, the other to freedom; 5. The one is veiled, as the face of Moses, the other unveiled, as the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; 6. The one is done away, the other abideth; 7. the one leaves the hearer dead in his sins, the other leads him on, step by step, from glory to glory. Let us pursue the thread of argument as thus laid down.

1. The first distinctive feature of the ministry of the gospel is that it is "the ministration of the *Spirit*." This is its distinguishing glory. The law is but the letter, written and engraven in stones; but believers are "the epistle of Christ, written, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in fleshy* tables of the heart." There was indeed a glory of its own in the law, as typified by the glory of the face of Moses when he came down from the Mount; but this glory fades and grows pale by the side of the glory of the gospel. "But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done away; how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious?" (2 Cor. 3:7, 8.) The Apostle, therefore, asks the Galatians, "This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Gal. 3:2.) And again, "He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by

the hearing of faith?" (Gal. 3:5.) The "hearing of faith" means the gospel, as is plain from Romans 10:14-17. When Peter preached the gospel in the house of Cornelius, we read: "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." (Acts 10:44.) So was it at the memorable day of Pentecost. (Acts 2:38, 39.) So under Paul's preaching at Antioch in Pisidia; (Acts 13:52;) at Ephesus; (Acts 19:6;) at Thessalonica; (1 Thess. 1:5, 6;) at Corinth. (2 Cor. 11:4.) And though in those days there were extraordinary gifts of the Spirit which were gradually withdrawn as the canon of the Scripture was closing, yet the peculiar glory of the ministry is still the same as "the ministration of the Spirit." If the question be asked, "What is meant by the ministration of the Spirit?" we answer, the means whereby the Spirit is communicated to the souls of men. And if it be further asked, "How does the gospel do this?" we reply, that the Holy Spirit uses it as a means of communicating his graces, operations, and influences, for he works in and by the word; and when he himself comes and dwells in the soul, making the body his temple, it is not in a visionary way, without the word, but through the gospel coming "in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." (1 Thess. 1:5.) This is beautifully opened up by the Apostle: "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." (Eph. 1:13, 14.) He traces out four distinct and progressive steps: 1. They heard the word of truth, the gospel of their salvation; 2. They believed in the Son of God, as preached in this gospel; 3. They were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise; 4. he became, by his indwelling, the earnest of their inheritance. (Compare Rom. 8:9, 23.) It is thus that the preached gospel is "the ministration of the Spirit."

* This word is sometimes quoted, and even printed in some Bibles "fleshly;" but in the original, as in our version, the words are distinct both in form and meaning. "Fleshy" signifies soft and tender—the heart of flesh as distinct from the heart of stone; (Ezek. 36:26;) whereas "fleshly" means what is corrupt and evil, (2 Cor. 1:12; Col. 2:18; 1 Pet. 2:11,) and is generally translated "carnal."

2. It is, therefore, also the ministration of *life*; for "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." (2 Cor. 3:6.) By the word "spirit" here is meant, not the

Holy Spirit, but the gospel as being, as we have shown, the ministration of the Spirit; and by "the letter" is meant, not the letter of the gospel, but the law which was given in letters on the two tables of stone, and which is said to kill, as cursing and condemning all found under it, and slaying the soul that is brought under its inward sentence. The gospel, then, in the hands of the servants of God, is a ministration of life; for, as made life and spirit to the soul, one part of its work is to quicken dead sinners into spiritual life. God is said, therefore, "to beget us with the word of truth," (James 1:18,) and the regenerate are declared to "be born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." (1 Pet. 1:23.) Jesus is the Life, (John 14:6,) and as such he quickeneth whom he will; (John 5:21;) but it is through his word that he quickeneth; for he has "the words of eternal life," and the words that he speaks, "they are spirit and they are life." (John 6:63, 68.) "In him was life" originally and eternally, (John 1:4,) and that life he communicates to those who are his, even that "eternal life which God that cannot lie promised before the world began, but hath in due times manifested his word through preaching." (Titus 1:2, 3.) And as through the gospel this life is communicated, so it is through the gospel that it is maintained. How many a poor dying soul, condemned by law, condemned by conscience, has been brought out and up into the light, life, and liberty of the gospel by the preached word. How many a drooping head has been raised up, how many a backsliding heart recovered and healed, how many a cold, lifeless frame warmed into life and feeling, how many a hard, frozen soul, apparently impenetrable to love or fear, has in a moment, by one soft word spoken by a servant of God, been softened, melted, and dissolved into a flood of contrition, humility, and brokenness before the Lord, in which it was hard to say which most prevailed, love to him, or hatred of self. We cannot enlarge on this point, but every servant of God will have his own thankful record, his own grateful Ebenezers, how the gospel has been made a ministration of life to him, and through him of life to others.

3. Another feature of the gospel, as a service committed to the trust of the servants of Christ, is that it is a ministration of *righteousness*. The law was a ministration of condemnation, and it was given for that purpose, as the Apostle so cogently argues: "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the

deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Rom. 3:19, 20.) And again "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid; for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." (Gal. 3:21, 22.) As, then, the law is the ministration of condemnation, so the gospel is the ministration of righteousness, and the two are therefore contrasted by the Apostle in the chapter before us: "For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory." (2 Cor. 3:9.) But in what sense is the gospel, and especially the preached gospel, "the ministration of righteousness?" In this, that it preaches, holds forth, and instrumentally brings near the righteousness of Christ as that by which, and by which alone, we are justified before God. The Apostle, therefore, says: "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 3:21-24.) "The righteousness of God" here spoken of is not God's own personal, intrinsic righteousness, whereby he is eternally holy and just, but the way by which he justifies a sinner and accounts him righteous. Now this is "without the law," that is, distinct from and independent of the law, but is manifested, where? In and by the gospel, through which it is proclaimed and made openly known. He therefore adds: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." (Rom. 3:25.) Where hath God "set Christ forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood?" In and by the gospel, as he further adds: "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Rom. 3:26.) "To declare at this time his righteousness." What time? The time of the gospel. And how declare it? By the preached word. It is thus that "the gospel is made the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; " for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God;" and as faith believes what God declares, it receives justification from the mouth of God. To proclaim, reveal, and seal this upon the heart is the grand and effectual province and work of the gospel: "Be it known unto

you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Acts 13:38, 39.) As the gospel, then, when preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, (1 Pet. 1:12,) is made a means of lodging this sentence of justification in the heart, it is emphatically "the ministration of righteousness." No one was ever justified but by faith. And by faith in whom? In Jesus Christ. But how was this faith raised up in the heart? By the gospel which testifies of him reaching the heart as a word from God, for "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." (Rom. 10:10.) The Lord says, "I bring near my righteousness." (Isa. 46:13.) But how and where? In and by and through the gospel, for "therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Rom. 1:17.) If, then, the gospel be, as thus explained, the ministration of righteousness, we may well ask, How can any man, be it in church or chapel, be a servant of God or a minister of Jesus Christ who does not preach full and free justification by Christ and Christ alone, as the Lord our righteousness? (Jer. 23:6;) as "of God made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption?" (1 Cor. 1:30.)

4. The next distinguishing feature of the gospel as a ministration is, that it is a ministry of *liberty*: "Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (2 Cor. 3:17.) The law knows nothing and speaks nothing of liberty. On the contrary, it "gendereth to bondage," that is, begets in every one under its sensible spirit and influence a most miserable state of mind under which he becomes shut up as in a prison-house under its condemning sentence, aggravated by the accusations of a guilty conscience, the fear of death, the dread of judgment, and the temptations of the devil. Now, as opposed to and contrasted with this miserable ministry of bondage, the gospel proclaims and brings liberty. Thus the blessed Lord read and applied to himself the prophecy of Isaiah 61 in the synagogue of Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18, 19.) The same anointing which rested on him as the Head without measure, (John 3:34,) rests on his ministers according to their measure, for to

every one of his servants is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ, (Eph. 4:7; 1 Cor. 12:11,) and they have an anointing which they have received of him, (1 John 2:27.) As, then, he preached liberty to the captives, so do his ministering servants proclaim the opening of the prison to them that are bound, by holding forth the forgiveness of sins through his precious blood. As, then, they thus preach peace by Jesus Christ, (Acts 10:36,) and the Spirit attends their testimony with power, it comes with a blessed liberating influence, into the heart. Nothing can stand before the power of the gospel. Every lock, bar, and bolt must give way when "the Breaker comes up, and their King passes before them, and the Lord at the head of them," (Micah 2:13,) to break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron. (Isa. 45:2.) The gospel is "the perfect law of liberty," (James 1:25,) therefore the very perfection of liberty. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus," is the pure language of the gospel; and if no condemnation, no bondage; for what brings the soul into bondage? The guilt of sin lying on a burdened conscience, with an evil heart of unbelief suggesting a thousand gloomy fears, and shutting out, as it were, the sweet voice of mercy. We often get, it is true, into bondage, but never through the gospel, but rather from not believing the gospel; nor can we be delivered from bondage but through the gospel, and by believing the glad tidings which it proclaims and brings. As, then, the servants of Christ preach the gospel in its purity and power, and the blessed Spirit, by attending and accompanying their word to the heart, reveals the love, and blood, and grace of the Lord the Lamb, and faith is given to receive and believe it, the soul is brought forth, according to the strength of its faith, out of this miserable bondage into the liberty of truth, according to the Lord's promise: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31, 32.)

5. The next point of contrast is, that the law was a veiled dispensation; whereas the gospel is an *unveiled* one. That the law was what we have termed a veiled dispensation was plainly shown by the veil of the temple, and more especially, as the Apostle here argues, by the veil over the face of Moses. But it was a veiled glory—veiled under a worldly sanctuary (Heb. 9:1) and a multitude of rites, ceremonies, and sacrifices, and what the Apostle calls "carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation;" that is, the time of the gospel. (Heb. 9:10.) But as opposed to and distinct from this, the gospel

is an unveiled dispensation; for the old veil is done away in Christ.

But we must defer the consideration of this point to our next paper.

III.

As the Ministry of the Gospel is, as we have already shown, an ordinance peculiar to the New Testament, it is very evident that unless we have clear views of the grand points of difference which distinguish the two Covenants, the Old and the New, from each other, we shall have but dim, confused conceptions of its true nature and character; and may thus run great risk either of misunderstanding it through ignorance, or legalising it through self-righteousness. But to obtain these clear views, two things are needful: 1. An experience of these two covenants in our own breast, that by feelingly and experimentally knowing both law and gospel in their separate spirit and power, we may discriminate between the two with all that peculiar keenness and nicety of insight into their distinctive character which nothing but such a personal, living acquaintance with each of them can produce; and, 2. An understanding heart in the word of God, that we may see clearly traced by the pen of the Holy Ghost in the Scripture what we have felt and known of these two covenants in our own soul. These two things mutually help each other. If there be no light within, there will be no light without; where there is a veil upon the heart, there will be a veil upon the word, as the Apostle speaks in the chapter we are now considering. (2 Cor. 3:14, 15.) Similarly, the same blessed Spirit, when he takes away the veil from off the heart, takes away the veil from off the word; and as what he writes in the heart (Jer. 31:33) is in harmony with what he has written in the word, the two correspond, like the wax to the seal, or the coin to the die. In the mouth of these two witnesses every truth becomes established; and the more closely and fitly they agree, the greater is the strength of their united testimony. In proportion, then, as we are so led and favoured, we move on safe ground; and as the word of truth is thus made a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, under its guidance we step firmly and boldly forward, with an enlightened understanding, an established judgment, a willing mind, and an approving conscience. It is in this way and in this spirit that we commenced, and, with the Lord's help and blessing, hope to pursue to the end the subject of our present Meditations.

Our readers will doubtless remember that the part of our subject which we are now considering is to show the nature and character of the ministry of the gospel; and that taking for our text 2 Cor. 3 we are opening the leading points of difference between the two dispensations—the law and the gospel. Some of these distinctive points of difference we have already considered, and need not refer to them. The point at which we abruptly broke off in our last paper was to show that among the other distinctive differences between the law and the gospel, as traced out by the Apostle, one was that the law was a *veiled* dispensation, whereas the gospel is an *unveiled* one.

5. Here, then, we resume our subject; and to lay down this point of distinction more clearly, we shall quote the words of the Apostle which we shall endeavour to open: "Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech; and not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished; but their minds were blinded; for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart." (2 Cor. 3:12-15.)

If the chapter from which these words are quoted be carefully read, it will be plainly seen that the chief line and main force of the argument pursued therein are based upon this ground that, whilst each dispensation had a glory of its own, the glory of the gospel far outshone the glory of the law. But the question would naturally arise: "How do you prove the distinctive glory of these two dispensations; and what authority have you for your assertion that the glory of the former exceeds the glory of the latter?" "How," it might also be asked, "was the glory of the old dispensation visibly manifested?" To this last question the Apostle would answer, By the shining of the face of Moses, which was a reflection of the glory of God seen by him on Sinai's top. This shining of the face of Moses was, therefore, to the children of Israel a visible symbol that he had conversed with God, and as the typical mediator of that dispensation had brought down that glory with him. It was thus made plainly evident that there was a glory in that dispensation, if its very reflected image shone so brightly in the face of its typical mediator before assembled Israel.

But now comes that peculiar transaction on which the Apostle lays so much stress, and on which he bases such a remarkable development of heavenly truth. Moses put a veil over his face. This the Apostle explains to have been a symbolical act, and that it represented that the dispensation of which he was the typical mediator was a veiled dispensation; whereas the gospel is an unveiled one.

This veil symbolised, according to the Apostle, two things: 1. The veil over the dispensation itself. 2. The veil over the hearts of the children of Israel. Now the effect of these two concurring circumstances was that "they could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished;" that is, Christ, who is "the end of the law." It would take us too far from our present subject to dwell upon these points at any length; but we shall require a little space clearly to lay open the distinctive character of the ministry of the gospel as an unveiled dispensation, for it is a point of great importance in showing its true nature and character.

All under the law was veiled. The ark of the covenant, where God dwelt between the cherubim, and which was the peculiar symbol of his visible presence, was hidden by a veil. All the Levitical rites, ceremonies, and sacrifices were representations of "good things to come;" (Heb. 9:11;) that is, of Christ and the blessings and benefits that were to come through him; but they were veiled, partly by their own shadowy nature, (Heb. 10:1,) and partly by the ignorance and unbelief of Israel, to whom they were given. But Christ being now come "a High Priest of good things to come," and having put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, the veil between God and us is rent in twain from the top to the bottom, as the veil of the temple was when he yielded up the ghost, laying down, by a voluntary act, the life which he had taken. (Matt. 27:50, 51; John 10:17, 18.) He has thus consecrated for us a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh, that we may have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. (Heb. 9:11, 12, 26; 10:19, 20.) Thus the veil was actually taken away by the sacrifice and bloodshedding of Jesus on the cross. But there is the veil also upon the heart. This, too, must be taken away. But how? By "the Lord the Spirit," as the Apostle so clearly speaks: "Nevertheless, when it," that is, Israel, "shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit," or rather, "*the* Spirit," that is, the Holy Spirit, by whom it is taken away. We thus see that one grand

distinctive feature of the glory of the gospel is the removal of the veil: 1. Its actual removal from the face of God by the sacrifice, bloodshedding, and death of his dear Son; and 2. Its removal from the face of our heart by the Lord the Spirit taking it away by an inward revelation of Christ.

Now what follows from this removal of the veil, both actually and experimentally? Two things. One known only to ourselves, the other known and seen by others. 1. The one known to ourselves is thus unfolded by the Apostle: "But we all, with open face 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." (2 Cor. 3:18.) The word "open" should have been translated, as it is in the original "unveiled," for by the present rendering much of the force and beauty of the Apostle's words is lost. "But we all," that is, all we who believe, "with unveiled face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image." We, he would say, are not like Israel after the flesh, whose minds are blinded; the same veil remaining untaken away which now hides from them the glory of Christ, as the veil of old hid the glory of the face of Moses. This veil was actually done away in Christ, and this veil has been experimentally taken off our heart by the Spirit; and the blessed fruit and consequence of this removal is that we see as in a glass the glory of the Lord, and are thereby changed into the image of Christ, and reflect his glory, as the face of Moses was changed to reflect the glory of God. But what is this glass? The gospel, which is a reflection of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and is therefore called "the glorious gospel of Christ." (2 Cor. 4:4.)

Now from this beholding with unveiled face as in a glass the glory of the Lord, there follow certain important fruits and consequences, all which determine the nature and character of the ministry of the gospel.

There is a being "changed into the same image." This is in analogy with the shining of the face of Moses. By looking on God, he caught the reflection of his glory. His very face was changed thereby, and a conformity wrought in it to the glory which he saw in his communion with God. So by beholding the glory of Christ, as shining forth in the gospel, there is a being changed into the same image—an internal reflection of his glory, a being "transformed in the renewing of the mind;" (Rom. 12:2;) "a putting on of the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him who created him;" (Col. 3:10;) a putting on

of Christ, as having been baptized into Christ; (Gal. 3:27;) a forming of Christ in the heart; (Gal. 4:19;) yea, Christ himself in it the hope of glory. (Col. 1:27.) And all this from glory to glory—each successive view of the glory of Christ in the gospel producing a corresponding glory in the soul; but all "by the Spirit of the Lord."

Now from this internal experimental renewing in the spirit of the mind, certain fruits spring, certain consequences flow.

1. A renouncing of the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness. (2 Cor. 4:2.) An unveiled gospel is utterly opposed to dishonesty and craft; and a heart from which the veil has been taken away will not allow the mouth to speak, or the feet to walk in such accursed ways of hypocrisy and deceit. But whilst the veil is on the heart there is a veil on the gospel; and what is the consequence of this double veil? What we see all round us—universal dishonesty and craft in men who call themselves ministers of Christ, so that we can scarcely find anywhere a truly honest man; that is, one honest to God, honest to himself, and honest to the souls of men.

2. Another fruit of this removal of the veil is "not handling the word of God deceitfully." (2 Cor. 4:2.) All ministers fly to the word of God, and try to prove their views and doctrines from that infallible source of truth; as they well know that by that unerring standard every doctrine must be tried. But some through ignorance, and others through wilfulness, handle it deceitfully. Not beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, and not being changed into the same image, they have no internal perception of the glory that shines forth in the gospel as a revelation of the wisdom, grace, and love of God, and therefore they cannot understand its spiritual meaning. Not seeing the glory of Christ as its central sun, through the veil of ignorance and unbelief being on their mind, they must needs, as the Apostle speaks elsewhere, "corrupt* the word of God." (2 Cor. 2:17.) Now whether this corrupting and adulterating of the word of God be done through a spirit of wilful enmity, love of filthy lucre, ambition, thirst for human applause, or spring from mental darkness, ignorance, and unbelief, the result, if not the sin, is the same—poisoning of the wells of truth. But the servant of Christ, first from divine light, God having shone into his heart to give him the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ; (2 Cor. 4:6;) and, secondly, from divine life, producing

and maintaining the fear of God in his breast, cannot handle the word of God deceitfully, or corrupt and adulterate it. In his view and feelings, to handle the word of God deceitfully is one of the worst of sins,—as gross, as grievous spiritually as for a servant to embezzle his master's goods, a steward to falsify his employer's accounts, a trustee to defraud the widow and the orphan of property entrusted to him on their behalf; nay, in some respects worse, inasmuch as God is greater than man, the soul than the body, and eternity than time. The honour of God, the witness of conscience, the blood of souls, the joys of heaven, the horrors of hell, all, all as with one voice testify against a dishonest minister and a dishonest ministry. How can he then handle the word of God deceitfully?

* The word "corrupt" means literally, deal with it as dishonest sellers of wine do with their wines; that is, adulterate it with wate [water?] or with drugs, as our modern publicans do their beer and liquors.

3. From this internal work and witness, testifying against all deceit and dishonesty, springs another fruit—"great plainness or 'boldness' (margin) of speech." (2 Cor. 3:12.) If we carefully read the context we shall see how the Apostle contrasts this great plainness, or boldness of speech, with the veil over the face of Moses: "Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech; and not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished." (2 Cor. 3:12, 13.) "And not as Moses." Why not? Because *that* was a veiled dispensation; and there was, therefore, a veil on the tongue, as a part of the face. The types and figures, rites, ceremonies, and sacrifices of that dispensation spoke as with a veiled voice; therefore obscurely, not plainly; timidly, not boldly. But the gospel is an unveiled dispensation. The veil taken off the face removes the muffle from the tongue,* and the servant of Christ speaks plainly. His speech and his preaching, like Paul's, are "not with enticing words of man's wisdom," wrapped up in, and obscured by high-flown expressions and flowery language, but "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power;" not "in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." (1 Cor. 2:4, 13.) They are thus the "words of the wise, which are as goads" to urge on and stimulate the sluggish soul, and "as nails fastened in the heart by the masters of assemblies, as given them from one Shepherd." (Eccles. 12:11.) And as they

use great "plainness," so do they use great "*boldness*" of speech (margin). There was, in a certain sense, a timidity under the law. The law, indeed, itself did not speak timidly, for it spoke with thunders and lightnings, and the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud; but it produced timidity in those who heard it. It gendered to bondage. (Gal. 4:24.) Only once a year, and then not without blood, could the high priest enter into the holiest place. (Heb. 9:7.) When given on Mount Sinai, bounds were set unto the people round about, and a caution given, "Take heed to yourselves that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it." When on the third day there were thunders and lightning, a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud, all the people that were in the camp trembled; and, as recorded by the Apostle, "so terrible was the sight that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake." (Exod. 19:16; Heb. 12:21.) Its spirit was "the spirit of bondage to fear;" (Rom. 8:15;) and its ministration, therefore, not only at first was in the same spirit, but this spirit of fear and bondage was ever kept up by displays of the justice and wrath of God against sin and disobedience, both in the wilderness and all through the history of that dispensation. But the gospel is a revelation of the full forgiveness of sins through the blood of the Lamb; a proclamation of mercy for the vilest and worst of transgressors; a message of reconciliation to enemies and aliens by wicked works; a declaration of free, sovereign, and superabounding grace, which, in its swelling tide, rises high above, and covers all the aboundings of sin of every name, shape, line, and magnitude. As then, this precious gospel is believed and received into the heart, it imparts and inspires a holy boldness, a gracious confidence, which manifests itself inwardly in the approaches of the soul to God, (Eph. 3:12; Heb. 4:16; 10:19, 22,) and, outwardly, by a bold, outspoken testimony. With what boldness did Peter and John speak, so that the rulers of the people and the elders of Israel marvelled at it. Nothing daunted by all their threatenings, how they and their fellow-worshippers prayed that "with all boldness they might speak the word of God;" and how, in immediate answer to prayer, they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and spake the word of God with boldness." (Acts 4:13, 29, 31.) So, no sooner was Christ revealed to the soul of Paul as the Son of God, than "he preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." (Acts 9:27.) A timid ministry is not the ministry of the gospel. Carnal boldness, presumptuous confidence, daring language, are, indeed, as foreign to its character and spirit, as sneaking cowardice or timid unfaithfulness; but a gracious, holy boldness, a fearless

disregard of smiles or frowns, character or consequences, opposition or approbation, pay or popularity, will always distinguish the servant of Christ from the common word of self-seeking, men-pleasing ministers. (Gal. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4-6.)

* The veil worn in Eastern climates is not such an apology for a veil as our English ladies wear, but a thick covering, completely hiding the features and muffling the voice.

4. But there is another fruit of beholding with unveiled face as in a glass the glory of the Lord; there is a being "*changed into the same image.*" Those whom God "did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son," (Rom. 8:29,) his suffering image here, his glorified image hereafter. It is of the first image of Christ, his image when here below, into which an unveiled view of his glory changes the believing soul. In the gospel, as in a glass, is seen the image of Christ as he appeared in the flesh. His dying, bleeding love; his pity and compassion to the children of men; his meekness and lowliness; his gentleness and calmness, for he neither strived, nor cried, nor did any man hear his voice in the street; his holy wisdom; the warmth of his zeal, yet the tenderness of his heart; his submission to the will of God in all things; his forbearance with his disciples; his endurance of the contradiction of sinners against himself; his condescension to all, his denial of help to none; his holiness without asceticism, and separation from the world without seclusion; his faithfulness without anger, and rebukes without bitterness; these, and other features of the image of Christ as beheld in the gospel, are, as it were, copied in the heart, and manifested by the words and actions of his servants. Has he not left us an example that we should follow his steps? (1 Pet. 2:21;) and do we not read: "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked?" (1 John 2:6.) Not that any one of his followers, whether private Christians or public ministers, can be so conformed to the image of Christ inwardly, or so reflect it outwardly as fully to carry out the words of the Apostle. But the Lord Jesus is the pattern set before us, which is to be looked at and into, as beaming, to a spiritual eye, with ineffable grace and glory. Nor let any one think that this can be effected by any will or wish, strength or wisdom of our own. This is far out of the sight of human eye, far beyond the reach of human hand. It is the especial work of the Holy Ghost to impress this image of Christ upon the heart; for the Apostle adds, "Even as by

the Spirit of the Lord." It is he who takes the veil off the heart; it is he who reveals Christ to the soul; it is he who manifests his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth; (John 1:14;) it is he who takes of the things of Christ, and shows them to his disciples; (John 16:15;) who testifies of him to them, and glorifies him in them; (John 15:26; 16:14.) This possession of the Spirit of Christ, this conformity to the image of Christ, this knowledge of the mind of Christ, (1 Cor. 2:16,) this walking after the example of Christ will always distinguish the servant of Christ from all others. It is true, lamentably and painfully true, that there is not one of them who does not fall short, woefully short, of this inward and outward image of Christ. But there are some faint glimmerings of this image in all his true servants; for why do we love them, respect them, receive them, or hear them? Is it not for the resemblance that they bear to their Lord, from the knowledge that they have of him, from his gracious words that they speak, and from his Spirit which they manifest? What other claim have they upon our notice or attention? The image of Christ which we see in their words, in their spirit, in their actions, may be very weak, and, as it were, broken, like the image of the sun in ruffled water, but it is *there*, or we have no warrant to receive them as his servants: for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his;" (Rom. 8:9;) and if there come any unto us and bring not the doctrine of Christ, to know and abide in which is to have both the Father and the Son, we are not to receive him into our house, or bid him God speed. (2 John 9, 10.) This may seem hard doctrine, and to draw a very narrow line; but the question is, Is it scriptural truth? Is it according to the unerring standard of the word of God? And must we lower that standard because so few can come up to it, and, if rigidly adhered to, it seems to cut off so many from being true ministers of Christ? Every point that we have advanced, every step that we have taken, has been rigidly after the word of truth. We well knew when we undertook the task that our views would appear rigid, narrow, and exclusive; and simply for this reason, because they would strip so many of their claims and pretensions to be counted servants of God. But what other standard can we take than the word of God? And if we take that, we must take it in its purity, lest we do the very thing which we have been condemning—"corrupt the word of God," adulterate it either by lowering and watering away all its spirit and strength, or by drugging it with stupefying ingredients to please the palate and benumb the brain. If a man bring with him neither the doctrine of Christ in his mouth, nor the Spirit of Christ in his heart, nor the example of Christ in

his life, will any one kindly tell us what claim he has on our ears, our respect, or our affections? The question is not whether we are cutting off this or that minister, but whether our standard of receiving any man whatever as a servant of Christ shall be the word of God or the word of man. For, be it observed, we have not set up a high standard. We have said nothing about a man's depth of experience, clearness of call to the work, ability in it, or blessing upon it. All we have done or wish to do is to set up a true standard, or rather to point out, from the word of God, the true nature and character of the ministry of the gospel; and upon this ground to urge that, unless a man come to us with those marks, be they strongly or faintly stamped upon him, we are not called upon to receive him as a servant of Christ.

But it may be said, "Yes, we fully agree with you that the word of God must be our only standard; nor do we object to the chapter which you have taken to show from it the nature and character of the ministry of the gospel. But are we bound to take *your* exposition of it? You have laboured hard to impress *your* views upon us; but we are not tied to your views or anybody else's. Do allow us to have an opinion and a judgment of our own." Unquestionably; we give as well as claim the right of private judgment. To refuse this is the very essence of Popery, and foreign alike to our intentions and spirit. We want no one to call us master, or believe anything because *we* believe or assert it. All that we can do, or wish to do, is to bring forward and open to the best of our ability the word of God. In reading the writings of good men, we have felt that we can receive nothing from them but what they show from the word of truth. Let us be read and judged by the same rule. Compare all that we advance with the Scriptures. Then let our views be received or rejected as each man's own judgment or conscience may approve or condemn.

The two remaining points of the Apostle's comparison between the two dispensations we shall handle with great brevity, as they are, in fact, involved in that point of contrast which has formed the subject of our present article. These are, the one, that the law is done away, but the gospel abideth; and the other, that the law leaves the hearer dead in his sins, whilst the gospel leads him on, step by step, from glory to glory.

6. The passing away of the old dispensation is a remarkable feature of its character. Whatever glory, therefore, it might have, it was transient and

transitory. This the Apostle clearly states: "For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious." (2 Cor. 3:10, 11.) It is "done away." It was symbolised when first given by a tent or tabernacle, as an emblem that it was not to be of stable endurance. It became in course of time old and worn out; not in itself, for, like its typical Mediator, as a revelation of the justice and anger of God against sin, its eye never becomes dim, nor its natural force abated; (Deut. 34:7;) but "weak through the flesh," (Rom. 8:3,) that is, of those to whom it was given. Therefore, as decaying and waxing old, when it had accomplished its purpose, and the Son of God had fulfilled it, it vanished away. (Heb. 8:13.) But the gospel abideth, and will abide to the end of the world. To mix, then, law and gospel, is to mix the decrepitude of old age with the vigour of ever-blooming youth, death with life, flesh with spirit, and beggarly elements with the Person and work of the Son of God. We cannot now enter fully on this point, but it is of vital importance, especially at this present time, when Popery, which is but a resuscitation of the old Levitical dispensation, in its priests, its sacrifice of the mass, its forms, vestments, and ceremonies, is knocking hard for admission into our high places.

7. Equally brief must we be on the last point of contrast, the leading on "from glory to glory." This is intimated by the words, "But we all, with open face 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." (2 Cor. 3:18.) The words "from glory to glory" may mean either from one glory of Christ seen in him to a corresponding glory reflected in the soul, or from one degree of grace in the heart to another degree of grace. As both these interpretations are admissible, and indeed combine and coalesce in one, we shall take them both.

We have already shown that a view of the glory of Christ in the glass of the gospel has a transforming efficacy. There is indeed no other way of an inward conformity to his image. But he is so supremely, so ineffably and infinitely glorious, that only a few beams and rays of his glory strike the eye when the Spirit takes off the veil and manifests him to the heart. Yet each ray has a penetrating, enlightening, and transforming efficacy. Now the more that the glorious gospel is looked into, and the more that the glory of Christ is seen in it, the more there will be of this transforming by the renewing of the mind.

(Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23, 24; Col. 3:10.) For the most part we learn the knowledge of Christ by degrees and usually by slow degrees, for we are dull scholars, needing line upon line; and after all it is but here a little and there a little that we do know after many years of school discipline. (Isa. 28:10.) But there is this peculiar feature in the gospel, as distinct from the law, that the more the law is looked into, the darker is the mind, the heavier the bondage, the more confused the thoughts, the stronger the corruptions of the flesh. You may look at and into the law till you sink into black despair; and the deeper you sink, the more will it press you down. But the more you look at and into the gospel, and the more that the Person and work, blood and righteousness, grace and glory of the Lord Jesus are seen in it, the more light you will have in your mind, the more life in your soul, the more stability in your thoughts, the more peace in your conscience, and the more love in your affections.

But it is time for us to pause, though the subject would invite us on till we knew not where to stop. In our next paper we shall hope to gather up our threads, and complete our sketch of the nature and character of the ministry of the gospel.

IV.

In resuming our subject—the *Nature and Character* of the Ministry of the Gospel, we feel more and more, at each advancing step, the urgent necessity that is laid upon us of adhering as closely as possible to the word of truth in all that we bring forward upon a matter so difficult and yet so weighty. Let us name a few reasons which impose this necessity upon us.

1. As the ministry of the gospel is purely and wholly an ordinance of divine appointment, it is only from the word of God that its true nature and character can be clearly ascertained.

2. Our own views of the ministry, in its various bearings, have been, we hope we may say, all founded on the word of truth. We have found, from long experience, that in no other way could our mind be clearly instructed, our heart firmly established, or our conscience fully satisfied. We have in times past read upon this point, as on many others, the writings of men; but we have

ever found that when we turned from the word of God to listen to the word of man, our mind got full of confusion, and, instead of obtaining light, peace, and satisfaction, we reaped little else but doubt, darkness, and uncertainty.

3. But thirdly. We have undertaken a task of no little difficulty, and yet of great importance. We have not only to satisfy our own mind, and enjoy the verdict of our own approving conscience, under the teaching and the testimony of the blessed Spirit, but we have to satisfy the judgment and commend ourselves to the conscience of a large circle of gracious readers, who can and will receive nothing from us or from any other man which is not fully proved from, and confirmed by the word of God.

4. There are also "many adversaries," from whom we can expect little else but opposition and contradiction, and against whom our only defence must be the truth as our shield and buckler.

5. But fifthly. The ministry is with us and many others not a mere matter of theory and speculation, but one of vital and practical importance, in which we require to be specially instructed, held up, and supported by the unerring word of God, that we may not be drawn aside by the craft and subtlety of man, or by the deceitfulness of our own hearts, but move and act according to his revealed will and the dictates of a tender and enlightened conscience. We are surrounded on every side by men professing to be ministers of the gospel; and we are thus often placed in circumstances where we must, as a practical matter, come to some decision in our own mind who are and who are not sent servants of Jesus Christ. Now unless we have, more or less, an instructed mind, an established judgment, and an approving conscience, we cannot walk uprightly and equitably either before God or man, when we have to act, and that decidedly, upon this important point. This takes a very wide sweep, and may embrace in its circle very many of our readers. Pastors, deacons, and members of churches are especially and vitally interested in this matter. Indeed, we may say that all who know and love the truth, all who desire to preach or hear the gospel preached in its purity and its power, all who are jealous of the Lord's honour and glory, all who are seeking the good of their own soul and that of others, all who hate and abhor error and evil, all who feel a deep and warm interest in the cause of God and truth with which they are especially connected, all who grieve over the declension visible on every side,

all who are anxious for the rising generation, and that they may hand down the gospel which they have received untainted and unadulterated all such as these, and we trust we have many such among our readers, find and feel that it is with them not a light question to decide who are and who are not the true servants of Christ. Indeed, it often becomes a matter of urgent practical necessity with those who wish to act in the fear of God. How can a church, for instance, choose a pastor, deacons procure a supply for a vacant pulpit, members join or continue united with a church, without bringing this point to some practical conclusion? Is it not, in all those cases, of very great importance to know who are and who are not servants of Jesus Christ? It is also a matter which deeply concerns the conscience; for if to receive one of Christ's servants is to receive Christ, and to despise one of Christ's servants is to despise Christ, (Luke 10:16; John 13:20,) we may be much perplexed in mind, if we do not actually sin against the Lord, unless we have some spiritual judgment and discernment in this important matter. These considerations will amply show how necessary it is for us to move at every step in the fullest harmony with the word of truth.

With these prefatory remarks, which, we trust, will not be considered uncalled for or out of place, we now resume our subject.

We attempted to show in our last two papers, by an exposition of the Apostle's argument, 2 Cor. 3, the distinctive glories of the law and the gospel, and that in some particulars the glory of the new dispensation outshone that of the old. There are, of course, other points of contrast between them; but we dwelt particularly upon those which are brought forward in that chapter. But though we thus insisted upon the superior and surpassing glory of the gospel, let no one gather from that any idea that we think lightly of, or disparage, or set aside the glory of the law. The law, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, as applied to the conscience in its curse, spirituality, and condemnation, has a glory peculiarly its own, for in it the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness. It is the ministration of condemnation, and death; it brings the sinner in guilty before God; it stops his mouth, cuts to pieces all his righteousness, beats out of his hand all excuses, reaches to the thoughts and intents of his heart, and slays him as to any hope or help in self. There is a glory in this; for as God is glorious in his justice, his holiness, his anger against transgression and sin, the law is glorious as the revelation of his

righteous displeasure, and the means, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, of making it feelingly and experimentally known. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." (Rom. 3:20.) "Where no law is, there is no transgression." (Rom. 4:15.) But if there be no knowledge of sin, no conviction of it, no guilt under it, where can there be room for any manifested pardon of it, or any deliverance from its guilt, fear, burden, or bondage? The gospel, it is true, is more glorious, as revealing pardon, justification, reconciliation, and salvation, and especially as giving the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But the law, as revealing God's justice, holiness, majesty, and terrible indignation against sin to the conscience by the Holy Spirit, has a glory of its own, only inferior to the glory of the gospel. "The Lord killeth and maketh alive; he bringeth low and lifteth up." (1 Sam. 2:6, 7.) "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." (Rom. 7:12.) Is there no glory in this? The law is spiritual; by its spirituality the inmost thoughts and intents of the heart are brought to light and condemned; and by its curse falling upon every one who continueth not in all things written in the law to do them, all hope of salvation by works is effectually cut away. It is needful to bear these things in mind, lest in setting forth the superior glory of the gospel, we should tacitly seem to set aside the glory of the law. These considerations are not, indeed, necessary for the clear statement of our present subject, and yet we have thought it best to make them, lest it should appear from our silence on the point that we had wholly passed them by. We now, then, advance a step further in our attempt to unfold the nature and character of the ministry of the gospel.

There is a necessary connection between the gospel and the ministry of the gospel. If, then, the gospel be so glorious, the ministry of the gospel will be glorious also; for the gospel is reflected upon and made known by the ministry: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace." (Isa. 52:7.) But why should his very feet be beautiful? Because of the beauty of the good tidings which he brings. We find, therefore, the Apostle immediately after he had said: "But we all, with open face 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," (2 Cor. 3:18,) adds, "Therefore, seeing we have this *ministry*, as we have received mercy, we faint not." (2 Cor. 4:1.) He thus connects the gospel with the ministry of the gospel. To all believers the gospel is the ministration of

righteousness, liberty, &c.; for through it these blessings are communicated to their soul. But all believers are not privileged to minister in the gospel, nor to proclaim with authority, as servants of Christ, the good tidings which have gladdened their hearts. They are "the body of Christ, and members in particular." "But are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers?" No. God hath set some in the Church to fulfil these offices; (1 Cor. 12:27-29;) and those only who are "allowed, (or rather 'approved,') of God to be put in trust with the gospel," (1 Thess. 2:4,) can preach it with acceptance. The testimony of God in his word still stands good: "I sent them not nor commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord." (Jer. 23:32.)

But now comes an important question. How shall those trustees of the gospel be able to testify of the glory of the gospel so that power, unction, and savour may rest on their testimony? The Apostle shall answer this question. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6.) He compares here the shining of God into the heart of his servants, to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ, with that wondrous work in creation, when God said, "Let there be light, and there was light." This brings us at once to this point, that unless a man has had the shining in of this light of the knowledge of the glory of God into his heart, he cannot know the gospel experimentally, and, therefore, cannot preach it experimentally. A minister is not only a servant of Jesus Christ, a trustee, and an ambassador, but also a witness. As none could be an Apostle but a witness of his resurrection, (Acts 1:22,) so none can be a minister of the gospel who has not seen by faith a risen Christ, and beheld his glory at the right hand of the Father. The Lord, therefore, said to Paul when he made him a minister, "But rise, and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee." (Acts 26:16.) He was to bear witness of the things which he had seen, and of those things in which the Lord would further appear unto him. This was confirmed by the words of Ananias: "And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard." (Acts 22:14, 15.) Similar is the language of Peter: "And we are his witnesses of these

things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him." (Acts 5:32.) Of the false prophets we read that "they follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing." (Ezek. 13:3.) Having, therefore, "seen nothing," that is, of the Person, work, grace, glory, bounty, and blessedness of the Lord—having seen nothing of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, they can witness of nothing. Thus their ministry is "a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart." (Jer. 14:14.) How different from this is the language 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; (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;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:1, 2, 3.)

Now if we look at the Apostle's words in which he speaks of this divine shining into the heart, we shall see its connection with the gospel, and, therefore, the ministry of the gospel: "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." He calls it "our gospel," that is, the gospel which he and his fellow-apostles preached, and "the glorious gospel of Christ." When, therefore, God shines into the heart to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ, it is in the light of the glorious gospel of Christ that this knowledge is given.

We have thus arrived, step by step, to this point 1. That the gospel is a glorious dispensation, as containing in its bosom the gift of the Holy Ghost, the communication of divine life, justification by Christ's righteousness, liberty of spirit, a revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, a perpetual permanency, and a transforming efficacy. These seven points have passed successively under our notice, and, therefore, need not be further dwelt upon. 2. That the ministry of the gospel is a proclamation, a preaching, a testifying of this glorious gospel, and is, in the hands of the Spirit, a blessed means of communicating to the souls of men the rich blessings which the gospel contains in its bosom. 3. That those only can truly testify of this glorious gospel into whose hearts God has shined, to give them the knowledge of his

glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

We are brought by these considerations to see something of the nature and character of the ministry of the gospel, that it consists in preaching Christ from an experimental knowledge of the glory of God as shining forth in his Person and work. The word "face," we may here remark, may be rendered "Person," for it is in the Person of Christ that the glory of God is seen, he being "the brightness of his glory and the express image of his Person." (Heb. 1:3.) What was the grand subject of Paul's ministry? Christ. "Whom we preach." (Col. 1:28.) But to preach Christ is to preach the whole of Christ—Christ as "the Way, the Truth, and the Life;" Christ as "of God made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." It is to preach the Person of Christ, and therefore his Deity and eternal Sonship; his holy and pure humanity; his bloodshedding, sacrifice, and death; his glorious resurrection and ascension; his present advocacy and mediation; his sovereign rule as King; his prevailing intercession as Priest; his wise and holy teaching as Prophet; his second coming without sin to salvation, and his judging of the world in righteousness. Christ, therefore, is the sum and substance, the object and subject, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of the gospel. All its glad tidings are tidings of him; its message of peace, its embassy of mercy, its proclamation of grace are from him; its power, its authority, its influence are by him. All its doctrines, all its promises, all its precepts, all its ordinances derive their very being, and all their virtue and validity from him, and testify of him.

We see, then, how comprehensive the ministry of the gospel is, as embracing all that the Holy Ghost has revealed in the word of the Person, work, bloodshedding, obedience, life, death, and resurrection, grace and glory, beauty and blessedness of Immanuel, God with us. All that he is as God and the Son of God, all that he is as man and the Son of man, all that he was, did, and suffered on earth, and all that he is and does in heaven, so far as it is revealed in the word of truth, is the gospel; for it is all full of precious news and happy tidings for the people of God.

Now, that the ministry of the gospel may be in full accordance with the gospel thus revealed and brought to light in the Person and work of the Son of God, and stored up in the Scriptures which testify of him, it must be a clear

reflection of the grace and glory thus manifested. And not only so, but it must be penetrated and imbued with the Spirit and grace of the gospel. Besides which, it must exhibit the sanctifying, transforming influence of the gospel, as a revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

These three points are closely connected with, and flow immediately from beholding with unveiled face, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord.

Let us look at this a little more closely. Three things of the greatest importance in the ministry of the gospel are secured thereby: 1. *Purity of doctrine*. What room can there be for error, if we are privileged to see, with unveiled face, the glory of Christ? Such a view of his glory must chase away all darkness and all error. Lies and falsehood cannot live in a heart into which God has shone, to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. 2. Secondly, there is secured thereby a gracious, saving *experience* of the power of the gospel. What experience is to be compared with the blessed shining in of God into the heart? This chases away all airy notions and dim speculations, all mere letter knowledge and doctrinal theory, and becomes the well-spring of a life of faith in the Son of God. 3. Thirdly, the *sanctifying, renewing, and transforming* influence of this beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord secures vital holiness and practical godliness.

We thus see that the ministry of the gospel is not a mere preaching of Christ with the utmost soundness and clearness of doctrine, but embraces also an experimental knowledge of the grace and glory of Christ, that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord, and a life, walk, conduct, and conversation corresponding thereto.

Are we not thus brought to the good old division—~~doctrine~~, experience, and practice? We may have arrived at this point by a circuitous way; but we believe it has been step by step according to the word of truth.

But what a wonderful field does this open for the servants of God to walk in. What room is here afforded for the exercise of every gift and every grace. Take the whole range of divine truth, from the glorious Trinity, the sovereignty of God, the everlasting covenant, the election of the vessels of mercy, down to the simplest statements which fell from the Lord's lips in

addressing the multitude. The ministry of the gospel embraces them all. Take the whole range of Christian experience, from the first sight of the convinced sinner to the last hallelujah of the expiring saint. The ministry of the gospel enters into each and all. Take the whole of vital, practical godliness; range through every precept of the New Testament. The ministry of the gospel embraces and enforces every precept there revealed. What room is thus afforded for all the ability, all the gifts, all the wisdom, all the discernment, all the experience, all the power, and all the usefulness of all the true ministers of Jesus Christ. There need be no grudging here. The field is wide enough for thousands of ministers, were the Lord but pleased to send them, and raise up a people to hear and receive them. Whatever talent, learning, or education a man may have, here it may be put to a good use. Whatever gifts of utterance a man may possess, here is a wide, effectual door for it. A Peter, who had been on the mount of transfiguration; a Paul, who had been caught up into the third heaven; a Stephen "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost;" an Apollos, "an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures;" a Barnabas, the very son of consolation; a holy John, who had lain in the Lord's bosom, and many of less known name and fame found room in this field for the exercise of every gift and every grace bestowed upon them by the Holy Ghost. O, our unbelieving hearts; O, our narrow minds; O, our slender abilities, weak gifts, and feeble graces! Let none complain of the narrowness of the gospel field. Is the love of God in the gift of his dear Son a narrow love? Is the Person of Immanuel a narrow object of faith? Is his work, his blood, his righteousness, his sufferings and death, his resurrection and present intercession? Is his compassion, faithfulness, and tender mercy? Is his presence, Spirit, and ceaseless watchfulness and care? Is his second coming in the clouds of heaven—are these wondrous and divine realities, the present support and comfort, all the salvation and all the desire of thousands of poor and needy followers of the Lamb, narrow, limited, contracted? O shame be upon us if we think for a moment that the ministry of the gospel, whose high, holy, and happy privilege it is to testify of these divine and heavenly realities, is a narrow field. Let us rather, if engaged in it as servants of Christ, beg of the Lord to enlarge our hearts and open our mouths; and, if hearers, that he would bless their testimony to our soul, that we may see and feel more and more what a glorious gospel the gospel of Christ is. Indeed, it must be glorious, as revealing in a way beyond every other way, and illuminating, with a lustre surpassing the brightness of the sun, the most glorious attributes of God.

1. Is God glorious in his *holiness*? (Exod. 15:11.) The gospel reveals this holiness, sets it visibly forth, and brings it conspicuously before our eyes in the Person of "the Holy One of Israel," as he appeared on earth, in our blessed Lord, who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." (Heb. 7:26.) The gospel is declared to be the "holy commandment delivered unto us;" (2 Pet. 2:21;) our calling by it is a "holy calling;" (2 Tim. 1:9;) our conversation in it a "holy conversation;" (2 Pet. 3:11;) as the elect of God we are "holy and beloved;" (Col. 3:12;) our very bodies as temples of the Holy Ghost should be presented "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God;" (1 Cor. 3:17; Rom. 12:1;) and the gracious Lord will, at the great day, present all his saints "faultless before the presence of his glory, holy, and unblameable, and unreprouvable in his sight." (Col. 1:22.)

2. Is God glorious in his *wisdom*? The gospel is the greatest display of the wisdom of God, which he has ever afforded or ever will afford. It harmonises all his attributes, reconciles his justice and mercy, pardons sin and yet condemns it, saves the sinner and sanctifies him, defeated Satan by the seed of the woman whom he had tempted, and by death destroyed him who had the power of death. Angels read in the gospel the wisdom of God; (Eph. 3:10;) and whilst it outwits, destroys, and brings to nought all the wisdom of this world, it is "the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which he ordained before the world unto our glory." (1 Cor. 1:18-24; 2:6, 7.)

3. Is he glorious in *power*? The gospel is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." (Rom. 1:16.) "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." (1 Cor. 1:18.) The speech, therefore, and the preaching of the gospel, is "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power that the faith of the hearers should not stand in the wisdom of men, but the power of God." (1 Cor. 2:4, 5.)

4. Is he glorious in his *love*? Where is there such a display of his love as in the gift of his dear Son, such a revelation of it as in the Person of Jesus Christ, such a proclamation of it as in the gospel? This is the very language of the gospel: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John

3:16.) And again: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10.)

5. Is God glorified in having a people to love and obey him, and *bring forth fruit*? "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." (John 15:8.) But how can this fruit be brought forth, except by being dead to the law, and married to Christ in and by the gospel? "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." (Rom. 7:4.)

Thus in every way the gospel may well be called "the glorious gospel of Christ." And how blessed is it that the glory of God, which is, and must be the great end of all his works, should so harmonise with the salvation of our souls that God is more glorified in pardoning our sins than in punishing them, in saving our souls than in damning them, in taking us to heaven than in sending us to hell.

What glorious tidings are these for the servants of Christ to proclaim. Well might the Lord bid his disciples, "go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Well might he bid them in the words of the prophet, "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you." (Isa. 35:3, 4.) And again, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." (Isa. 40:1, 2.) What tidings to tell to poor guilty sinners, that mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other; that God can be just, scrupulously and inflexibly just, and yet the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus; that there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus; that none shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect; that all things work together for their good; and that neither death nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This; then, is the gospel—this the nature and character of the ministry of the gospel. Happy they who from a sweet experience of its power preach this gospel; happy they who hear, believe, and obey this gospel; happy they who live this gospel, and happy they who die in the faith, hope, and love of this gospel.

V.

We hope that we shall not weary our readers by dwelling at so great a length on the subject now before us. We would gladly indeed bring our "Meditations on the Ministry of the Gospel" into a shorter compass, but two things much hinder the fulfilment of this desire: 1st, the wide extent and deep importance of the subject itself, which will therefore hardly admit of a brief and superficial treatment; 2dly, the character of our own mind, which cannot be satisfied except by entering thoroughly into every point of divine truth which presents itself to our view, so as not only fully to understand it ourselves, but to endeavour that our readers should fully understand it also. But to do this properly, space is required; and this, when readers are not deeply interested in the subject, or do not see the importance of the various points brought before them, often appears unnecessarily prolix. Bear with us, then, kind readers, if we seem to protract our subject to any undue degree of wearisome length. Writers, like preachers, are not often fair and impartial judges of the length of their own compositions; and not being weary themselves, can hardly think they may weary their readers. We will do our best to condense our thoughts and avoid undue prolixity, but we cannot promise any such brevity as would impair the completeness of the subject, or leave any part obscure. But if, in our anxiety to do this, we should be a little, or more than a little tedious, you have this remedy against us, which you have not against the preacher; that you can read as much or as little as you like, and when and where you like, and are not tied to your seat till we have bestowed all our tediousness upon you.

Following, then, the order laid down by us in our first paper, the next point for our consideration is,

3. The *ends* for which the ministry of the gospel was established.

These ends we may conveniently divide into two:

1. *Ultimate*, and 2, *Proximate*. Let us explain the difference between them. An *ultimate* end is that for the sake of which anything is undertaken. A *proximate* end is that which, though not the primary object of the undertaking, yet is obtained at the same time in an intermediate way. Take the following illustration of the difference between them. In desiring to preach the gospel, the chief or ultimate end of one on whose mind the work of the ministry was laid would be the glory of God. To exalt, magnify, and set him on high who had done so great things for his soul would be his highest aim and object, and would be therefore his *ultimate* end. But seeing the misery of those who have no hope, and are without God in the world, or feeling an ardent love to the suffering saints of God, he might desire also to preach the gospel that he might be an instrument of good to the souls of men. This would be a *proximate* or intermediate end, as the glory of God would be his ultimate or final end. These two ends generally meet together in the breast of every servant of God, and their fulfilment crowns his ministry. He might have very little success in the work, and yet find his happiness in the glory of God. But if his ministry were blessed, it would much increase his joy. We have a beautiful example of this in the words of our great Exemplar, the blessed Lord himself, as prophetically addressed to his heavenly Father, when, foreseeing his rejection by the literal Israel, he thus rested in God: "Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain; yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God." (Isa. 49:4.) But the Father not only accepted his work, as done for his glory, but gave him, as his reward, to become a light to lighten the Gentiles, that he might be his salvation unto the ends of the earth. This simple illustration may give us a key to the ends for which the ministry of the gospel was established. They are, as we have already said, ultimate and proximate. The ultimate end was the glory of God; the proximate end was the benefit and blessing of the Church. We will consider these two ends separately; and first the *ultimate* end.

That all God's counsels, all his ways, and all his works in creation, in providence, and in grace, are for the display of his own glory is a truth so firmly established in every believer's heart that it is scarcely necessary to bring forward on its behalf, as might be easily done, any great amount of Scripture proof. And yet a few testimonies may be desirable, as we never wish

to advance any point without a "Thus saith the Lord" to establish it on a scriptural basis. Let it suffice, then, to quote two testimonies from the Old Testament and two from the New. Speaking to Pharaoh, God said: "And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth." (Ex. 9:16.) Why was this mighty king raised up and suffered to oppress the people of God? That the name of God might be declared—that is, glorified, in all the earth. And what said the Lord to Moses when he interceded for rebellious Israel? "And the Lord said, I have pardoned, according to thy word; but as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." (Num. 14:20, 21.) Whether, then, Pharaoh was hardened, or Israel forgiven, the glory of God was the ultimate end of each. Now hear Paul's testimony as regards the dispensation of his grace, and see how the glory of God and the good pleasure of his will is the ultimate end of his predestinating purposes: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved." (Eph. 1:5, 6.) And again: "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will; that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ." (Eph. 1:11, 12.)

But the exaltation of his dear Son is so intimately connected with, so wrapped up and involved in the display of this glory of God that the ministry of the gospel can have for its ultimate end nothing less than the setting of the crown on the head of Jesus. On his head are many crowns, (Rev. 19:12,) and he deserves and will ever wear them all. But the crown which belongs to him as the Redeemer of the Church by his own blood is the crown of crowns. Now, that to set this crown upon his head is the great, the ultimate end of the ministry of the gospel none will deny who know what the gospel is; and cold and dead must be the heart which beats in a minister's bosom, which does not feel that the glory of Jesus is his highest aim and best reward. It is beautiful to see the union between the glory of God and the exaltation of his dear Son. This is the decree which secures and harmonises both: "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." (Psa. 2:6.) And then follows the promise: "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." (Psa. 2:8.) So in that memorable prayer,

(John 17,) our Lord said to his heavenly Father, "Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee;" and again: "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." (John 17:4, 5.) Similarly he prayed, on a previous occasion, "Father, glorify thy name." And what an immediate answer! "Then came there a voice from heaven saying, I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." (John 12:28.)

But we shall not dwell on these points, as their consideration would take us too far afield, and shall, therefore, come at once to the proximate or intermediate ends, for which the ministry of the gospel was established, *the benefit and blessing of the Church of God*. Yet we cannot forbear dwelling for a few moments on the blessed union of these two ends. As the glory of God, and the exaltation of his dear Son unite and harmonise, so is there a union and a harmony between the ultimate and proximate ends for which the ministry of the gospel was established. We showed in our illustration of the work of the ministry, as laid on a man's heart, the union of two ends, the ultimate and the proximate, the glory of God and the good of souls. But in a much higher sense do the ultimate and proximate ends for which the ministry of the gospel was established meet and harmonise in the bosom of God. The union of these two ends, the blessed harmony which subsists between them, is even now, as realised by faith, a subject of thankful adoration, and will hereafter, when fully developed, be an eternal source of unutterable joy and praise. That God should establish his glory in the very heavens by taking into his blissful presence an innumerable multitude of redeemed sinners; that his highest justice and deepest mercy, his ineffable holiness and surpassing grace should meet in the Person and work of his dear Son, and issue in the everlasting salvation of millions of sinners, sunk as low as sin and Satan combined could sink them; O, the depths of wisdom, love, and power, displayed in this mystery of godliness! That God should be glorified, as it is the ultimate end of all his ways and works, as it was the end which our gracious Lord had ever before his eyes when here below, so it is the delight and joy of heaven. Compared with this, redemption itself sinks into insignificance. Better that all should perish, better that earth with all its multitudes should sink for ever into the bottomless pit, than that the glory of God should receive a tarnish or a stain. But that the salvation of the redeemed should redound to the glory of

God; that there should be so blessed a union, so thorough and perfect a harmony between the glory of God and the salvation of sinners through the blood and righteousness of his dear Son; that, as he said to Moses when he revealed to him his glory, it was to "keep mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin;" this will make the eternal anthem swell its highest notes of praise; this will be the highest joy of those who will see him as he is, without a veil between.

We come now, then, to the *proximate* or intermediate end, for which the ministry of the gospel was established—the *benefit and blessing* of the *Church of God*.

This point is clearly and beautifully set forth in various parts of the Epistles of the New Testament, especially in what are called the pastoral Epistles, viz., those to Timothy and that to Titus. The counsels and exhortations given by the Apostle to these two servants of Christ, form and embody a complete code of ministerial instruction, and should be pondered over, and attended to, by every minister who desires to know the will of God and do it. But we think that in no part of the New Testament are the ends for which the ministry was established so fully and clearly laid down as in Eph. 4:8-16. We shall, therefore, chiefly confine ourselves to the opening of this portion of the word of truth.

Our blessed Lord in his last interview with his disciples, "commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." (Acts 1:5.) This gift of the Holy Ghost we have already shown was necessary to make the ministry a living word to the souls of men. But the blessed Spirit thus given came down in diversities of gifts: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." (Eph. 4:11.) But though the gifts were different, yet the end was the same: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph. 4:12.) Three ends are here named. Let us examine them.

i. The first is "for the perfecting of the saints." But before we enter upon this

point it may be as well to define the meaning of both terms. What is meant, then, by "the saints?" Undoubtedly those who are "sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called;" (Jude 1;) who "by the will of God are sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all;" (Heb. 10:10;) in a word, the members of the mystical body of Christ, "chosen in him before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy and without blame before him in love." (Eph. 1:4.) By the word "perfecting" we may understand several things, but chiefly everything which relates to the calling, gathering in, and promoting the spiritual benefit of these members of the body of Christ. We will look at some of these benefits and blessings.

The word translated "perfecting" means making a thing ready, putting it fully in order, and rendering it complete. It is so used of creation. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were *framed* by the word of God." (Heb. 11:3.) It is, therefore, applied to the sacred body of Jesus in the words, "a body hast thou *prepared* me," *margin*, "fitted." (Heb. 10:5.) So, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast *perfected* praise;" (Matt. 21:16;) in the Hebrew, "*founded*." From this idea of preparing or framing, preparing in the mind, and forming by actual operation, comes that of *putting together*, so as to make a perfect and complete whole. We, therefore, find the word used as expressive of union of heart and judgment: "That ye be *perfectly joined together* in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1 Cor. 1:10.) Thence springs a further idea of *growth* and *development* in beauty and completeness: "*make you perfect*;" (1 Pet. 5:10;) "*make you perfect* in every good work." (Heb. 13:21.) Let us see whether we have now gained any clearer idea as to the meaning of the expression, "the perfecting of the saints." Take these three meanings into your consideration: 1, that of framing, which is chiefly done by putting things together; 2, so putting them together that they may fit in well with each other; 3, so fitting together that, with this original framing and neat junction of the various parts, there may be a gradual growth and development of the whole into such perfection as it is susceptible of. To gather suitable materials; to put these materials neatly and nicely together; and to keep adding stone to stone and layer to layer, till the whole building be complete in all its parts,—to do these three things thoroughly and well is "the perfecting of the saints."

Let us consider those three things somewhat more closely, as it may throw

light upon the ends for which the ministry of the gospel was established.

1. The first step is the *gathering of suitable materials*. These are already prepared in the mind of God, yea, prepared before the foundation of the world. Paul, therefore, says, "And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory." (Rom. 9:23.) But they are to be gathered, and usually one by one. (Isa. 27:12.) The stones are still in the quarry of nature, and have to be gathered out thence that they may be "as corner-stones polished after the similitude of a palace." The ministry of the gospel is God's appointed means of gathering these stones out. What a wonderful proof of this was afforded on the day of Pentecost, when under one sermon three thousand were not merely pricked, but pierced (as the word literally means, and should have been translated) in their heart, and thus quickened into life, and called out of darkness into God's marvellous light. How clearly also this part of the work of the ministry was given to Paul in that memorable commission spoken to his inmost soul by the Lord himself, when he appeared to him in majesty and glory at Damascus gate: "But rise, and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, 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 them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." (Acts 26:16-18.) If proof were needed of the fulfilment of this commission to the very letter, and of the power of the ministry of the gospel to call sinners to repentance, we need only follow Paul from city to city, and from country to country, and see how almost everywhere the vilest and worst of sinners, sinners such as he so graphically describes 1 Cor. 6:9, 10, were by the words of his lips turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven. God, indeed, may work upon a sinner's conscience without the direct application of the word; (1 Pet. 3:1;) but his usual way is to call sinners by it, and especially by it as preached by his servants. Peter, therefore, says: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." (1 Pet. 1:23.) And similar is the testimony of James: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." (James 1:18.)

We have, indeed, to lament that in our day there is so little of this conversion work going on, so few striking instances of the power of the preached word on the hearts of sinners, as we read of in the days of Bunyan, Whitefield, Huntington," &c. Nothing, indeed, more plainly shows the poverty and barrenness of the ministry of our day than the feebleness of its effects. We do not altogether lack men of truth, though from deaths and infirmities their number seems sadly diminishing; the gospel is preached with greater or less degree of clearness and faithfulness in various parts of the land; there is a spirit of hearing in many places, and a manifest hungering for a more powerful gospel, and more richly and ably furnished ministers; and yet, alas! judging from the effects, how rarely does it seem, as in days of old, preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

2. But now comes the second meaning, which we have pointed out as a part of "the perfecting of the saints." This we said was the *fitting* or *joining* of the stones, when gathered, *neatly and nicely together*. How then is this accomplished by the ministry of the gospel? Thus. As the Lord the Spirit makes it the power of God unto salvation; as by it faith is given, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God;" as Christ is revealed unto and embraced by faith thus given, and this faith works by love, a union is produced in the soul of the hearer thus blessed to the dear family of God. Thus, as the ministry first gathers out the stones, and, as we shall presently show, hacks and hews them into right form and shape, so it also brings together the living stones thus gathered and thus prepared, and unites them to the other living stones, and thus, as Peter speaks, they "are built up a spiritual house."

This is a very essential part of the ministry of the word, and is intimately connected with the spiritual blessings which the gospel holds out and instrumentally communicates. The two works are distinct, as distinct in the ministry as calling and deliverance in the soul of the hearer. Some of God's servants are more blessed in the first work, the calling of sinners, the quickening of them into divine life, the first gathering of the stones. Others are more blessed to the deliverance of souls in guilt and bondage. But both are parts of the ministry of the gospel. Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. And yet he that planted and he that watered were one; for

both were labourers together with God. (1 Cor. 3:6-9.) So in the building of the spiritual house. Before the stones can be nicely fitted into the building, they have not only to be hewed out of the quarry, but cut and squared, the rough corners and angles chipped off, so as not to be mere rubble, or like the stones that we see in the rough stone walls of some of our counties, thrust in anyhow just as they are picked up out of the pit, the work of a farm labourer, not of a mason. There is, therefore, often a long interval between the first gathering and the nicely fitting; for these stones are not fit to be put into the spiritual building in their rough, unhewn state.

But besides all this hacking and hewing, ("I have hewed them by the prophets," (Hos. 6:5,) squaring and paring, levelling and bevelling, something else is needed of special and divine communication to make the stones neatly and nicely fit; for without this there will be rents in the building, unsightly gaps, and anything but that which shows the master's hand. A man may be gathered for some considerable time, many are so for years, before he is so far humbled and broken in spirit, his pride, prejudice, and self-righteousness, these rough corners, chipped off, or his soul so fully blessed and delivered as to be fully united in heart and spirit to the living family of God. He may love their company, and esteem them the excellent of the earth; but through doubt and fear, darkness, guilt, and bondage, not be united to them in the full feelings of his soul, or in church fellowship, as in the case of our gospel churches. He feels himself, perhaps, to be a poor isolated being, spoiled for the world, yet unfit for the Church; a kind of spiritual nondescript, with sufficient light in his mind and life in his conscience to bring and keep him out of the world, to make him sit at Zion's gates, listen, eagerly listen, to the preached word, but not blessed with that sweet assurance of faith whereby he can take hold of the blessings of the gospel as his own, or unite himself to the family of God without fear or bondage. Now a large and important end of the ministry of the gospel is for the very purpose of delivering, comforting, and blessing such tried and exercised souls. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people;" "Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees; say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not;" "Cast up, cast up the highway, gather out the stones, lift up a standard for the people;" those are some of the special charges given to the servants of God for the perfecting of the saints. But there is "a set time to favour Zion;" and when this set time comes to favour a poor soul in guilt and bondage, when the word is blessed to his

deliverance, and pardon and peace are revealed and sealed on his conscience, he is then not only gathered, hacked, hewed, chipped, squared, and levelled, but so moulded into a felt sense of the love of God and his dear people, so beautifully and blessedly fitted for the fellowship of the saints, that he is constrained by every sweet constraint to be visibly and openly one with them and of them. He feels he cannot be happy unless he unite himself to the living family of God; and they, when they hear the good news, are as glad to receive him as he is to be received.

To this part of the ministry, therefore, belongs the uniting of the living stones into church fellowship. This was the invariable practice of the Apostles. They did not leave the stones gathered by their preaching to lie about by themselves anywhere and everywhere, as must be the case where there is no church formed, and the ordinances of God's house are neglected. In such a congregation there may be a living ministry, and living stones gathered by that ministry; but where is the spiritual house, where the Church as in the days of the Apostles? Where is there church discipline and gospel order, or any visible fellowship of the saints? It is true there may be the visible form of a church without spiritual fellowship among the members; and seeing this has sometimes repelled godly people from joining any church, and made them prefer their present state of isolation. But the abuse of a thing does not overthrow its use, nor are we to reject church fellowship because in many cases it is but a fellowship in name and appearance. One thing is undeniable, that the Apostles instituted churches, and that the same day of Pentecost which witnessed the gathering of the stones, the three thousand first converts, witnessed also the ordinance of baptism and the formation of a gospel church: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:41, 42.) Here we have, most undeniably, a gospel church; for we read: "And the Lord added to the *Church* daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47.) We have thus presented to our view, set up by the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, a gospel Church, in which were administered the two standing ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, the latter called the "breaking of bread." With this Church the Apostles had fellowship and communion, both with each other and the members; for we read that those who were thus called and baptized "continued steadfastly in the

Apostle's doctrine and fellowship." Blessed doctrine! for Christ, a crucified and a risen Christ, was its sum and substance; and blessed fellowship when "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." How beautifully and how blessedly were the living stones then fitted together; for they were all baptized into one body by the power and indwelling of the Holy Ghost, as they were united in church fellowship by the ordinances of God's house. No error then tainted the purity of their doctrine, no division marred the closeness of their fellowship; and for a short space the Church "looked forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." (Song 6:10.) Here, under the preaching of the Apostles and the pouring out of the Holy Ghost, we have the brightest example and clearest pattern of what the ministry of the gospel can do for "the perfecting of the saints," both in effectually calling or gathering, and in building them together in spiritual union and communion inwardly, and in church fellowship outwardly.

3. And now comes the third meaning which we attached to the expression, "the perfecting of the saints,"—the contributing to the *growth, increase, and development* of the people of God when thus brought together. We shall not dwell long upon this point, though one of great importance, for two reasons: 1. Because we will not encroach at present too much on our pages; 2. Because this peculiar feature of the ministry will come more fully under our consideration when we have to open the verses which immediately follow the passage which we are now attempting to explain.

"Perfection," as used in the New Testament, is often misunderstood. Wesley's doctrine of perfection has much obscured its scriptural meaning, and that in two almost opposite ways: 1. By persuading his ignorant followers that there is such an attainment as perfection in the flesh; and, 2. By prejudicing his opponents against the word itself, as being by him so grossly perverted. There is a remarkable tendency to ignore or quietly drop words which have been perverted to false meanings, and this from a jealous fear lest we should be suspected of holding erroneous sentiments if we made use of them. Thus the words "holy" and "holiness," as applied to a Christian walk, have been almost dropped in many pulpits, for fear lest their use should be suspected of encouraging progressive or fleshly sanctification. So the words "perfect" and "perfection" have dropped out of the established Calvinistic pulpit

vocabulary, much through Wesley's perversion of their meaning. But it is a scriptural term, and, therefore, has a sense fully harmonizing with the analogy of faith and the grand doctrines of the gospel. We have often thought that there is one passage in particular which clearly explains what the New Testament means by perfection. It occurs Heb. 5:14: "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of *full age*," (*margin*, perfect.") Perfection, then, according to the Scripture, does not mean absolute moral perfection, a freedom from the corruption of our nature; a thorough purity of heart, lip, and life; but as distinguished from a state of spiritual childhood, a Christian ripeness, a full maturity of judgment, a capability of feeding upon and digesting strong meat; a having the senses, by reason of use and experience, exercised to discern both good and evil. A man fully grown, a mind well matured, a house completely built, a tree arrived to its full size and fruitfulness, are not perfect absolutely, but they are perfect relatively. The man will be no stronger, the mind no riper, the house not more finished, the tree not larger or more productive. This is the scriptural idea of perfection, implying, not a freedom from sin or infirmity, but a freedom from childish ignorance, weakness, indecision, and instability.

As, then, the ministry is for "the perfecting of the saints," it is the appointed instrument of communicating that sound instruction, that ripened and matured wisdom, that firm stability, that clear judgment, that steadiness of mind, that decision in general character and action which distinguishes the man from the child. To produce this perfection, to be an instrument in the hands of the blessed Spirit thus to mature, ripen, and establish the saints of God, and build them up on their most holy faith, is a most important end of the ministry. What a blessing to a church, and especially to the older and more experienced members, is a sound, faithful, experimental ministry, a ministry of exercised, solid, weighty, established men, not of youths and novices. A church preached to by youths and ruled by women falls under that sentence: "As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them." And what is the consequence? "O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths." (Isa. 3:12.) But what with the prevalent system of supplies, what with the lack of able, experienced, and faithful pastors, and what with the low state of things generally in the churches, we have lost almost the very idea of a sound, experienced, weighty, established ministry; and can now only faintly realise it by reading the

writings of such men as Bunyan, Owen, Huntington, Bourne's Letters, &c.; and thus finding and feeling, from the weight and power of the words of such men, what a blessing it would be to sit under such a ministry; of course, not so gifted, for that would be desiring too much; but approaching it in its stability, and the weight of its instruction, guidance, consolation, and general edification.

But as this part of our subject will again come before us, we must defer its fuller consideration to our next paper.

VI.

Our readers will perhaps remember that the point at which we have now arrived in our present Meditations, is *the ends* for which the Ministry of the Gospel was established, and that we divided these ends into two *ultimate* and *proximate*; the ultimate being the glory of God in the exaltation of his dear Son, the proximate, the benefit and blessing of the Church. They will also call to mind that in examining the latter point—the proximate ends, we expressed our opinion that in no part of the New Testament were these ends so fully and clearly laid down as by the Apostle Paul in Eph. 4:8-16; and that we therefore purposed to confine ourselves to the opening of that portion of the word of truth, as the best and simplest way of elucidating the subject now before us.

In pursuance of that plan—for some degree of order is requisite in examining every important subject, we attempted in our last paper to unfold the meaning of Eph. 4:12, in which the Apostle intimates that there were three special ends to be accomplished by the ministry of "the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers," whom the Lord sends, and whom he endues with power from on high. These three ends were "the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ." One of these ends, "the perfecting of the saints," we have already examined.

ii. We come now, therefore, to the second end laid down by the Apostle: "*For the work of the ministry,*" which we shall endeavour in a similar way to unfold.

The expression is of a more general character than the preceding, and seems

to be purposely employed so by the Apostle, that it might take a more capacious grasp, and more fully embrace the whole of that wide and extensive service which is rendered to the Church by the ministry of the servants of God. Whatever ministerial work, therefore, is done by any or all of the servants of Christ for the benefit and blessing of the Church, whether much or little, whether performed by an apostle, or a prophet, or an evangelist, or a pastor, or a teacher, falls under this head, "the work of the ministry."

Its two leading ideas are ministry and work, and these two combined in effective and sustained operation; not work simply, which might be uncalled for or misdirected, and therefore useless, if not positively mischievous, nor *ministry* simply, which might be office without service, a mere sinecure dignity without labour; but that union of proper qualification and actual work which makes a servant acceptable to his master and useful to all within the compass of his services. The idea is simple and easily intelligible, and yet an illustration may set it in a clearer light. In a large establishment, say a wealthy nobleman's, there may be 50 or 60 servants, differing among themselves in rank, qualification, and situation; but each has his fixed place and appointed work. None has intruded himself into the situation which he occupies; all serve one lord, who appoints each his work, and pays each his wages; and not one is there but for the honour or service of his master, and the advantage, comfort, and well-being of the whole family. The figure, of course, is imperfect, as all figures necessarily must be; but it may serve as an illustration of what is intended by the expression, "the work of the ministry."

The first idea is that of "*work*," and that sound, honest, often hard, and usually efficient work. We have no idea of a lazy, slothful, indolent minister, and are very sure that such men, and it is to be feared there is an abundance of them in every sect and denomination, find no sanction for their laziness in the word of truth, and no approbation in the conscience or affections of the people of God. It is true that health, opportunities, spheres of activity and usefulness, gifts, abilities, and acceptance, and other both internal and external circumstances widely differ, even among the true servants of God, and therefore preclude the application of a fixed or rigid standard. We cannot, therefore, measure the work for the man, as we cannot measure the man for the work; but work there must be done by every professing servant of God, if he would not fall under the terrible sentence pronounced by the Lord

of the house against the slothful and unprofitable servant, Matt. 25:26-30. In this busy hive, work is the appointed lot of most; and work, when honest and not too fatiguing to body or mind, has its enjoyments as well as its profits. But no work is so honourable, so useful, so lasting, and so fruitful in consequences for time and eternity, as the work of the ministry. All other, however useful, excellent, or honourable, begins and ends with time; this alone, though it begins and is carried on in time, reaches into eternity.

The second idea is that of "*ministry*." This we have already explained as a service *for* men, but not *of* men. Let no sent servant of God so degrade himself, let no churches or deacons so degrade a real minister of Christ as to make him or consider him *their* servant. Let the wealthy deacons and rich members of churches have their men-servants and their maid-servants, their grooms and gardeners; and let their business men have their clerks, assistants, porters, and errand-boys, whom they may take on or take off, whom they may hire and dismiss as they choose. The work of these is time-work, and their service time-service; but their minister, if he be a man of God, is neither their time-servant nor a time-server. He watches for their souls as one that must give account, and labours not for the meat that perisheth, but that which endures unto everlasting life. If a church be so highly favoured as to have for its minister a man of God, let it esteem him very highly in love for his work's sake; and let him, on his side, not presume on his position, or attempt any other rule than the rule of love. To be a lord over God's heritage is as much out of place in him as to degrade him into their servant is out of place in them. Both are equally unscriptural; both will cause strife and division, and probably end in separation.

The work to be done is both great and various. It requires, therefore, corresponding labourers. No one man can do equally well every part of the work. Each has his own work to do, and each man will do his own work best. These are simple truths, truths which in theory almost every one will assent to, and yet in practice how continually are they forgotten or departed from. What a monopoly of gifts, usefulness, and acceptability some men seem disposed to claim to themselves; how prone to surround themselves with a little knot of friends and admirers; how jealous or suspicious of other ministers; how ready to speak against them, especially if any of their people are disposed to favour them; and how they will treat, almost as personal enemies, the very best

people if they cannot or do not receive their ministry. Such conduct surely manifests great pride or great ignorance. Look at the greatness and variety of the work to be done, and then see whether any one man, or ten men, can arrogate to themselves such exclusive pretensions. Consider the wisdom, grace, love, and power of the great Head of the Church; view the wide extent and scattered character of his kingdom; think of the variety of cases which his people present; bear in mind their trials, temptations, afflictions, and varied circumstances, and then ask, Who or what must that man be who can minister to all these people, meet all these cases, and do all the work of the ministry? A variety of gifts is as needful as a certain number of labourers. Some are more qualified for the first work, calling sinners to repentance. Their work lies chiefly in pulling down the strongholds of sin and Satan, showing man's state by nature before God, declaring the insufficiency of all creature worth or works, and proclaiming the necessity and nature of the new birth. Others are more qualified to build up the saints on their most holy faith by preaching clearly and experimentally the glorious doctrines of grace. Others can enter more fully and deeply into the experience of God's poor, tried, and afflicted family. Some are more searching and discriminating, and take forth in a bold, faithful, and separating ministry the precious from the vile; others are more for comforting the cast-down, and speaking a word in season to the soul that is weary. Some can enforce the precept without legality, others preach doctrines without dryness, and others handle experience without sameness. Each has his peculiar work to do, an appointed place to occupy, a people for whom he is specially adapted, and a field in which he alone can effectually labour. We are apt to judge too much by outward appearances. Because this man has not the gifts or the abilities, or the experience or the peculiar line of that man, or even almost because he has not the manner, or the delivery, or the mode of handling his subject of our favourite minister, are we to cast him aside, and slight him and his communication? If we have good reason to believe that he is a partaker of the grace of God, preaches what he knows and has experienced, has a sufficient gift to lead us to believe that the Lord has opened his mouth, manifests by his life, conduct, and conversation that his eye is single to God's glory, and is in any measure owned and blessed in the work, we are bound to receive him as a servant of Christ, even if in many points his ministry may seem in our view defective, or not specially profitable or acceptable to ourselves. This exercise of Christian judgment, this willingness to lay aside narrow, prejudiced, and contracted views, this rising above party spirit, this

free acting of that charity which hopeth all things and believeth all things, by no means implies that false charity which thinks well of every minister, or that superstitious credulity which believes every spirit. Nor does it preclude the exercise of our judgment as to the grace, gifts, abilities, and usefulness of the true servants of God. There is a middle, though a narrow, path between prejudiced, bigoted exclusiveness and false charity, between party spirit and wide-armed reception, between the shutting up of ears and heart against all but two or three, and that foolish simplicity which believeth every word that drops from the pulpit. (Prov. 14:15.) "The ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat." (Job 34:3.) We are bidden to "try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world;" (1 John 4:1;) and yet we are "to know them which labour among us, and are over us in the Lord, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." (1 Thess. 5:12, 13.) We, therefore, need special grace in this matter to receive none whom the Lord rejects, and reject none whom the Lord receives, but be so guided by wisdom, and so influenced by love, that we may walk before God with the answer of a good conscience, and walk before men with meekness of wisdom.

iii. The third end is, *"the edifying of the body of Christ."* "To edify," we need scarcely remark, means to build up: "the body of Christ" is the Church which he hath purchased with his own blood. The Holy Spirit here has united two figures to convey one idea. The Church of Christ is sometimes compared to a building, as in that beautiful passage: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." (Eph. 2:19-22.) Peter uses the same figure, "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house." (1 Pet. 2:4, 5.) We have already shown in our remarks upon "the perfecting of the saints," that the work of hewing the stones out of the quarry and squaring them into shape, and fitting them together into the spiritual house was an especial end of the ministry of the gospel. This, therefore, we need not repeat. The figure of a human body, as descriptive of the Church of Christ, is no less common than

that of a house or temple. We shall see more of its beauty and propriety presently, but for the present, let us quote the Apostle's words: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member but many." (1 Cor. 12:12-14.) Now this body of Christ—his mystical, as distinguished from his actual and personal, body, has to be built up, that is, the various members are to be brought together, united to each other, and thus grow up in harmonious concord. Christ is the ever-living Head, (Eph. 5:23; Col. 2:19,) who supplies out of his own fulness all the need of the various members; but they have first to be brought together and then to grow together. It is for this reason that the two figures are blended into one. The natural figure of a body with its various members would not convey a right conception of the way in which the saints become partakers of the benefits and blessings of Christ as a covenant Head, because in the human body all the members are at once and at the same time in union with the head and each other. This indeed is true as regards the eternal union between Christ and his people, for they were all chosen in him before the foundation of the world, and united to him by an act of the Father's sovereign good pleasure. But as they are brought into being successively in time, so they can only be vitally and spiritually united to him in their time state. For this reason, therefore, the figure of a building is chosen as indicative of the successive addition of stones to a temple. But as stones in a natural building, when brought together, do not grow as the members of a body grow from childhood to manhood, the Holy Ghost has blended the two figures—building implying successive additions of stones, a body implying a living growth, which members have, but stones have not. This short but perhaps not very clear explanation will perhaps throw light upon the expression, "the edifying of the body of Christ," as an end accomplished by the ministry of the word.

The work of the ministry generally may be divided into two great branches—the calling of sinners, and the building up of saints. It is chiefly, though not exclusively, the latter which is intended by the expression, "the edifying of the body of Christ." But how is the body built up by the ministry?

1. These young converts have first *to be instructed*. They are usually very

ignorant, even of the first elements of our most holy faith; but if they are of the right stamp, and the work of conviction in their souls is genuine, they are generally very teachable. They are brought as it were into a new world. The word of truth may have been known by them in the letter, but its hidden spiritual and experimental meaning was altogether hidden from their eyes. Much self-righteousness and legality of spirit often cleave very closely to their skirts, and the very freeness of gospel grace, until the law has done its work upon their consciences, and burned up their wood, hay, and stubble, hinders its cordial reception. Now to souls thus exercised and distressed, full of guilt, bondage, and misery, and yet entangled in a legal, self-righteous spirit which only makes their chains heavier, what a blessing is a living, experimental, clear, enlightened ministry! What good hearers such burdened souls usually are; with what eagerness do they listen, with what an appetite do they feed, with what a memory do they retain the word of life as it falls from the pulpit. These are not like many old hearers, too proud to be taught, and though they have not the judgment and discernment of more established believers, yet they may well by their life, zeal, warmth, and earnestness put their elders to shame. Every minister, therefore, who seeks to approve himself to God, and be made a blessing to his people, should consider *instruction* a very important part of his ministry, and should endeavour to put before the people the truths of the gospel in the clearest, plainest, and most consistent possible manner. He should, therefore, be continually reading and studying the Scriptures, mingling his reading with prayer and supplication for divine teaching, and be satisfied with nothing short of a gracious, feeling, experimental knowledge of the truth in his own soul, as he can then speak with authority and power; and where there is a clearness of views, there will generally be a corresponding clearness of statement. A minister of truth should also seek to have very clear ideas upon the grand doctrines of our most holy faith, based upon a living experience of them, such as the Trinity, the Deity and Sonship of the blessed Lord, the Deity and personality of the Holy Ghost, the Person of Christ as God-man, his holy and sacred humanity, his bloodshedding, obedience, and death, his resurrection, ascension, present intercession, and future coming;—in a word, every point connected with the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. Unless he himself has clear, consistent views of the grand fundamental principles of truth, how can he either preach it clearly or defend it successfully? Under his confused, cloudy, perplexed and perplexing ministry, error will lie snug and undisturbed, even gracious living hearers be tossed about and unestablished,

and little union felt or known with him or each other.

2. Secondly, the living family *have to be fed*.

We have remarked that there is a growth of the members of the mystical body of Christ, and that to conduce to and promote this growth is to edify or build up the body of Christ. As in the natural, so in the spiritual body, this growth much depends on the nature and quality of the food supplied to it. Let the food given to the natural body be thin, watery, deficient in those peculiar elements of nutrition which supply the continual wasting of the bodily tissues, and in consequence, will be emaciation of the whole frame. This is especially the case in childhood and youth, when the growth of the whole body and of its various members is going on, and the future man or woman is being built up. The difference at that period of life between scanty, insufficient, unnutritious food, and an ample supply of sound, wholesome, nourishing diet is a matter of illness or health, debility or vigour, and, in their consequences, of death and life. So in the building up of the mystical body of Christ, the difference between a thin and watery, unnutritious ministry and one full of sound, solid, wholesome, nourishing food is immense. The word of God speaks of "milk" and "strong meat," milk for babes, (Heb. 5:14; 1 Pet. 2:2,) and strong meat for men. (1 Cor. 3:2.) Both these kinds of diet contain the largest portion of the elements of nutrition, and severally suit the digestive organs of infancy and manhood. Such, then, should be the ministry of the gospel, milk and meat; not London milk, weak and watery, but good, rich, new country milk, as it comes from the cow, full of cream and cheese, and meat sound and healthy, well bred and well fed; not Whitechapel beef, snatched by the butcher's knife from pleuro-pneumonia or the cattle plague. We do not want eloquence in the pulpit, but we do want food. Jael brought forth her milk and butter "in a lordly dish," for she was feeding the proud lord and master of 900 chariots of iron; but we can well dispense with "the lordly dish," if the bowl at one end of the table be filled with good milk for the babes, and the dish at the other, where the men sit, has on it a sound and juicy joint. But London milk in a porcelain bowl will starve the babe, and Whitechapel meat in a china dish will poison the man. Do we not love to see our children grow up stout and strong? But they need for this good food, and a good supply of it. O brother ministers, do you think sometimes about the food that you supply the children of God with? Has it nourished, is it nourishing your own soul?

Can you say of what you preach, "These truths have fed, and do still feed my soul? Christ, his Person, his work, his blood, his righteousness, his dying love, his beauty, blessedness, and suitability; his mercy, pity, and compassion; what I have seen, felt, and known of him in his presence and power, as all my salvation and all my desire; this is all my life, all my hope, and all my happiness. I must, therefore, speak well of his name, exalt him to the utmost of my power, and commend him to every poor sensible sinner who is pining after him as the child after the breast, or the starving man for food. 'Honey and milk are under his tongue; his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed.' And having drunk his milk and wine, and eaten his meat, I can speak well of them both, and never wish to set any other provision before the dear family of God." This is the preaching which God will own and bless; and though it may be despised by the great bulk of professors, it will be prized by the poor and needy, hungering and thirsting children of God.

3. Another thing desirable, if not absolutely necessary, to edify the body of Christ is a *suitable and seasonable variety* in the food supplied. The natural body requires for its due nourishment variety of food. The constituent elements of what is eaten remain the same, or it would not be nutritious; but, without some degree of variety, food, after a time, becomes rather loathed than loved. Our poor soldiers, under that red tape system which ties men up like a lawyer's brief, when not on foreign service, had boiled beef served to them at their mess day by day till their very stomachs loathed the sight and smell. The children of Israel ate quails in the wilderness till the meat came out of their nostrils and became loathsome unto them. (Num. 11:20.) Should there not be some corresponding variety in the ministry of the word? What a variety there is in the Bible! Take the whole range from Genesis to Revelation. How consistent, how uniform in doctrine, but how varied in detail. It is thus uniform in conception, but multiform in expression. Without unity of thought there would be confusion, if not contradiction; without variety of expression there would be not only a wearisome sameness, but a deficiency of instruction. The amazing variety of the Bible is not only charming, as ever presenting some new feature of heavenly truth, but most instructive and edifying. So in the approved works of our most esteemed Christian writers, such as Bunyan, Owen, Huntington, what a fulness of abounding variety. Should not the ministry have a good measure of this? The food that it supplies may be varied, and yet be good food still. Milk can be given to children in more ways than

one; meat for men need not be always mutton, and least of all the same piece and the same exact mode of cooking. So in the ministry of the word, there may be, and should be, variety—not a variety *of* truth but a variety *in* truth. Prayer is a part of the ministry; but how wearisome to hear the same prayer over and over and over again. We condemn forms of prayer; yet how does the same prayer repeated again and again differ from a mere printed form? The chief value of extemporaneous prayer is that it enables the minister to pour forth his whole soul before God, as the blessed Spirit helps his infirmities and gives him utterance. He thus, as mouth for his gracious hearers, expresses the desires of their souls, and they can silently and sweetly unite with him as he presents his own and their mutual supplications before the throne. But when they know beforehand almost every word of his prayer; when there is no enlargement of heart and mouth, no entering into the numerous and varied wants, feelings, exercises, and desires of their souls, his prayer becomes at length but a wearisome, burdensome, unprofitable formula—words, and nothing but words. And as this is true of the prayer, so is it true and more than true of the preaching. We want no novelty in doctrine or experience; we are well satisfied with the good old beaten way. We want no startling, still less no sensational preaching. We want no juggler with his cup and balls to astonish our weak minds with the wonderful interpretations which he can put upon God's word, and no merry-andrew to entertain us with jests and anecdotes. Nor do we want the eloquent orator, who perhaps may break down in one of his finest passages which he has well conned over and learnt by heart; nor do we require a dry doctrinalist, or contentious disputer, or a personal railer. But we do sadly want the sound, sober, well-taught man of God, whose grace we see in his heart and life, and whose gift we feel in the power and savour of his ministry. Our own belief is that whenever God sends a man to preach his word, he always furnishes him with a suitable gift; and that one mark of this gift is such a seasonable measure of variety as shall make his ministry from time to time a living word, springing out of and kept up by a living inward experience of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

VII.

We are never so safe as when we are on strict Scripture ground; indeed, off that ground we are never safe at all. It is for this reason that in our

Meditations on the Ministry of the Gospel we have adhered so closely to the word of truth, and preferred bringing forward select passages in which the Holy Ghost has clearly unfolded its true nature and character, and opening, to the best of our ability, their spiritual meaning, to dealing with the subject in a wider and looser way by general observations of our own. But the letter of Scripture is one thing, and the interpretation of it is another. We might quote right passages, and yet give them a wrong interpretation. We believe, however, that we have not so erred. At least, we can declare with all holy boldness the inmost conviction of our conscience that, with the exception of such infirmities and defects of knowledge or expression as all are subject to, we have interpreted the word of the Spirit according to the mind of the Spirit. This may seem to some a bold assertion; but we will make a still bolder one in the expression of our conviction that whoever undertakes to instruct the Church of God must have the fullest certainty in his own mind that what he brings forward is in harmony with the mind of the Spirit, or he is utterly unfit either to stand up in a pulpit or to handle a pen in the cause of God and truth. Carrying out, then, this plan, we are now engaged in opening the mind of the Spirit as expressed by the Apostle, Eph. 4:11-16, and have advanced in our explanation as far as the end of verse 12: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." In the verses which immediately follow, and which we shall presently quote, the fruits and effects of the ministry are unfolded with equal clearness and beauty, as we hope to show by our exposition of them: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Eph. 4:13-16.)

Several points here are worthy of our closest attention, and especially two as fruits of the ministry: 1. What peculiar *evils* we are instrumentally to be preserved from *by* it; 2. What eminent *advantages* we are to reap *from* it.

We will consider these two points separately.

i. Observe then, first, what we may call the *negative* side, the peculiar *evils* from which the gospel is intended to preserve or deliver us.

The ministry of the gospel is intended to be our main safeguard against error: "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." (ver. 14.)

Many, if not most, in a profession of religion are children all their days—not children in the best sense of the word, but children in the worst. In the Scripture we find the figure of a child used in two different senses, each being drawn from its natural character. In a child, as a child, there are two main, leading, salient features—what we may call its good side, and its bad side. Its docility, simplicity, sincerity, humility, artlessness, and what is usually termed its innocence, form its good side. This part of its character our Lord noticed when "he called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of the disciples, and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 18:3, 4.) But the child is also ignorant, unstable, undecided, pettish, soon moved to passion or to tears, caught by baubles and gewgaws, credulous, open to deception, fickle, and changeable. This forms its bad, or at least its weak side. The Apostle has beautifully hit off the difference between these two senses of the word in one verse: "Brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men." (1 Cor. 14:20.) To be a child in understanding is to be weak, ignorant, vacillating, undecided, ever halting between two opinions, deficient in every manly grace and gift; ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. To be a child in spirit is to be simple, sincere, teachable, peaceable, affectionate, open; free from craft, hypocrisy, and guile. To be the first is to be the least, to be the last is to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

In grace as in nature, there is a period when we are children; and such a state has its beauty in one as well as in the other. A born man would be a monster

or a prodigy, as Hercules is fabled to have strangled two serpents in his cradle sent by the goddess Juno to kill him; or as King Richard III is said to have come into the world not only with a hump on his back, but with teeth in his head. Jerusalem, the mother of us all, bears no such prodigies as infant giants, able when yet in arms to overcome the wicked one, or well toothed babes who cry out for strong meat instead of milk. The Scripture most plainly lays it down that the Church of God is made up of babes, children, young men, and fathers; and to hear a child talk like a father is almost worse than to hear a father talk like a child.*

* A friend of ours once told us of a young man who used to pray at the prayer meeting in such a way that a stranger behind the door, who did not see him, would have thought it was the experience and language of a deeply taught, well established father in Israel. Our friend, who possessed some discernment, augured badly of him from the circumstance; and these suspicions were too well founded, for we believe that he turned out very ill.

In this sense we are to be "no more children." To have been a child once is enough. We are to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." We are to grow up, as we shall by-and-by show, "unto him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ." There is a coming unto "a perfect," or adult man, "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Wherever there is life there is growth, and the more healthy the life, the more vigorous, the more marked is the growth. A want of growth is, therefore, a sure mark of sickliness, or at least of a weak, unhealthy constitution. The Apostle, therefore, sharply reproveth the Hebrew disciples as being always children: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe." (Heb. 5:12, 13.) We see sometimes children that never seem to grow, or able to run alone, or learn to talk. What a grief is this to their parents, who fear that they may turn out idiots. Should it not be a matter of equal grief to ministers to see their spiritual children showing, year after year, little else but the weakness, ignorance, and instability of childhood, and so little of the strength and firmness of youth or manhood? But there is something even worse than want of growth. There is an old Latin proverb,

"Non progredi est regredi," that is, "Not to go forward is to go backward." In the divine life there is no standing still. Not to go on is to go back; not to grow is to decay; not to fight is to flee; not to resist is to yield.

But there are worse consequences of continual childhood even than this. There is a "being tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." This is just the state of many in our churches. In the controversy about the true, proper, and eternal Sonship of our gracious Lord, how many, not merely members of the congregation, but members of the Church in various places of professed truth, were ever tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine. Just as the wind blew, they were driven. If they read a book or an article in its favour, then they thought that right; if the next day they met with a book or article against it, then they thought that right. Like the chameleon, they changed their colour according to their book or their company—not so much from wickedness as from weakness, not so much from hypocrisy as from indecision, not so much from craft as from cowardice, not so much from wilfulness in error as from instability in truth. But what was the consequence of all this childish weakness, ignorance, and instability? That they laid themselves open to, and became a prey of, "the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lay in wait to deceive." The real heretics, the erroneous men, saw at a glance with whom they could, and with whom they could not succeed. It was these unstable ones whom they juggled by their sleight of hand, whom they cheated with their loaded dice.* It was these dwarfed, sickly, rickety children that they laid their crafty plans to deceive** and entangle in error. These are their game, whom they find out as instinctively as the London sharpers smell out a country bumpkin, with whom they are so willing to share a part of the large fortune which has just been left him by a dead uncle. Now to deliver the family of God from these sharpers is an important part of the gospel ministry. As the ministry is "for the perfecting of the saints," it is to bring them out of this childish state of ignorance and instability, through which, as carried about with every wind of doctrine, they fall a prey to the arts of these designing men. Did you ever read any of their books or see any of their pieces? With what craft they write! How they commence with a show of truth as if they believed just the same doctrines as the Church of God has always held; but by little and little they bring forth their error, yet still so wrapped up in Scripture language that it almost requires an eagle's eye to see into their real meaning. We see the necessity,

therefore, that the man of God should be well armed at all points against such errors and such men; should be thoroughly instructed himself into a clear experimental knowledge of the truth; should be furnished with a sufficient gift of utterance to unfold and enforce it clearly, and courage to defend it firmly, boldly, and faithfully.

*** The word translated "sleight" is literally "dicing," that is, cheating with loaded dice.**

**** Paul himself never put so much strong meaning into a few words as those so expressively rendered in our English version: "cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;" but they might be thus more fully and literally translated: "With unprincipled craftiness, laying down a deliberate plan of deception."**

A main part of the ministry is instruction. The character of the babe is that he is "unskilful in the word of righteousness." He, therefore, needs instruction—~~instruction~~ instruction from the word of truth, called "the word of righteousness," as unfolding and manifesting "the righteousness of God," that is, not God's intrinsic and eternal righteousness as a just and holy Jehovah, but his wondrous plan of saving sinners by the incarnation and mediation of his dear Son, so that "he might be just and yet the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus." (Rom. 3:21-26.) Now if these weak and vacillating members had been but well instructed in "the word of righteousness;" if they had been favoured with clear views of the Trinity, and seen how intimately and closely it was connected with the divine Sonship of Jesus; if they had been well grounded and established in an experimental knowledge of the Son of God by some gracious discovery of his glorious Person to their soul, would they have been tossed to and fro and carried about with these winds of erroneous doctrine?

We are not advocates for dry doctrine—far from it; but we are advocates, and warm ones too, for laying before the people the grand verities, the vital truths of our most holy faith, with every doctrine according to godliness, which we have ourselves tasted, felt, and handled as the food of our soul. We never loved so much, never more highly valued, never saw more beauty in, never felt the sweetness more of the grand doctrines of grace which we have professed so many years; and were never more fully, if so much, persuaded of the

importance and indeed necessity that they should be the main staple of the ministry as setting forth the person and work of the Son of God. To be well established in the truth is a great blessing both for minister and people. It gives a firmness to the ministry and a satisfaction to the church and congregation. They feel that they can trust their man. He has fully proved, and therefore well knows his ground. He has felt the truth and power of what he preaches in his own soul. He is resting all the weight of his own personal salvation on the grand and glorious truths of the everlasting gospel, as all centering in the person of Christ. He has his sharp exercises, and may have his doubts and fears; but those touch not the foundation, do not affect the truths themselves, but only how far he may be deceived as to his personal interest in them. But his very exercises make him hold truth with a firmer hand. Lies, he well knows, cannot save him; errors, he is fully confident, cannot sanctify him. All his hope is in the truth; all his dependence is on Christ and his finished work. The enemies of the Son of God, of salvation by grace, of a living experience of the power of truth, are therefore *his* enemies, because they would dig up the foundations of the everlasting gospel, destroy his faith, and root out his very hope. He contends, therefore, for the truth in its purity and its power, not only from a sense of its sweetness, but from a sense of its necessity. It is with him not a mere Sunday sermon, the subject of a text neatly spun out into a discourse, but the one grand matter, the one thing needful, by which he must live and die. He therefore digs more and more deeply into its hid treasures, that his own soul and the souls of his hearers may be enriched thereby; and he guards it with more holy zeal and indignant warmth against the thieves and robbers who would plunder himself and them of their very hope of salvation.

ii. But we now come to the *positive side*—~~the~~ *advantages* which we are to reap from the ministry of the gospel. These are contained in verse 13, of which 15 and 16 are but a fuller explanation: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." (Eph. 4:13.)

We shall have to open and work out several points of truth here. 1. The leading idea is that of "coming unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." The means of its attainment are "unity of faith and a knowledge of the Son of God."

We have already shown that growth is the grand mark of life. But this growth has both its object and its term. It is not a rapid, loose, shooting up, like that of a tall, lank, over-grown boy, or of a tree which spindles with its one shoot on high, without thickening its stem or throwing out its side branches. The object or intention of the growth is "to grow up in all things into Christ;" the *term* or end of the growth is that of "a perfect" or adult man, or, as more fully expressed, "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Strictly speaking, as is evident from verse 16, the growth intended by the Apostle is that of the whole Church, as the mystical body of Christ; but the expression, "Till we all come," allows us to apply it to individuals. As this last is the simpler meaning, we shall consider it first.

Christ is the Head of every member individually, as he is the Head of the whole body collectively. Growth of the body, from babyhood to manhood, is the growth of individual members in the body. If, then, I am a member of the mystical body of Christ Jesus, I shall grow. My growth may be so slow and gradual as to be scarcely perceptible; but it will be growth still. If I have union with Christ, I shall be supplied, at least in some measure, out of his fulness. He is my life, and he has promised, because he lives, I shall live also; and if I live by him, I shall live upon and unto him. Paul could say, "The life which I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God;" and tells us, "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." (2 Cor. 5:15.)

But this life and this growth are maintained by means, and the chief amongst them is the ministry of the gospel. By a sound gospel ministry our souls are fed. Christ is set before us in all the glories of his divine Person, in his Deity and Sonship, and in all the graces of his suffering humanity. His covenant characters and gracious relationships, his blood and righteousness, his death and resurrection, his ascension and glorification at the right hand of the Father, his present mediation and intercession, his sympathy as a once suffering but now exalted high Priest, and his ability to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him, are brought before us as the food of our faith; and as we taste that he is gracious, and feed upon him as the bread of life, there is a growth into him. We grow out of self, and it is to be hoped, in some measure, out of the love of the world and of sin; and we love and admire him all the more that we taste of his grace and see of his glory. The term or end of

this growth is "perfection"—that is, not moral, legal, or fleshly perfection, but that adult state, that ripeness of judgment, that maturity of Christian stature, that establishment in the truth which distinguishes the grown-up man from the weak, ignorant, vacillating child. Paul's "perfect man" means an adult, a grown-up man, not perfect as free from sin, defect, or infirmity, but as arrived at fulness of strength and stature. The word is therefore well translated, "of full age," (Heb. 5:14,) it being precisely the same word as is rendered "perfect" in the passage now before us.

But this maturity, which it is the end of the ministry to accomplish, mainly depends on two things, which mark and test the soundness of the ministry and of the food furnished by it.

1. First it is "in the unity of the faith." There is, there can be but "one faith," as there is but "one God and one Lord." This faith is "the faith of God's elect," as opposed to the faith which is common to all men; "the gift of God," as opposed to the work of man; a fruit of the Spirit, as opposed to a fruit of the flesh. There is a unity or oneness of this faith in all the living members of the mystical body of Christ, so that, with all their seeming differences, their faith is really one and the same, and they the sole possessors of it. The object of their faith is one and the same—the Son of God; the ground of their faith is one and the same—the word of his grace; the author and finisher of their faith is one and the same—the Lord Jesus Christ; and the end of their faith is one and the same—the salvation of their soul. This faith has to grow, (2 Thess. 1:3,) and it grows as fed by the word of truth. Here then we see the benefit and blessing of the gospel ministry. It is intended to feed the faith of the Church by holding forth to it the word of life. (Phil. 2:16.) This therefore demands not only a truthful but a living ministry—not only soundness in the faith itself, not only life in the minister's own soul, two indispensable requisites, but life in the word which drops from his lips. The true servant of God is at a point in all that he advances. He can say therefore with Paul, "We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak." (2 Cor. 4:13.) This faith in his heart meets and unites with the faith in the heart of his gracious hearers. They are sure that he believes what he preaches, because his "speech and his preaching is in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." And what is the effect? That both his faith and their faith stand not in the wisdom of men but in the power of

God. (1 Cor. 2:4, 5.) This is the unity or oneness of faith which, as working by love, knits and unites the heart of the people to the minister and of the minister to the people. They thus grow together, for as his faith becomes strengthened and enlarged, fresh fields of green pasturage are opened to him, and into these he leads his willing flock. But a wretched time-server, who has crept into the ministry to eat a piece of bread; or a puffed-up novice, who has a little smattering of doctrine in his head and a set of wheels to his tongue; or a crafty hypocrite, who is watching every turn of the wind nicely to shift his sails; or an erroneous man, who hides his error under the pulpit cushion till he can safely bring it forth; or a vacillating character, who, either from ignorance of the power of truth, or from false charity, or from a soft, pliant disposition, holds with all sides and is faithful to none—how can any such men as these feed the Church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood? If I have a living faith in the Son of God, what union can there be between my faith and the faith of such men? It is not merely oneness of doctrine but oneness of faith, and that too neither dead nor drooping, but living, acting, and growing in minister and people, which binds them together.

2. But with that there is "the knowledge of the Son of God." If you will read the passage carefully, you will perceive the little word "of" before "the knowledge of the Son of God." This little word "of" refers to the unity just mentioned. Thus there is not only the unity or oneness of faith, but the unity or oneness of the knowledge of the Son of God.

Our readers will bear in mind that the point now before us is the growth of the whole body generally, and of each individual member particularly, through the instrumentality of the ministry of the word. There is a oneness, therefore, of this knowledge both in the minister and in the people. He knows the Son of God for himself. He has had that view, discovery, manifestation, or revelation of the Son of God, whereby he spiritually knows him as the Son of God. He can therefore preach him, and testify of him to the people. They, we of course mean the spiritual part of them, also know, or at least are panting to know the same eve-blessed Son of the Father in truth and love. Here they meet, not only in the unity of faith, but in the unity of knowledge—a sweet, experimental knowledge of the Son of God in his Person and work, beauty and blessedness, grace and glory. Directly that Paul's mouth was opened he "preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." (Acts 9:20.)

And how came he to know that he is the Son of God? Because God was pleased to "reveal his Son in him, that he might preach him among the heathen." (Gal. 1:16.) As, then, the heaven-taught minister sets forth the Person and work of the Son of God, from a gracious, experimental knowledge of him, the blessed Spirit takes of the things of Christ and shows them to the people through the ministry of the word. They receive Christ under the word of the truth of the gospel, which testifies of him, for it bringeth forth fruit in them; (Col. 1:5, 6; 2:6;) and they thus receive the love of the truth, and are saved thereby. (2 Thess. 2:10.) Now minister and hearer are as one-knit together in a oneness of knowledge, as well as a unity or oneness of faith.

But this knowledge, both in him and them, is, for the most part, but weak, scanty, and imperfect. It is true, real, gracious, experimental, but necessarily imperfect, and will be so to the end of our life, for "now we see through a glass darkly." It therefore admits of growth. Even blessed Paul, who could say, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ," (Phil. 3:8,) was obliged to add, "that I may know him," as if he did not yet know him. So great and glorious was his Person, so complete his finished work, so broad, and long, and deep, and high was his love, so sympathising his heart, so strong his hand, so sweet his mouth, so superabounding his grace, that all that he knew of him was but as a drop to the boundless ocean. There is, then, a growth in this knowledge, both in minister and people. As he advances in this knowledge, they advance with him. Every fresh trial, temptation, and affliction which befalls him leads him into a deeper and further knowledge of the Son of God. As this is brought forth before the people, it feeds their knowledge, and by it their faith, for

"Faith is by knowledge fed;"

and as the same Spirit teaches both minister and people, for as there is "one body," so there is "one Spirit," they move on together in this blessed path of an experimental knowledge of the Son of God.

This is God's plan, as laid down in the word of his grace; this the fruit of the ministry of the gospel, as traced by the hand of the Holy Ghost. We have not

yet done with our subject, as we have still to open verses 15 and 16; but, for the present, let this suffice.

And now what are those voices which we hear in the distance? "You are cutting us off. You are setting up a fixed, arbitrary standard for the ministry, and if we cannot reach your standard you are at once off with our heads; or if you spare us as Christians, you cut us off as ministers." Not so, dear friends and brethren in the ministry—to you we speak who have any faith in, any knowledge of the Son of God, and testify to the people of that faith and of that knowledge as far as you possess it. It is not the strength of your faith, nor the depth of your knowledge, nor your gifts and ability in testifying of it that is the question. It is the *reality* of it. What we write, we write from the word of truth and our own experience as a Christian and as a minister. If we set up a high standard, we must cut ourselves off; but believing that we have a living faith, and a gracious knowledge of the Son of God, and this faith and this knowledge forming, as the Lord enables, the basis of our own ministry by tongue and pen, can we admit anything else, whomever it may touch? Would you have us allow that an unbeliever in, or a denier of the Son of God is a true servant of Christ? Shall we set up unbelief in the place of faith, and ignorance or denial of the Son of God instead of a knowledge of him? "O dear, no," you say; "we mean no such thing. God forbid that any one who desires to fear his name and preach his word faithfully should set forth any other way of salvation than faith in the Son of God. But, but"—well, what "but?" "Why, we do not like, and, indeed, we do not at all approve of your setting up a certain standard of faith and knowledge, and cutting off all ministers who do not exactly come up to your standard." But where have we done this, here or elsewhere? We have shown you, from the word of God, what the ministry of the gospel is, or should be. We have moved carefully and cautiously, step by step, with the express language of the Holy Ghost in the word of truth; and, we may add, with our own experience of the truth of God. If we preach faith, it is because we have some testimony that we possess it; if we preach the knowledge of the Son of God, it is because we have seen and known him in the light of his own gracious revelation. Our writings and sermons, such as they are, have been for years before the Church of God. Let them be our judge, whether we have ever set up any other way of salvation than a living faith in, a living knowledge of the Son of God. But we do not set up a fixed standard of this faith and this knowledge, still less a fixed standard of grace and gifts for

the ministry of the gospel. If we cut off any, it is the hypocrites in Zion, the false preachers, the erroneous men, the deniers of the Son of God. But we never have touched (God forbid we should ever touch) the weakest of his saints, or the least of his servants. Would to God there were more ministers of the everlasting gospel. It would truly rejoice our heart to see men raised up, humble, simple, sincere, sound in faith, blessed with an experimental knowledge of the Son of God, and furnished with sufficient gifts of utterance as well as inward life and power to feed the Church of God. We much need them. The Lord is taking home, or laying aside by sickness or infirmity very many of his servants. And where shall we look to find their successors? It seems to us, at present, a gloomy prospect. We have plenty of preachers, whose worst feature is that, puffed up by a vain idea of their own gifts and abilities, and fawned upon by a tribe of admirers and flatterers, they have not light enough to see their own deficiencies, or life enough to feel their own shortcomings. How can men grow, or even desire to grow, who think themselves already arrived at full stature, and wonder that all do not admire them as much as they admire themselves? How can they approve themselves to the family of God, when they evidently are pushing themselves forward, as if they were qualified to stand in any pulpit, to preach to any congregation, and to take first and foremost rank among the servants of God? They will have to learn a different lesson before they find an abiding place in the confidence, the esteem, and the affections of the discerning family, however well they may stand in their own. "Before honour is humility." "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." The Lord bless thee, thou humble servant of the living God, who in simplicity and godly sincerity preachest what God has taught thee, and feedest the people with the food with which he hath fed thee. We would not say a word to cast down or discourage thy tried, exercised soul, weaken thy hands, or cast a slight on thy ministry. But thou wilt not think our sword too sharp or words too cutting, for if our heart can read thine, thou lovest all that is good, and hatest every false way.

VIII.

God has set before our eyes in his holy word a model Church and a model ministry, and by so doing has displayed both his wisdom and his grace. From not seeing and from not following this inspired pattern have arisen almost all

the errors and all the evils which have made havoc of both Church and ministry, and perverted some of God's choicest gifts to the vilest purposes. As this point has an important bearing on our present subject, and has not met with the attention which it deserves, we will devote to it a few moments' consideration.

Without a proper pattern to instruct his eye and guide his hand, no artist, no artisan, can properly execute any work. It is not supposed that he will ever come up to his model, for that is assumed to be perfect; but it is expected that he will do his best to imitate it. If he be so ignorant as not to understand, or so conceited as not to follow the pattern set before him, he will be all his days a poor bungling workman, the plague of his employer, and the spoiler of everything put into his hand which demands skill and execution. We see, therefore, a divine pattern laid down both in the Old Testament and the New. When God said to Moses, "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them," he added, "according to all that I show thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it." (Exod. 25:9.) Not a pin of the tabernacle nor a vessel of service was left to the choice of Moses. Binding upon him and on the artificers employed by him was the injunction: "And look that thou make them after their pattern which was showed thee in the mount." Similarly, the Lord has given in the New Testament a perfect pattern of the ministry of the word and a perfect pattern of a gospel Church. The pattern of the ministry may be found chiefly in the ministerial Epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus; but there is no one passage where it is more clearly yet concisely laid down than in that which we have been unfolding and have not yet succeeded in finishing, viz., Eph. 4:8-16.

The perfect pattern of a gospel Church is given in 1 Cor. 12:4-31. But we find very beautiful and concise descriptions of what the Church at large is as the mystical body of Christ, Col. 2:19, Eph. 4:16, and 5:25-32, all which demand much prayerful attention and consideration. As one of these passages, Eph. 4:16, is in connection with our subject—the ministry of the gospel, we shall direct special attention to it. We have shown hitherto that one of the main objects of the ministry of the gospel is the edifying or building up, as the word means, of the body of Christ. By "the body of Christ," as applicable to the Church, we may understand two things: 1, the Church of Christ as a whole;

(Eph. 1:22, 23; 5:29, 30;) 2, the Church of Christ, as represented visibly on earth by a gospel church. (1 Cor. 12:12, 13, 27.) The difference between these two bodies is that the one is invisible, the other visible; the one perfect, the other imperfect; one the reality, the other the representation. But from their close connection and their resemblance, the Scripture often speaks of them as one, and transfers to the visible Church what is true in its fullest sense only in the invisible. Unless we see and understand this, we cannot enter into the spiritual meaning of such a chapter as 1 Cor. 12. Now, God's idea, so to speak, and we may add, intention, are that this body is to "grow into a perfect" or matured "man;" and when this is attained unto, it is "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." In the eye of him who sees all things from the beginning, the Church is already complete; but it is not so in present realisation or visible manifestation. It has, therefore, to grow; and this growth has a measure or appointed standard, which is "the stature of the fulness of Christ." By turning to Eph. 1:22, 23, we shall see what this "fulness of Christ" is: "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." This fulness is not his fulness as God, (Col. 2:9,) nor his fulness as God-man Mediator, (Col. 1:19,) but the completeness of the mystical body of which he is the Head.

The subject is somewhat difficult to understand; but as it contains much deep and precious truth, and is closely connected with the ministry, we trust that our readers will give us their attention as we attempt to unfold it.

Growth is of three kinds: 1. Growth in the whole body of Christ; 2. Growth in a church as a representation of this body; 3. Growth in each individual as a member of the body. And to each of these kinds of growth the term or limit is "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." But of course this differs according to that which has to grow. We will view it in each of these three senses.

1. View first, then, the growth of the *whole* body. The body of Christ is ever growing. In this sense "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" will only be attained when the whole body is complete, and all his mystical members glorified in eternal union with the glorified Head. But it cannot be said that this body is yet complete, except in the mind of God, for many of his

elect are yet unborn, many born who are not as yet born again. As, then, each member is quickened into divine life, the body grows by the continual development and accession of these living members, which will go on until the last elect is gathered in, and the body is complete.

But now see the bearing which the ministry of the gospel has on this growth of the body of Christ. By the preached word the members of this body are quickened into spiritual life. Accessions are thus made continually to the body, for every soul quickened by the word becomes a manifested living member of Christ. What a permanent blessing is, then, couched in the ministry of the gospel, as the means appointed and owned of God to build up the body of Christ; and in this sense every sent servant of God is a labourer together with God. (1 Cor. 3.) As, then, the ministry of the word is the appointed means of thus edifying or building up the body of Christ, it will be maintained until this body is complete, and it has attained to the appointed "measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

2. But, besides this growth of the body as a whole by the accession of successive members, there is also a growth of the visible body of Christ as represented in a *gospel church*. Does a gospel church always remain at the same stand? Is there no difference between a newly-formed church and one that has been established for many years? It is true that when we come to examine their actual, internal condition, many old established churches are sadly disappointing to a spiritual eye. They have lost the vigour of youth, without attaining to the wisdom and stability of age. But most churches resemble the human body in its three periods—youth, manhood, and old age. When first formed, there is usually with them a period of warmth, activity, and zeal. To this succeeds the church's best period, when its young members have become matured and ripened into steady, solid, well established believers. And then follows the third and worst stage, when it sinks into old age and all its attendant infirmities, when it has neither the active vigour of youth nor the solid strength of manhood; but the deadness, sloth, peevishness, and fretfulness of decrepitude. Such was the Laodicean church, and such are many of our gospel churches now. Their best members, the pillars of the church, have died off; none of the younger members, taken in perhaps on a very slight experience, have succeeded to their place; peevishness and fretfulness, often issuing in strife and contention, mar all love and union; the

old members are too self-willed and obstinate to heed counsel or admonition; the pastor, to whom all once looked, is removed by death, and the pulpit filled by a succession of ministers. Supplies, however, cannot have his authority or influence, and gradually the church sinks into dotage and death. Such is the history of many a gospel church, as too many can testify. The church itself, thus stricken with age, may not see its own condition, and like some old men naturally, who cannot bear the thought of old age, and still affect to be young, may stoutly resist any imputation of decline. Ephraim had grey hairs here and there upon him, yet he knew it not. (Hos. 7:9.)

But leaving this point, let us see what is God's idea, in the word of growth in a Christian Church. It is beautifully described by the Apostle: "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Eph. 4:15, 16.) There is also a very sweet and concise description of the same growth and by the same means in an almost parallel passage: "And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." (Col. 2:19.) By putting these two passages together, we may, the Lord teaching and enabling us to understand them, arrive at a right conception of growth in a Christian Church. We may observe that it is dependent on two things as means and instruments of this growth; 1, the ministry of the word; 2, the mutual communion of the members with the Head and each other.

1. It is in the mystical body of Christ as in the human body. All the members are dependent on the head for life and growth, but much more in the mystical than in the natural body. Only as we are supplied out of his fulness, can there be any sensible life or manifest growth. By "holding the Head," that is, holding union and communion with the Head, "all the body, through its joints and bands, having nourishment ministered and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God;" that is, according to the will, purpose, and power of God. And as in the human body, the members grow together. Now, here comes in the benefit and blessedness of a sound and experimental gospel ministry. It feeds each several member; at least, that is what it does or should do, according to the mind of God. Now, as each is thus fed, each grows. The

eye grows clearer, stronger, and more discerning; the ear becomes more fine, delicate, and discriminating; the taste more nice and yet more sound, less fond of sugar-plums, and more relishing savoury food; the hand stronger and more open and enlarged; and the foot more active and willing to run on errands of kindness and love. And as they grow together, so are they more firmly knit together. How well knit are the bones and joints of a man compared with those of a child. How compacted they become by use and exercise and advancing manhood. How strong their union, and how almost indissoluble they become.* So in the mystical body of Christ. Indissolubly united to their living Head, the members are indissolubly united to each other; and, as thus united, they minister to each other's growth and edification. The whole body is "fitly joined together," for all the members "are baptized into one body," and "all have been made to drink into one Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:13.) God has thus mingled and tempered together the strong and the feeble, the comely and the uncomely, the honourable and the less honourable, so that each contributes to the nourishment and growth of the other. The figure of the vine and the branches may help us to understand this. The sleeping, dormant bud in the stem may represent the members of the body of Christ before divine quickening. It is in the vine, but not developed into manifest life and growth. But at a certain period a power is put forth, which may be called manifest life; (for the bud in nature never was really dead;) sap flows into it from the stem; it shoots, it grows, it blooms, it bears. Nor is it alone in life, growth and fruitfulness. Its fellow-buds grow with it into fellow branches, and the life of the one keeps pace with the life and growth of the other. So in the mystical body of Christ. The members grow together. The strong arm has a fellow in the strong leg, and the health and strength of each member are the health and strength of all. As this growth is being carried on, there is a "growing up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ;" for it is out of his fulness and the supplies of his grace that all this growth comes.

* When Ravaillac, the assassin of Henri IV, was, according to his sentence, to be torn to pieces by four horses, one at each arm and leg, they could not, after several attempts, pull the limbs out of the body until the surgeon cut the ligaments of the joints with a knife.

But there is also growth of the whole body by the union and communion of the members with each other. This is beautifully opened up by the Apostle:

"From whom the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part; maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Eph. 4:16.) Each member contributes to the welfare and benefit of the other. The eye does not see for itself, nor the ear hear for itself, nor the hand minister to itself, nor the foot walk for itself, but each individual member acts for the benefit of the others and the whole. We cannot enlarge on this subject, but it is set before us as God's pattern of a gospel church. But now observe its connection with the ministry of the gospel. The ministry feeds and strengthens each individual member. As then each member is thus fed and strengthened, it feeds and strengthens its fellow-members. The whole body is first "fitly joined together;" it then becomes "compacted," that is, firmly knit and strengthened, "by that which every joint supplieth; and by the effectual working in the measure of every part, the whole body edifies itself in love."

To open this subject, to explain how the members mutually contribute to each other's nourishment and growth, would not only take up too much space, but would divert us from the more immediate consideration of our subject. But it may easily be seen how the ministry of the gospel contributes to the mutual growth of the members. When, for instance, there is an addition to the church, and the candidates can speak of their being called or blessed under the ministry of the word, and give in a clear and sweet testimony to the work of grace on their soul, does not this kindle new life and feeling in the hearts of the members of the church? Or when any one member is signally favoured and blessed, he does not eat his morsel alone; he is glad to communicate to others and share with them the blessing of God which has made him rich; and how this will often revive a drooping soul, and if it do no more, will draw forth prayer and desire for a similar blessing. Nay, if it even work jealousy, it does not work amiss, for these coals of fire which hath a most vehement flame will often stir up the languid soul, and draw forth the wrestling cry, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." O what a blessing there is in a real, gracious, savoury, experimental ministry. How a church flourishes under it, as member after member is by it edified and fed. How it promotes union and brotherly love; and as these are promoted, how the church edifies or builds itself up in love. But where there is a cold, barren, lifeless ministry, under it church and congregation sink into a dead, listless, lethargic state. No union or communion is felt among the members; they care little for each other's welfare, naturally or spiritually; they just meet, out of formality, on the Lord's day, and whilst a

few poor, tried souls are secretly sighing and mourning their own carnal state and the dead state of the church generally, the talkative professors have it all their own way, insensible of their own death, and the death in the pulpit and pew; and strife and division, perhaps on the merest trifles, soon rend the already disunited members asunder.

We see, then, the connection between the ministry of the gospel and the growth and edification of the Church as the body of Christ. And what is true of the Church collectively is true of *each member* separately. The ministry of the word is God's appointed means to instruct, feed, and edify every member of the mystical body of Christ. Much, indeed, of this instruction and edification is conveyed so gradually as to be almost insensible. We are on the look-out for great signal blessings, and, indeed, we are right in so doing; but we should bear in mind that it is with the soul often as the body. The food that we daily take feeds and nourishes our frames, and yet we are not always sensible of the benefit thus derived from it. So, in sitting under a sound, gracious, experimental ministry, there is a being fed and nourished by the word of life, as distinct from special seasons of signal blessing, which are rare events, though so highly prized when they do come. Perhaps at your first deliverance, or afterwards, under some special trial, deep affliction, or powerful temptation, you were signally favoured under a sermon; but how rare these seasons are, and what bright spots do they form in a believer's experience. But distinct from these special and rare seasons there is a feeding under the word, a revival of faith and hope and love, a being renewed in the spirit of the mind. Sometimes instruction is communicated by it to inform and establish the judgment; sometimes a light is cast on a dark path in providence or grace, to show us that the Lord is with us in it; sometimes our evidences are brightened, and doubts and fears dispelled; sometimes temptations, which we have thought peculiar to ourselves, have been so touched on that we see the servant of God is tempted as we are; sometimes we get such views and discoveries of the blessed Lord, as he is set forth in his Person and work, as draw forth faith upon him and love towards him, and he is felt to be near, dear, and precious; sometimes we can so travel almost step by step with the minister as to fully believe we are in the footsteps of the flock; and as he opens up and proves, point after point, by the word of truth, the work of grace in the heart is so shone upon by the blessed Spirit that we have no doubt of its genuineness and reality. Sometimes, again, our cold, sluggish, dead, and backward hearts are stirred up to take fresh hold of the mercy of God in

Christ, of the faithfulness of a covenant God, of the fulness and freeness of rich, free, and superabounding grace; and as faith embraces these divine realities, the soul is melted and softened into contrition, humility, and love. Sometimes the fear of God is sensibly strengthened, the evil of sin more clearly seen and felt; prayers and desires are kindled to be kept from it, that it may not grieve us, and sorrow of heart experienced, with many inward confessions on account of past backslidings. Sometimes peculiar strength is communicated under a special trial, resignation given to the will of God, the rod submitted to and embraced, and the mercy acknowledged that he does not leave us to go into evil unchecked, without repenting of or forsaking it. Sometimes keen reproof enters the soul; we see that we have been entangled in a snare of Satan; we may almost fear the wound is incurable; but blood and love form a balm that well suits the bleeding conscience. Sometimes we are led to see how worldly, covetous, and carnally-minded we have been; how carking cares and business anxieties have, like locusts, eaten up every green thing, and how little we have really thought of, or done for the Lord during the week. The contrast between all this worldly din and dust, and the calm, still, spiritual services and worship of the sanctuary, strikes the mind; and whilst it conveys secret reproof to the conscience, yet, mingled with it, there springs up an earnest longing for deliverance from the pressure of the body of sin and death, and for more enjoyment of that sweet spirituality of mind which we know is life and peace.

But now, in order to see how all this nutritious food, communicated to the soul by the ministry of the word, is connected with not only the growth of the individual members of the body, but how, by joints and bands, the nourishment is ministered, view the effects, such as we have just described, in connection with our fellow-members. Love to the Lord produces love to his people; union and communion with him create and cement union and communion with those who are manifestly his. As, then, one or another testifies to a blessing received under the word, there is a spreading of the blessing, a diffusion of the warmth, a running down of the precious ointment upon the head and beard, down to the skirts of the garments. Heart becomes more closely and firmly knitted to heart, and soul to soul; and as the joints and bands are thus more compacted together, the nourishment flows more fully into them, and through them becomes diffused over the body. In every church there will be stiff joints, crooked fingers, lame legs, tender feet,

rheumatic shoulders and limbs, which, if not actually paralysed, are full of old chronic complaints; and these are almost out of the reach of the nourishment spoken of, are little themselves benefited by it, and therefore cannot spread it on. But, in describing the mode in which the body has nourishment ministered by joints and bands, we are no more bound to set it all aside, or doubt and deny it on account of these crooked joints, than a lecturer on anatomy, in describing the human frame, is obliged to explain diseased structures or crippled limbs in the natural body. We do what the Scripture does—describe the body as it *should be*, not what it often *is*; we draw after God's model, not after man's; and for this simple reason, that God's pattern is inspired and perfect, but man's a perverted and base imitation. All who have known and felt spiritual blessings, and have witnessed their effect upon the healthy members of a church, will bear witness to the truth of our description; and any exceptional case of a crooked or half-paralysed member which neither receives nor communicates nourishment no more nullifies or impairs the accuracy of our statement than a diseased or defective joint in the human body sets aside a true representation of the natural frame. How blessed it is when the ministry of the word is thus owned of God, and answers the end of its divine institution. There is now no room for strife and contention, petty jealousies, evil surmises, unjust suspicions, cold looks, averted eyes, cutting expressions, harsh speeches to the face or behind the back, dwelling on past grievances, raking up buried complaints, and rubbing up old sores. The spirit now is that of love and union, humility, meekness, gentleness, and quietness; strife and division are shunned and abhorred by the soul thus favoured and blessed; it would do anything or suffer anything rather than pain the feelings, grieve the mind, or wound the conscience of the dear children of God. This is, if we may use the expression, God's idea of the ministry, and of the way in which it ministers nourishment to the members of the mystical body of Christ. He has set a pattern before our eyes, that we may know what his mind and will are. But this cuts both ways. As you read what we have thus feebly and imperfectly traced out, a secret sigh springs up in your breast. "I wish that our minister fed our souls as you describe; I wish that our church was as flourishing, as fruitful, as united, as loving, as mutually ministering to each other's comfort and profit as you have drawn. But it is not so with us. We are rather starved than fed; and the members of the church, or at least some of them, instead of ministering to each other's comfort, seem more ready to tear each other to pieces." Your complaint may or may not be just as regards your

particular instance. The ministry may feed others, if it do not feed you; and you may yourself be one of those unpleasant, quarrelsome, disaffected members whose words and actions rather foment than allay strife. But this is a point on which we cannot now enter. We shall, therefore, conclude our present paper with the expression of our belief that nearly all who fear God and have a right judgment in these matters will admit that Zion is low, in a low place, and will join with us in the expression of our desire and prayer that the Lord would graciously revive his work, and in justly-deserved wrath would remember mercy.

IX.

According to the plan which we laid down in our opening paper, we should now proceed to consider:

IV. The *blessings* which are promised to accompany the ministry of the gospel.

This part of our subject, however, we have already in good measure forestalled, since the *ends* for which the ministry was established, and which we have considered at so great a length, include most of those blessings which were promised to attend it to the Church of God. But as these promised blessings much depend for their fulfilment on the peculiar character of the ministry itself, it being evident from observation and experience that a very wide and marked difference exists between ministers of truth, not only in the possession of grace and gifts but in the amount of the blessing of God which rests on their ministry; and it being no less evident from the word of truth that unless expressly called and sent by God and furnished by him with needful qualifications for the work, they cannot profit his people, it can hardly be considered a serious or unfair digression from our subject if we here turn aside to consider two important points which not only much concern but must ever deeply interest every true servant of the Lord. These two points are closely connected with each other, and are: 1. What is meant or implied by a *call* to the ministry; 2. What are the needful *qualifications* for its exercise to the glory of God and the good of his people.

i. We will consider first, then, what is meant or implied by a *call* to the ministry. In examining this point, the first consideration which presents itself

to our mind is the striking fact that under the Old Testament dispensation none were true prophets unless expressly called by the Lord to that office. Now, from this obvious fact at once springs the important question, whether a similar call is required under the New Testament for the work of the ministry; and if so, whether it should be equally plain, signal, and clear? It seems desirable, if not necessary, to clear up this point before we proceed any further with the question of a divine call to the work.

That there is a considerable similarity between the prophets of the Old Testament and the ministers of the New most will admit; and if this resemblance be conceded it will follow that there is a sufficient analogy between the prophetic and ministerial offices to warrant comparison between them both as to the call to, and qualifications for, the exercise of each. Admitting, then, this similarity between the office and work of the prophet and the office and work of the minister, we must next inquire whether they are so similar that they must be judged by the same exact standard and weighed in precisely the same balance. According to our judgment, and admitting to the fullest degree the necessity of a call to the ministry, we believe that we are not warranted in applying the same rigid standard to both offices, and demanding from the minister the same clear, precise, and signal call which was required of the prophet. Two simple considerations may be sufficient to show this with sufficient clearness.

1. Consider, then, first, the great difference between the two dispensations, not only as regards their general character, but as respects what we may term their officers and ministers. Prophets, it must be borne in mind, were not an original part of the Old Testament dispensation. The priestly office, not the prophetic, was an integral part of the ceremonial law given at Sinai; and the priest, not the prophet, was the minister of God to the people. The strict parallel, therefore, would seem, at first sight, to be between the priestly and the ministerial office; but this comparison is not admissible on the simple ground that the priestly office was typical of the priesthood of Christ; and, having its parallel in him, cannot be extended beyond him to the ministers of the New Testament, without falling into the Romish error of turning ministry into priesthood. But the ministry of the gospel, as we have already shown, is a special New Testament institution; and, being the express gift of our risen and glorified Head, is neither priestly nor prophetic, though it has an analogy

with each, but possesses a distinct and peculiar character of its own. We cannot, therefore, apply the same rigid rule to both offices, and measure a call to preach by the same precise standard as a call to prophesy.

2. But consider, secondly, that the prophets were not ordinary, but *extraordinary* messengers of God to his people. Some were raised up, as Deborah and Samuel, to be judges of the people; others, as Elijah and Elisha, to work mighty miracles; others, as Isaiah, Jeremiah, &c., to utter prophecies which should form a part of the inspired Scriptures. Now, how can we fairly apply to the ministers of the New Testament the same standard by which was measured the call of these extraordinary servants of God, demand from every preacher of the gospel the credentials of an Elisha or a Jeremiah, and declare, unless he were called by a voice from heaven, that he is a hypocrite and an impostor?

In handling, therefore, this point, we seem to have a line marked out for us which runs between two extremes. 1. That there must be a call to the ministry, that it may be exercised to the glory of God and the profit of his people; for if we set aside this, we do away with the ministry itself as a divine institution. 2. That this call need not be so signal and special as that of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, &c., or, we may add, of the Apostles under the New Testament, who occupy, as such, a peculiar position.

Having thus far shown the reasons why we have marked out for ourselves the line which we shall endeavour to follow, we shall now proceed to consider what is in our judgment a sufficient, if not absolutely needful, call to the ministry.

Now, according to our view, it is a very difficult and delicate point clearly to lay down what is a sufficient call to the ministry, for many of God's own sent servants, who have been most fully received by the living family as his commissioned ambassadors, have been much tried to make their calling to the work plain and clear to their own satisfaction, whilst some, if not many, who have spoken great swelling words of their call, are not commended to the consciences of God's own people as sent by him to preach his word at all, and have either been obliged to give up their preaching through positive failure of hearers, or from the thorough wearing out of what little gift they ever had for

the work. Thus, when the trembling, exercised servant of the Lord has waxed stronger and stronger, and been more and more established in the hearts and affections of the family of God, these pretenders have become more and more manifest as led by a false spirit, and if not wilful deceivers, at least themselves willingly deceived.

When we say this, we wish it to be distinctly understood that we believe every sent servant of God will have, sooner or later, more or less, a witness in his own conscience that he is called to the work, for without some such inward testimony, he must soon faint under its burden, and always speak in fetters and shackles; but it may be some time before he is clearly established in his own mind. And besides this, he must have also a witness in the hearts and consciences of God's living people, who are often better judges of his call to the work than he himself can be, especially when he is under much trial and temptation.

What is thought to be a call to the ministry is more common than many persons suppose. In saying this, we purposely set aside all those schemes of human contrivance by which *pious* young men are manufactured into ministers by the gross, and can be sent out to order to suit any pulpit and any people; and we take as little account of those numerous instances where pride and ignorance, vanity and self-conceit, love of ease, and aversion to hard and daily work, combine, with some natural ability of mind and readiness of speech, to persuade an aspiring youth that a pulpit is the proper place for him to adorn, and for it to adorn him. Such men-made ministers, and such self admiring beauties, have no place in the Church of Christ, and no place in the consciences of those who know and love truth in its power. But take the case of one really called by grace in his youth, blessed with the love of God shed abroad in his heart, and possessed of a fair share of ability of mind, knowledge of the Scriptures, and utterance in prayer, private or public. Many if not most of such, in the warmth of their first love, in their liberty of access and freedom of utterance before the throne, in their zeal for the truth in its purity and power, in their strong affection to the family of God, and in their devotedness of heart and willingness to suffer for the Lord's sake, feel such impulses and movements on their spirit as make them long to testify to all who will hear what God has done for their soul, and to give themselves up to his service. But time and circumstances abundantly show them that this was not a

call to the ministry, for as their first love declined, these movements towards the ministry declined with it, and they clearly saw that it was not the will of God that they should stand up in his name. It is not, therefore, any or every secret impulse or movement of the mind, even when honest and sincere, or any inward persuasion of the heart or desire for the work which will prove to be a call to the ministry, for many such blossoms drop off and are never matured into fruit. There must be, therefore, other things working together with the feelings and desires that we have named to constitute a divine and sufficient call.

1. First, then, generally there is a great *backwardness* to the work. We see this in Moses, Jeremiah, Jonah, Habakkuk, and if not expressly mentioned in the case of the other prophets, yet the words so often in their mouths, "The burden of the Lord," show the solemn weight with which the ministry pressed on their spirit. Those whom God calls to the work, he usually so strips and empties, so pulls down, humbles, and abases, so shows them what the ministry is, and their own unfitness for it, that they shrink back from so arduous and important a work, and can scarcely be persuaded that they are called to it. We need hardly remark how different this is from the forward, pushing, bold, if not presuming spirit which so many manifest in their ambitious aim almost to force their way into the pulpit.

2. Usually, too, there are strong and marked leadings in *providence*. A train of circumstances has been long at work, which, however obscure at the time, becomes cleared up when the moment arrives for unfolding the secret purposes of God. Hindrances of various kinds, such as business engagements, occupation or employment in life, fixed habitation where there was no door open for the work, opposition of wife or relations, repeated disappointments when the prospect seemed a little clearer, inability to move forward until the pillar and the cloud moved—these and similar hindrances are gradually or suddenly removed, and what was yesterday a mountain becomes to-day a plain. All the difficulties are taken out of the way in so marked a manner, and the hand of the Lord so clearly seen, that what once seemed almost impossible is now accomplished in a moment.

3. Usually, too, it entails not only suffering, but *sacrifice*. The labourer is worthy of his hire, and those who sow spiritual things may lawfully reap

carnal things; but to go into the ministry for a piece of bread, to attain a respectable position in life, to feed a secret thirst for popularity and applause, to occupy a somewhat higher place in the church than a private Christian, to exchange a wearisome, irksome employment for comparative idleness and ease, to have the pleasure of hearing himself talk, to shine as a light, and be a teacher and a preacher instead of being taught and preached to; all such base, unworthy motives stamp a man at once as a hireling. God may, after a season of suffering and sacrifice, honour his servants by giving them such a warm place in the hearts of his people, and such a high standing in the Church of Christ as shall elevate them above their original position. Bunyan was raised from the tinker's barrow, and Huntington from the coal-barge, to an honoured place in the Church of God; but we know through what sufferings, privations, and sacrifices these men of God passed in the first exercise of their ministry, and that though this honour followed, it was not their aim nor object in the first instance. Many, if not most of God's sent servants have had to come down before they went up, and to sacrifice good situations and employments, which, if not lucrative, were either likely to become so, or at any rate exceeded in value anything which they could expect from the ministry, especially in our connection, where the people are usually so poor, and the ministers so indifferently paid.

Generally, too, where there is a call to the ministry, there will be some peculiar *impression* fastened unexpectedly on the mind concerning it; or some secret, inward persuasion that it is the will of God he should stand up in his name; or some promise applied to the heart strongly looking that way; or some remarkable season experienced in prayer, when access was given to spread all his desires before the Lord, and there sprang up a humble petition to be made use of for his glory, which seemed to enter the ears of the Lord of sabaoth; or some intimation in hearing the word preached, or reading it in private, from the power which attended it, that a door would be opened to speak in the Lord's name; or some intense longing for the good of souls and earnest desire to be made useful to the Church of God, which seemed as if it would not fall to the ground unfulfilled. These, and other similar impressions and intimations, are like the leaven in the meal which sets the whole mass to heave, ferment, and work. So through these peculiar impressions there will work almost day and night in the mind of one who has experienced them, exercises, desires, longings, cries, breathings, and petitions to the Lord; and

mingled with them, there will be many fears of being deceived by false impressions, being deluded by Satan as an angel of light, or being impelled to so great and arduous a work by pride, ambition, lust of praise, and distinction, a name amongst men, or other equally base and carnal motives. But as these fears work, and the cry comes forth, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me," the soul is thus made increasingly honest and sincere, and willing to go or stay, speak or be silent, take up the burden of the Lord or leave it untouched, draw the sword in the van or still tarry among the stuff in the rear. It may be some years, perhaps, before the way is made sufficiently plain—years of anxious waiting and watching, years of delayed hope till the heart is made sick, years of disappointment and vexation, but all working to a determined end, and gradually preparing the man to become an able minister of the New Testament, and not enter the pulpit as a raw recruit, but as one who can endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, and contend earnestly for the faith once delivered onto the saints. The Church, alas! is overrun with youths and novices who attempt to teach when they need to be taught; and if ever they learn anything or are ever of any use, learn their business as an ill-taught medical student learns at last a little of his profession—by experimenting on men's souls as he on their bodies, and making a hundred mistakes for one right or successful treatment.

5. There will also generally be, where the Lord has called a man to the work, an impression on the minds of the discerning part of God's people—we say "discerning," for we take no account of the undiscerning and inexperienced who so abound in most churches—that he will one day stand up in his name. This arises sometimes from hearing his experience when he joins the church, sometimes from his peculiar gift in prayer, or his knowledge of and light upon the Scriptures, or his spirituality of mind in conversation, or his firmness in the truth, or his warmth and zeal in defending the cause of God, or his circumspect walk, his separation from the world and general devotedness of life; and all joined with that measure of mental ability which seems indispensable for a man who has to preach the word of God, to instruct the ignorant, edify the Church of Christ, and convince the gainsayer.

Perhaps none of the things which we have mentioned would be sufficient of itself to be a call to the ministry, but the concurrence of some or many of

them, like the flowing of many little rivulets to form one brook, make, by their combination, the purpose of God more plain and clear. Not that all who are truly called to the work can trace out with equal distinctness the marks and proofs of their call, but they can usually record some of those landmarks which have directed their path, and by which they have been led and encouraged to believe that it was by the hand of the Lord.

But we fully believe that, besides these peculiar leadings, every true servant of God will have two witnesses to his call, without which he can never arrive at any real satisfaction that the Lord has himself appointed him to the work. These two witnesses are, 1. The witness in *his owns breast*; 2. The witness in the *consciences of the people of God*. Let us look at these separately.

1. We lay this down, then, as necessary to a man's being fully persuaded that God has called him to the work, that he will have, at times, the witness to it in his own breast. The Lord will, at times, so enlarge his heart, and so open his mouth; he will find, at favoured seasons, such a pouring in of gracious thoughts and feelings, and such a door of utterance to pour them out in words so suitable and so expressive, as if they were not his own, but were given him at the moment; such a power resting on his spirit to testify of what he has tasted, felt, and handled of the word of life; such a boldness to take forth the precious from the vile, that he may be as God's mouth; such holy warmth in declaring all the counsel of God, and yet no strange fire in his censer, but coals from the brazen altar; such a firm, solemn, believing realisation of the sacred truths which he is preaching, and such a sacred determination that, come what will, please or offend whom he may, he would sooner part with his life than part with the truth of God, as bring with them a sweet satisfaction that the Lord has called him to the work of the ministry. As these seasons are repeated, with greater or less power, and are contrasted by him with those, perhaps, more frequent times of darkness, when he is so shut up in his soul and the door of utterance so closed that he has scarcely a gracious thought, heavenly feeling, or suitable word, he gathers up an inward testimony that the Lord has, notwithstanding all his weakness and unworthiness, doubts and fears, called him to the work; and the very difference between himself and himself—between himself in the stocks and himself on the tower, himself shut up and himself able to come forth, himself hacking and stammering and himself enlarged with the sweetest freedom of speech, himself full of bondage and misery and himself full of light, life, liberty, and love—this very contrast, which

he so plainly feels, shows him only more clearly and distinctly when the Lord is with him and when he is not; and thus, by these very changes in his soul, these goings and comings of the Lord's presence and power on his spirit, he becomes satisfied that he is not warring at his own charges, but has been chosen to be a soldier to fight the Lord's battles. The way also in which texts are brought to his mind, opened up to his understanding, or applied to his heart; the light cast upon a passage when speaking from it, the suitable Scriptures which are brought to his memory to confirm his views upon it, and the sweet enjoyment which he has himself in or after the time of speaking from it; the secret prayer and meditation on the word which he has before he goes into the pulpit, and the holy savour which often rests on his spirit after the labours of the day; the sense which he has of the blessedness of the work, and his willingness to spend and be spent, labour and suffer, live and die in the Lord's service—these and similar experiences confirm him in the persuasion that the Lord has called him to the work, and is with him in it. He is brought to see and feel that his very sermons are not his own, and that he cannot preach them again with that life, power, and utterance which were given him with his text; that though he may take the same passage, he cannot handle it in the same way again; that he cannot open it, or enlarge upon it, or enforce it as before; and that he cannot recover even the light which then shone through it, still less the savour which rested on his spirit in setting it forth. But we must not further enlarge on this point, though we could say much on both sides of the question, from our own long and diversified experience of it.

2. But, he must also have the witness in the hearts and *consciences of the family of God*. Without this testimony from others, his own will be of little avail, for "not he who commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth." "In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established." (2 Cor. 13:1.) The testimony in his own breast is the one witness; the testimony in the consciences of others is the other; and the third, we may add, is the blessing of God resting upon his ministry.

This, therefore, we may next bring forward, as stamping a broad seal on his call to the work. Where a man is really called by God to the work of the ministry, his blessing will rest, more or less, manifestly upon the word; power will attend it to the heart of sinner and saint, and the Lord will not suffer it to fall to the ground as the mere word of man. There will be, at various times,

marked instances of some being called out of darkness into light, of others delivered from bondage into the liberty of the gospel, of others being brought out of temptation and soul distress into a wealthy place, of others specially favoured when much cast down with trials and afflictions, and of others being encouraged and strengthened to persevere courageously in their conflict with unbelief, sin, and Satan. Besides these special testimonies there will be also a general power and savour attending his word, which will gather and keep together a living people, few, perhaps, in number, but much united to him and his ministry, who highly esteem him in love and cleave to him for his work's sake. We do not speak here of partisans and flatterers, really a man's worst and most dangerous enemies, who cry him up as much as they cry all others down; nor of those weak and silly old women, of all ages and both sexes, who have no experience, judgment, or discernment in the things of God, and can receive almost everything in the shape of a sermon, and everybody in the shape of a minister; nor of those young people, and especially the female part of them, who admire the man almost as much as they admire the minister; but we mean the solid, well-taught, sober-minded, tried, experienced children of God, who know what they hear and whom they hear, and can tell the difference between chaff and wheat, letter and spirit, word and power, the noisome stench of the creature and the sweet savour of Christ. We will not, indeed, say that every called servant of God will at first, perhaps, obtain this clear witness in the consciences of the Lord's people, or to the extent which we have traced out, for, knowing what man is, and how easy the best may be deceived, they are slow to receive any minister; but, sooner or later, the Lord will establish his testimony to the call of his servant by commending it to feeling hearts, discerning spirits, and living consciences.

ii. And now for a few words on the *qualifications* for the work of the ministry. All must admit that if God call a man to the work, he will fit him for it; and if he have no such qualifications, there is no reason to believe that God has sent him. But what do we understand by qualifications for the ministry of the word? We may cast them under two simple heads: 1. Grace, and, 2. Gifts.

1. And first, *Grace*. Nothing is more evident than that a man without the grace of God in his heart has neither part nor lot in this matter. A man dead in sin, or dead in a profession, to stand up in the name of the living God to preach to a living people—what daring presumption, what an awful contradiction! And

yet what troops of men there are, on every side and of every sect, party, and denomination, utterly destitute of the life of God, who call themselves ministers of Christ, and would resent, with the bitterest enmity, the slightest imputation or even suspicion that they are hypocrites or impostors. But all these, whoever they be, Churchmen or Dissenters, or whatever they be, high or low, we must at once set aside as only awful intruders into a work to which they were never called, and for which they were never qualified. But a man may have the grace of God in his soul, and yet have but little divine, spiritual knowledge of the truth, and little experience of its power. Now no one, who knows what the work of the ministry is, can say that such a beginner is qualified to be a minister of the gospel, and go in and out before the exercised family of God, as a leader and a teacher. We cannot, indeed, say what use God might make of him to beginners, like himself; but one would think that he had better tarry at Jericho till his beard is grown, than go up to Jerusalem with only a little down on his chin. "A novice" ("one newly come to the faith," *margin*) is expressly excluded from the work of the ministry. As "newly come to the faith," it is assumed that he has faith; but he is not old enough yet in the way to escape being lifted up with pride, or falling into the condemnation of the devil. (1 Tim. 3:6.) And yet what beardless boys are now thrusting themselves everywhere into the ministry, and presume to teach grey-haired saints the way of salvation, who knew the Lord for themselves when these youths were in their long clothes; and, what seems worse, are hammered into shape and squared to pattern by a few lectures in Greek and grammar, or run into a mould by a course of what is termed theology, till they are stiffened into pride, and hardened in self-conceit, under what is called a preparation for the ministry. Alas! for any people when "children are their princes, and babes rule over them!" (Isa. 3:4.) What is wanted as a gracious qualification for the ministry is, an experience of the things of God—a spiritual, saving knowledge of law and gospel, sin and salvation, self and Christ, affliction and consolation, bondage and liberty, temptation and deliverance, misery and mercy, the awful depths of the fall, the wondrous height of the recovery. How can a man preach Christ who knows nothing experimentally of his Person, work, blood, righteousness, death, and resurrection? of his beauty, blessedness, suitability, grace, and glory? of his love, and some measure of its breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and of the riches of his free, sovereign, and superabounding grace? And how can he enter into and experimentally describe the trials, afflictions, temptations, sufferings, and sorrows of the poor

afflicted family of God, who is himself at ease in Zion, and knows only what he knows in theory, notion, and opinion? A minister attempting to preach without some good experience of the things of God, would be like a pilot taking charge of a ship coming up the Channel, who does not know one headland, lighthouse, buoy, or shoal from another; or like an engine-driver who should presume to drive an express train without knowing what handle to lift of his engine, or how to read aright the indication of his thermometer. But enough of this. Let us pass on to consider what qualifications are needful in the way of *gifts*.

2. We consider, then, that wherever God calls a man to the work of the ministry, he will qualify him for it by furnishing him with a suitable and sufficient gift. We do not want learning, or education, or great mental ability, though when these are sanctified to the service of the sanctuary they have their place in the work, and are not to be rejected or despised. But what we want is a *door of utterance*, such as Paul prayed for. (Eph. 6:19, Col. 4:3.) By this is meant not a mere flow of words which is often but empty chatter, or that readiness and volubility of tongue which weary alike ear and heart, but that sober, solid, grave, sound speech which cannot be condemned, and by which "he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort, and to convince the gainsayers." (Titus 1:9; 2:7, 8.) A minister should be "apt to teach," (1 Tim. 3:2,) and, therefore, must have some teaching ability in him. But this requires at least such a clearness of thought and speech as shall preserve him and his hearers from being lost in a fog of confusion. The plainest, simplest language is the best; and that a man may have this in the highest degree and yet possess neither education nor learning, we have for witnesses Bunyan and Huntington, those masters of the English tongue in all its native simplicity, beauty, and strength.

But he must also be well *established in the truth*, and he able to open it up; and, when occasion demands, defend it. Error abounds on every side; and though we do not advocate a controversial spirit in or out of the pulpit, yet a minister should be able to defend truth and expose error. And he should be able to do this in a way simple and yet forcible, so as not to weaken the force of truth, or even, as some do, make it contemptible by handling it in so confused and bungling a manner as to grieve its friends and gladden its foes. It is surprising what force and power there sometimes are in a few simple

words, or even in the apt quotation of a text with but little comment upon it. What light will often shine to a hearer through it on the truth, and how before it error will fall as Dagon before the ark.

He should also have a good *knowledge of the word*, not only as dwelling in his memory, but in his heart and conscience, and be able to open it consistently and experimentally, that he may feed the souls of God's people with milk and honey, meat and marrow, and give them to drink of the pure blood of the grape.

There should be also some *variety* in his ministry, which is best obtained by keeping close to his text, and seeking to open it through its breadth and length, which will much preserve him from unconnected rambling or dropping into the same round of experience, which, however good or sound in itself, becomes after a time wearisome from its very sameness and repetition.

But, above all things, there should be that *flow of divine life* into his soul, and that continual renewing and reviving of the power and presence of God in his heart which alone can give life to his gift, and make the wellspring of wisdom in him to be a flowing brook, watering, so to speak, both his soul and his ministry from that river of God which is full of water, the streams whereof make glad the city of God. Without this water in him springing up into everlasting life, his gift would soon wither and decay. In his ministry there would be nothing new, nothing fresh, nothing sweet, savoury, or acceptable to the family of God. He may thump his Bible or the cushion, and try by noise and bluster to make way for his word to the hearts of the people. But he can only give the head-ache, not the heart-ache, stun, weary, and confuse; but his doctrine will not drop as the rain, nor his speech distil as the dew, unless the precious things of heaven and the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush come as a blessing upon his head. (Deut. 32:2; 33:13, 16.) A small gift fed with the life and power of God will not only live and last when a great gift unfed with heavenly oil will wither and decay, but will thrive and grow by exercise and use, by prayer, reading, and meditation, until it shines brighter and brighter, and gives a wider and increasing light.

But our limits warn us to stay our pen. The due qualifications for the ministry is a subject which has much and long exercised our thoughts, and on which we

have formed in our own mind some definite conclusions; but we should need some space to lay them before our readers, even if we should ever venture upon a field so difficult and so delicate. Let, then, these few feeble hints for the present suffice; and sorry indeed should we be if anything which we have dropped on the subject should discourage the feeblest of the sent servants of God, or add the least weight to that "burden of the Lord," which, as his ministers, it is their highest privilege, though often their heaviest trial, to bear for his name's sake.

X.

In resuming our subject at the point from which in our last paper we somewhat digressed, we have now to consider the *blessings which are promised* to accompany the Ministry of the Gospel.

These, as we have before observed, are much included in the ends for which the ministry was instituted, and to the examination of which we have already devoted so large a space. Still, as they are so rich individually, and so abundant collectively, we shall so far give a little further consideration to them as may enable us to examine, in the light of Scripture and experience, a few of the most signal and prominent.

But before we do this, we may remark that three points call for our special attention as connected with this part of our subject.

- i. The *Foundation* on which all the promised blessings rest.
- ii. The *Fountain* out of which they all flow.
- iii. The *Nature* of the blessings themselves, as brought with a divine power into the heart.

i. The *Foundation* of the blessings communicated by the ministry of the gospel, as well, indeed, as of every other, is the good pleasure of God, who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, that they might be to the praise of the glory of his grace. (Eph. 1:6, 9, 11.) This is an immutable and immovable foundation; and it would be well for us who are engaged in the ministry not only to be well instructed and fully established in the persuasion of the firmness of this basis, but from time to time to refresh our souls and gather up

new strength for the work by fixing our eyes and hearts more frequently and believingly on its stability and breadth. When we can see and feel that our gospel, not only in its contents, tenor, and spirit is in harmony with the word of truth, but that in preaching it we are doing the will of God from the heart, it is surprising what a source of strength is thence opened to carry us on amidst all our trials and discouragements from without and within. Paul could say of himself and his brethren in the ministry, "We are labourers together with God." How encouraging it is to believe that God himself is with us in the work; and, whilst to realise this solemn truth may well make us tremble at our own deficiencies, yet, at the same time, what singleness of eye, and what strength of heart it is calculated to communicate in giving us some inward persuasion that God and we are working together by the same means and to the same end. And yet though so highly honoured as to be labourers together with God, yet is the work wholly his. It was this conviction which made the Apostle add, "Ye are God's husbandry; ye are God's building." (1 Cor. 3:9.) The labours, cares, and trials of the ministry are so great that the true servants of God need all the strength, help, and encouragement which they can obtain; and what can afford them more than to believe that they are doing the will of God, and thus instrumentally labouring with him in preaching his word? This will deliver them from many fears, and, above all, from the fear of man, which bringeth a snare. This will afford a quiet resting place for their weary souls, and often weary bodies, when on lying down at night they have the testimony of a good conscience that, according to the ability which God has given them, they have preached his word in faithfulness and affection. There is no truth more certain or more practical, both in individual and ministerial experience, than that to fall back upon ourselves is to fall back on weakness, and to fall back upon the Lord is to fall back on strength. The work of the ministry demands also much patience and quiet endurance. As labourers, we are to be like "the husbandman who waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." (James 5:7.) How much of the fruit of our labours is hidden from us,—wisely hidden, lest we should be puffed up with pride. How continual the labour, how vexing the opposition, how scanty the crop, how slow its growth. What need, then, we have of patience, that is, endurance, as the word literally means, that after we have done the will of God we may receive the promise.

ii. Nor is the *Fountain* less full than the Foundation is sure. What a treasury of grace there is in the Lord Jesus Christ! What an ample supply for all our need. The testimony of the Holy Ghost is that "God hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 1:3.) Every blessing, therefore, which the gospel contains, holds forth, and communicates we are already blessed with in him. All are lodged in his glorious Person, as he sits enthroned on high at the right hand of the Father. When, therefore, he sends any blessings down through the gospel, it is but the communication of them out of his all-glorious, his ever-flowing, overflowing fulness. How full, then, the Fountain, and how precious should be the gospel, which is the appointed means of communicating these blessings to the poor and needy family of God.

iii. But this leads us to consider the *nature* of the *blessings* themselves; and must they not be equal to so firm a Foundation and so overflowing a Fountain?

1. The first all will agree in pronouncing to be *effectual calling*. How clearly and how gloriously was this manifested on that memorable day when the Holy Ghost at the feast of Pentecost called three thousand under one sermon! How quick, (that is, living,) and powerful was the word of God that day, when sharper than any two-edged sword, it pierced, as the word means, not merely "pricked,"* so many hearts and consciences as with one simultaneous stroke. It was as if the gracious Lord would not only manifest his risen power by sending down such a shower of blessings, but would thereby give a firstfruits as a sample of the harvest which was to be reaped by his labouring servants. Peter, therefore, said, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts 2:39.) Though the Lord, therefore, does not confine himself to means, and can and does call some by his grace without the preached gospel, by applying his word privately to their heart, yet both Scripture and experience agree in testifying that the public ministry of the gospel is the more usual way. Thus the commission given to Paul was: "But rise, and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, 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 them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." (Acts 26:16-18.) How he executed that commission, and the blessing with which the Lord attended it, we well know from the Acts of the Apostles, and the epistles which he addressed to the churches.

* The word rendered "pricked," (Acts 2:37,) occurs only once in the New Testament, but is thus explained by Leigh, an old writer, in his *Critica Sacra*, a valuable Lexicon of that period, A. D. 1646: "The word signifieth to vex, rend, and to wound punctually, (that is, with a point,) even every the least part and point of the heart; as if the sharpest points of many empoisoned daggers, and scorpions' stings had been all at once fastened in their hearts, in the cruellest manner that can be devised." Dr. Gill also thus explains it: "*They were pricked in their heart.* The word of God entered into them, and was as a sharp sword in them, which cut and laid open their hearts and the sin and wickedness of them. They saw themselves guilty of the crime laid to their charge, and were filled with remorse of conscience for it; they felt pain at their hearts, and much uneasiness, and were seized with horror and trembling. They were wounded in their spirits, being hewn and cut down by the prophets and apostles of the Lord, and slain by the words of his mouth. They were as dead men in their own apprehension; and indeed, a prick, a cut, or wound in the heart is mortal."

We have brought forward these testimonies, as many think that they were merely pricked as with a pin, instead of being pierced through and through. Their very cry, like that of the Philippian jailer's, showed the severity of their wound.

When the Lord sent forth his disciples just before his ascension to teach or make disciples among all nations, (margin,) baptizing them when thus made in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, he most graciously added, "And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Here, then, is at once our commission to go forth, and the blessing attached to it. We are to go forth, as Paul did, "testifying repentance towards God, and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ." And if we go forth in his Spirit, determined not to know anything among men save Jesus Christ and him crucified, we shall find, each according to the blessing vouchsafed to his labours, that after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom, knows not

God, yet it pleases him, by the foolishness of our preaching, (as men esteem it,) to save them that believe.

2. The next blessing admits of as little doubt or controversy as the first. It is the *deliverance* proclaimed by the gospel, and revealed and sealed by it on the hearts of the family of God.

What was the commission of the Lord himself when, as the anointed prophet of God, he preached the gospel? "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." (Isa. 61:1-3.) The "good tidings," or the gospel, which he preached were to the meek; those whose hearts were meekened and softened, and thus made poor in spirit. (Matt. 5:3; Luke 4:18.) The brokenhearted, the captives, the bound, the mourners in Zion, sitting in ashes and bowed down with the spirit of heaviness, these were the characters to whom the Lord himself proclaimed liberty, and to whom he himself, through his own word, as made spirit and life to their souls, gave beauty for ashes, and the oil of joy for mourning. This, then, is our message, and this the blessing promised to attend it. Our word is not only to be a quickening, calling, regenerating, piercing, wounding word, whereby the dead hear the voice of the Son of God and live; but a delivering, healing, comforting word to those of the family of God whose hearts are broken by the law, bruised by the guilt and weight of sin, shut up in heaviness and bondage through unbelief, doubt, and fear, harassed by temptations, plagued by Satan and the dreadful evils of a heart laid bare by the two-edged sword of the word, and naked and bleeding before a just, righteous, and holy God. These are the poor to whom the gospel is preached, the flock of slaughter that wait upon the prophets, and know that it is the word of the Lord when it drops from their mouth with a divine liberating power into their hearts. (Luke 6:22; Zech. 11:7-11.) This is the sweetest part of the ministry of the gospel, and one of the surest testimonies of a minister's being sent of God.* To be the honoured instrument of bringing pardon and

peace to a poor burdened, distressed soul, to pour oil and wine into a bleeding conscience, to dispel the doubts and fears which gather so thickly over a heart troubled by sin, and thus be a means of setting at happy liberty some dear child of God,—what a sweet consolation and blessed, encouragement is this to a servant of Christ, and what a confirmation to him that the Lord is with him in the work! What union, too, what love and affection it creates in the hearer thus favoured and blessed to the servant of God through whom so great and often unexpected a blessing has come; and with what firmness he can testify that it was the word of the Lord, for nothing short of that could have loosed his bonds, as well as that he through whom it came is a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in his mouth is truth. (1 Kings 17:24.)

* We remember hearing our dear friend the late Mr. Warburton say in conversation that he believed men might be awakened under ministers of the letter, but that none were blessed and delivered except under God's own sent servants.

3. And now what shall we say is a third blessing? What but the gracious *renewals* and *revivals* of the Lord's presence and power which keeps alive his work upon the soul? There are few of the Lord's living family who have not to learn feelingly and experimentally what havoc sin has wrought in them, and what a thorough wreck and ruin they are through the Adam fall and their own personal transgressions. They thus learn that as no man can quicken, so no man can keep alive his own soul. When, then, they are not favoured with the Lord's presence and power, they sink into carnality and death. The fear of the Lord still abides in their soul, and is still a fountain of life that they do not depart from him; but the more active graces of the Spirit, as faith, hope, and love, seem dormant or torpid, and, being cold and feeble in their operations, take little out and bring little in. From this coldness and deadness of spirit, as sensibly and painfully experienced by them, spring bondage, doubt, fear, misgivings, and exercises, as to the reality of the work of grace in their hearts. "If I am the Lord's, if he has communicated divine life to my soul, if he has manifested himself to me and blessed me, why am I thus?" asks the tried child of God. Now, if help be long delayed, he begins to fret and fume, complain and rebel, especially if he see others favoured and himself passed by. But this spirit of rebellion causes the Lord still more to hide his face, and this makes the load heavier, and the case seemingly more dark and desperate. Having lost his best

Friend in the sensible light of his countenance and the power of his presence, sin begins to work with renewed strength; Satan, always on the watch to tempt or to accuse, allure or terrify, comes in with his baits or his charges, and under one or the other, the poor wandering sheep often falls. Now how suitable for a case like this is an experimental ministry—the ministry of a man well taught and exercised in his own soul, who can trace out the path from himself having walked in it; and how often the Lord is pleased to bless to those who thus sit in darkness and the shadow of death, his precious gospel in the mouth of a servant of his, who can thus speak a word in season to him that is weary. Burdened souls come up to the house of prayer, scarcely able to look up under the weight of their trials and temptations, scarcely daring to hope there can be anything for them, fearing rather that all they shall hear shall be to their condemnation. Now, what can the general ministry of the day do for such poor tried tempted souls, of whom there are many among the living family of God? Can a free-will ministry do anything for them, or a dry doctrinal one, or a light, trifling, jesting one, or a mere superficial one, just skimming over the surface of truth in the letter, but never diving into the experience of its power? All such ministries weary and disgust them, and are felt to be lighter than vanity. But let a gracious, experienced man of God speak out of a feeling, believing, exercised heart, what life and power often attend his word. And how sometimes the Lord will be pleased to speak a word to their hearts, through his servant, which breaks their bonds asunder, and brings them up out of all their fears, once more to bless and praise his holy name. What a blessing to the living family of God is a gracious, faithful, and experimental ministry, and yet how scarce! How few seem able to take up the stumbling-blocks that lie in the way, to trace out the work of grace in the soul, especially in its wilderness and more advanced stages, and to bring forward strong meat for men, as well as milk for babes. How few seem to feel for and sympathise with that portion of the family of God who know the plague of the heart, the trials and temptations of the wilderness, the thorough helplessness and inability of the creature; and that none but the Lord himself, in the manifestations of his grace, can do them any good. "Feed my sheep; feed my lambs," was the Lord's injunction to Peter; and thus he bids his servants now feed *all* the flock, both the tender lambs and the stronger and sturdier sheep.

4. As the servant of Christ is a minister of the word, he will, as the Lord gives him ability, bring out of the word all that is needful for the *guidance* of a flock

committed to his charge. This, therefore, we may mention as a fourth blessing of the ministry of the gospel. A shepherd has to go before, not behind his flock, to lead and guide them; not to be led and guided by them. But how can he do this unless he himself be taught and led by the Spirit and be well instructed in the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven? The Holy Ghost makes him an overseer over the flock to feed, or, as the word literally means, to shepherd the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. (Acts 20:28.) To do this well and properly, sometimes *instruction* will be needed. There is not a case or state, character or condition for which there is not some provision of this kind in the word of truth. How often is instruction needed, not only in the literal, but especially in the spiritual and experimental meaning of the Scriptures; and as the servant of God is enabled to open up this spiritual and experimental meaning, it will often cast a sweet and blessed light on the path in which his children are walking. Sometimes this word of instruction will discover to them secret snares, in which they have become unwarily entangled, or lay bare a temptation, on the edge of which they now find they are walking. Sometimes it will clear up a knotty and intricate path in providence, or throw light on some Scripture that meets their case. Sometimes, it will show them how they should act in a season of perplexity; sometimes it will strengthen their will to do what is right, and give power to make sacrifices, renounce bosom idols, and confirm a weak and wavering resolution to walk in the path of which God and conscience approve. Sometimes the ministry of the word will sharply *cut* and keenly *reprove*, and will so lay bare the secrets of the heart, that the poor child of God will feel scarcely able to look up before God and man. The word thus handled is, indeed, "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart," and lays it naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. (Heb. 4:12, 13.) It is a great mistake to think that the ministry of the gospel is only to give comfort. There are states of soul, as there are states of body, when cordials would be poison. "Comfort us, comfort us, whatever be our state and case;" cry some to their ministers. "However worldly, carnal, covetous, and careless we have been through the week; however up to our neck in business; and with nothing in our heart, mouth, or hands to distinguish us from all around us, we expect the minister to preach comfort to us on the Lord's day. This is what we pay him to do, and we expect him therefore to preach to us our full security in Christ, and to assure us that all will be well with our souls, whatever we may think, say, or do."

These we may call religious dram-drinkers, who look for their Sunday drink—their drop of comfort before they go out of the chapel, as regularly as the man who steps into a gin-palace for his morning glass. Keen cutting reproofs, sharp rebukes, stern denunciations of all ungodliness, and no quarter given to sin, carnality, and worldliness, in any shape or form, such men have no relish for. "It is legal, it is legal," they cry, "to insist so much on the precept, and to cut so continually at all disobedience and inconsistency. We want to have Christ gloriously exalted, and to hear of nothing but covenant engagements, fixed decrees, the certainty of salvation to the elect, and that come what will we are safe for eternity."

But we will not dwell further on these points, or show how such men would willingly make even what they call a glorious Christ a minister of sin, and under great swelling words hide their shame. We will only say, better were it for a man to break stones on the road than stand up in a pulpit to deceive souls and be unfaithful alike to God and man. The more solemn the office, the greater the responsibility; the higher the post, the deeper the fall. Enough, then, enough of this. Time and space both admonish us that we should hasten to our fifth and last point.

V. The *trials* and *exercises* with the *comforts* and *encouragements* of the ministry.

And must these weighty matters be all discussed at the fag end of an article? Must we crowd into a few sentences the experience of years of labour? So bids stern December,* and perhaps the wishes and patience of many of our readers echo back the call to finish our task with the finishing year. Be it so, then; for we are free to acknowledge that we have already protracted our Meditations on the Ministry to somewhat an inordinate length.

* The present paper appeared originally in the Gospel Standard for December, 1866.

i. The *trials* and *exercises* of the ministry claim the first place. These we may roughly classify under two leading heads—1. Those which spring from himself. 2. Those which spring from others.

1. Had a minister nothing else to try him but his own heart, he would have trouble and exercise enough to last him all his days. But, like Issachar, he has to crouch between two burdens—the burden of self, and the burden of the Lord, his burden as a Christian, and his burden as a minister. It is with the last only that we have now to do. A deep sense of his own incompetency for the work, and his continual miscarriages under it, will always try a man who has any right sight and sense of what a minister of Christ should be. Poor, ignorant, proud, puffed-up men in the ministry may see and feel in themselves no such inefficiency or deficiency. A sound scheme of doctrine, a tolerable knowledge of the letter of the word, a natural fluency of speech, a bold unabashed face and manner, and the applause of light professors, carry many on as preachers who seem to have no spiritual sense or feeling of what the ministry really is. Until a man is led to see and feel by divine teaching what it is to be mouth for God, and to stand up before the people as his ambassador, a steward of his mysteries, a trustee of his gospel, an interpreter of his counsel, a messenger of his deputed, a witness of his dealings both in providence and grace with himself and others, and a servant who must one day give an account of his ministry to his heavenly Master, he will trifle both with God and man, and be unfaithful to his office, to himself, and to his hearers. His ignorance, his incompetency, his unfaithfulness will be hidden from him by a thick veil of pride and presumption; and whilst the living, discerning family of God see in him nothing but barrenness and death, he will see in himself but little to censure and much to admire. But let a man once have his eyes opened to see what the ministry really is; and what he himself is as a minister, his unfitness in every way, both naturally and spiritually, for so great a work, his incompetency, his infirmities, his shortcomings, his inability to do or say anything aright, his ignorance, his unbelief, his fainting heart, stammering tongue, and faltering lips, his deadness, coldness, and unfruitfulness, his deep-rooted sinfulness, defiling all he touches, and his utter unworthiness to take the Lord's name into his polluted lips—all these feelings will, at times, so press upon him as to try him to the very quick, and make him doubt and fear whether he has anything to do with such a solemn, sacred, godly work as to preach the gospel of the Son of God. It is true that he knows what he preaches, for he has himself tasted, felt, and handled the word of life which he administers; he is quite at a point about the truths which he sets before the people, whether doctrine, experience, or precept; he labours to be faithful,

and seeks neither money nor applause; and he has a single eye to the glory of God and the good of his people. And yet there is not one point in which he does not feel to come short; and this deeply tries his mind. Sometimes he is tried about his text; and if, after much prayer and labour of soul, he get one, then he is tried about his sermon. He is tried before preaching, in preaching, and after preaching; tried on Saturday night about what he has to say, and tried on Sunday night for what he has said. If a little helped, though he would bless God for it, he is still tried whether his liberty might not have been much in the flesh. If not sensibly helped, then he is tried whether he was ever called to the ministry at all. Thus he is never satisfied with himself, or if he begin to feel a little self-satisfaction, he knows at once that this is about the worst of his sins, for it is pride which is now puffing him up in one of its worst forms.

But he has *temptations* as well as trials. Thus sometimes he is tempted to unbelief, sometimes to infidelity, sometimes to question the whole work on his soul, and to fear whether he is not an awful hypocrite, who has deceived himself, and well-nigh everybody else. Sometimes he is tempted to think that he never should have put his hand to the plough, and to wish he were anything or anybody but a minister. The people can come, he thinks, and sit and hear, and no one need know what they fear or what they feel. But he, poor he, must stand up, whatever be his feelings; whatever darkness, bondage, or distress he may be labouring under, however shut up in heart or tongue, he must stammer out something. The people are come together, some perhaps from many miles, looking to him for a word of consolation and encouragement; and he is as empty as an up-turned pitcher, as confused as chaos, and as dark as midnight. The word of God is a sealed book, the heavens as brass, the text slipped away, and scarcely one idea left for the sermon. It is true that at such times the Lord most usually makes bare his arm, and helps his poor trembling servant far beyond his hope or anticipation; and some of these seasons have been the very best both for the minister and the people. Light and life break in upon his soul; the heavens are parted asunder, fervent prayer goes up, answers of mercy come down; sweet liberty is felt in preaching the word of truth; and O how he can now exalt the free grace of God, and set forth the Person and work, blood and righteousness, dying love, and risen power of his dear Son. This must serve as a sample of ministerial trials and exercises which spring from self, for we might fill pages with them.

2. But he has trials and exercises which *spring from others*. We pass by his trials from the world dead in sin, and the world dead in a profession. A real sent servant of God will keep himself separate from both; and as long as he does this, they will neither of them much trouble him. A disturbance in the street may be a passing annoyance, but what is it to a disturbance in the house—a disturbance in the family, among the children or the servants? Of all quarrels, the most trying are family quarrels. So the deepest trials of a minister, which spring from others, are church trials, family disturbances, family differences, family quarrels and contentions. Our, dear friend, the late Mr. Gadsby, used to say, that next to one's own spiritual troubles, the greatest of all troubles were church troubles. And indeed the dear old man found it so, for, in his own language, his church troubles in his latter days broke his heart. The perverse, contentious, unyielding spirit of some, whom he cannot but receive, with all their faults and failings, as the children of God, deeply tries many a servant of the Lord. He is for peace, but they are for war. He hates and abhors strife and contention; but they seem full of it, and never more in their element than when, like a sea-bird, in a storm. What painful spectacles often are church meetings, when a spirit of strife has entered into a church, and well-nigh rent it asunder. Word brings on word, and argument leads on to argument; temper rises, angry expressions drop, and whilst the meek and quiet sit and mourn in silence, the quarrelsome and contentious battle with one another, almost as if the fear of God were lost out of their heart.

But where a minister of God is spared such heavy trials as these, he will have exercises from other causes, almost as painful. Inconsistencies will break out in the church, of greater or less magnitude, which will deeply grieve his spirit. Reproach will be thereby cast on the cause of God and Truth, and be reflected, perhaps, even on his ministry, as if it encouraged sin. He will see sometimes much death creeping over those who once seemed lively in the things of God; others much buried in the world, or overtaken with a spirit of covetousness, who once seemed spiritually-minded, and their whole heart fixed on heavenly things. His best hearers and dearest friends, pillars of the Church and ornaments of the congregation, he will see taken away by the hand of death, and few or none raised up to take their place. He may have to see the cause sink very low, both as regards spiritual and temporal prosperity; little work going on, either in calling souls or delivering them, and much sloth, apathy, coldness, and indifference settling as a dark and increasing cloud on

the church and congregation. Now if his soul be, as we assume it is, kept alive and lively in the things of God, all these things will deeply try his mind, and exercise both his faith and patience. And yet by these very trials and exercises his soul is made increasingly lively, for "by these things men live, and in all those things is the life of his spirit."

ii. But he has his *comforts* and *encouragements*. Indeed what could he do, and how could he get on, without them? To have nothing but trial and exercise, to feel nothing but bondage and misery in the work, would soon break him down altogether. The Lord, therefore, graciously, from time to time, comforts and encourages his soul, so that as his afflictions abound, so his consolation also aboundeth by Christ. When he is giving strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that are of heavy hearts, he gets a good drop himself of the wine of the kingdom, which he is bringing out for others; and as he drinks this, he forgets his poverty, and remembers his misery no more. He gives what he believes, and believes what he gives; faith is mixed with the word as it issues out of his heart and lips; and he thus not only ministers food as a servant, but sits down as a guest at the table. And as this inward feast of soul gives life to his word and power to his preaching, he comforts those who are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith he himself is comforted of God. One such good season makes up for many bad ones; and though he knows he may have to fast many days after his feast, yet the remembrance of it, and the savour which it leaves on his spirit, enables him to go in the strength of that meat many days. What a true servant of God wants for himself is, not what some men think and call liberty, that is, a mere liberty of tongue, which is, after all, in many cases, a mere carnal, natural fluency of speech. True liberty is an inward liberty of soul, a sweet and holy freedom of spirit before God, not a mere gift of the gab, (excuse the expression,) or a full and rapid flow of words, or even an increasing stream of texts and quotations. The two things are quite distinct. A man of God may have liberty of tongue, and be bound in spirit; and he may have liberty of spirit, and be bound in tongue. It is when liberty of spirit and liberty of tongue go together that he is most happy and most at home, most in his element, and most in the enjoyment of his work. But he has also comforts and encouragements from *others* as well as *himself*, for though a good man is to be "satisfied from himself," (Prov. 14:14,) yet it is sweetly encouraging to him to see that the Lord is with him in the work. To go on preaching year after year, and see little or no fruit attending his ministry,

how trying this must be to a minister whose heart is in his work, and who is continually longing for a blessing to rest on his testimony. But this is not usually the case with those whom the Lord himself has called to the ministry. He who has thus called him will, from time to time, give him proof by signs following that a divine blessing rests on his ministry. One after another will be raised up as witnesses to the power of the word; and every such witness will confirm him more and more in the persuasion that the Lord has called him to the work and owns and blesses him in it.

But it is time to draw our meditations to a close. The subject is so vast in itself, it has so grown under our hands, that, with all our attempts to examine it in the light of Scripture and experience, we have come short of setting it before our readers as clearly and as fully as we could desire. Still, let them receive what we have written in the same spirit as we trust we have brought it forth; and we would affectionately ask our spiritual readers generally, and our brethren in the ministry particularly, to take our meditations on the ministry as a whole, and not judge them by separate parts or isolated expressions. As we take a man's Christian character as a whole, as we take a servant of God's ministry as a whole, so deal with our treatment of this important subject. Take into consideration our general drift and meaning, and the spirit in which we have written. We have endeavoured to be faithful and discriminating, yet, we trust, have not been harsh, unkind, or overbearing. We have not spared, indeed, the general ministry of the day, but we have desired to show in word what we feel in spirit to every real sent servant of God—esteem, tenderness, and affection. The Lord ever keep and bless them; and in this day, when on every side the enemy seems coming in like a flood, may the Spirit of the Lord, by their instrumentality, lift up a standard against him.