

SERMONS

VOLUME IV



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THE FRUIT OF THE LIPS

Preached 20th August, 1843 at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London

"I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him" Isa.57:19

The Lord had said in verse 16 of this chapter: "I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made." As though the Lord saw, so to speak, the fruitlessness of contending with man that all his stripes were thrown away upon him; that his severest chastisements, unaccompanied by grace, did not bring him into submission and humility; that all his heaviest strokes could do would but wear the spirit out and make it fail before him, but that his contending in anger would never make him a partaker of godly sorrow, nor cause him to lie low at his feet. "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart" (verse 17).

The Lord tells us here why he smote his people. It was for the iniquity of their covetousness; the word "covetousness" pointing out what the human heart is chiefly engaged upon. For we must not limit the expression merely to avarice after money, but consider it as embracing the going out of the heart of man after the things of time and sense, the insatiable desire of the carnal mind after earthly and sensual gratification. This covetousness God speaks of as iniquity, the iniquity of man lying in this: that he loves everything earthly and sensual better than God, that he seeks pleasure from every object but the Lord, that he wilfully and greedily runs into every base lust, making carnal things his delight and happiness. Now the Lord, provoked by the iniquity of his covetousness, smote him with stroke upon stroke, with disappointment upon disappointment, with affliction upon

affliction, with trouble upon trouble. But it was all thrown away. It did not raise up in him a spiritual work, it did not bring him to the Lord's feet, it did not change his will; it did not renew him in the spirit of his mind, but it left him as it found him: earthly, sensual, and dead; or rather, it left him worse than it found him for his heart became more hardened and his conscience more stupefied than before. The Lord, therefore, adds: "I hid me;" as though he would try what that would do. He took no apparent notice of him. The Lord would not appear conspicuously in a way of providence. He shut himself up, as it were, in his own glory, and covered himself with a cloud, so that no ray should pass through. But that failed also. "I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." So obstinate, rebellious, wayward, perverse a wretch is man that no step which the Lord could take in a way of judgment or anger, independent of the Spirit's operations (for that is the point I am endeavouring to enforce) could ever have the least effect upon him. Now do not you parents often see this very thing in your children naturally? You sometimes cannot make anything of them; there is such a frowardness and perversity of disposition in them, that all your chastisements and every means you employ to make them better, only seem to make them worse. They go on frowardly in the way of their heart; and you cannot, with all the pains you take with them, make them one whit better. Now what children often are to their parents, such are we toward God. His stripes, his frowns, his hiding himself, his sharp afflictions, do not produce in us any spiritual good; but we go on frowardly in the way of our heart, muttering perverseness, full of rebellion, peevishness, and discontent; and though we may feel the rod of God upon us, yet there is no breaking down of heart, no submission of soul, no contrition of spirit before him. The Lord therefore says: "I have seen his ways." What a creature he is! What an obstinate, perverse, rebellious wretch, and that wrath and judgments will not mend him. It is, then, as though he added: "I will alter my plan altogether. I see that there is no use in smiting and afflicting him with these sharp troubles; he is only the worse for it; only the more rebellious, more perverse, more froward. I have seen his ways, and will heal him." The Lord

speaks as though he would change his conduct towards him. If he could not frown him into obedience, he would kiss him into it. If, he could not by the manifestation of his anger, make him walk in a right way, he would do so by love, and as he could not bend the heart by trouble, he would break it by an overwhelming sense of grace, mercy, and pardon. In that way, then, does the Lord gain his point and bring about his blessed purpose, warming the soul into fruitfulness by summer suns, which wintry blasts could never produce, pardoning sin, and thus making it hateful; overcoming the soul with his goodness, so as to new model it into obedience; and by communicating a new heart and a new spirit, bring out of it freely and cheerfully that humility, submission, devotedness, and affection, which stripes and blows could never have extorted. This, then, is the connexion of the text. And this slight sketch of the context may, with God's blessing better prepare our minds to see and feel something of the sweetness and beauty of the text.

I. What are we to understand by the expression which meets us in the first clause: "I create the fruit of the lips?" I understand by it that which grows upon, or rather out of the lips. Just in the same way as the fruit naturally is that which grows upon or grows out of a tree, so spiritually that which grows upon and out of a gracious man's lips is here called "the fruit of the lips." But cannot a man say just what he pleases? Not to God's honour and glory. If it is true that God *creates* the fruit of the lips, and that there is not a single word which man's lips can speak for the honour of God except what the Lord himself creates by as great a miracle as when he called the world into existence, what a death-blow to human merit, creature righteousness, fleshly sanctification, legal obedience, free will, and the whole spawn of Arminianism! What a sweeping off at a single stroke all the piety and holiness of the creature, if it is true, as most true it is, that a man not only cannot create a spiritual thought, nor perform a spiritual action, but that he cannot even create a spiritual word that he cannot actually bring forth from the door of his lips anything which God calls fruit, except it be created in him by a miraculous putting forth of supernatural power. But, however the wise and learned may call this enthusiasm, or however Pharisees and Free-willers

may rebel against God's sovereignty and man's helplessness, yet all the living family are taught, sometimes by painful and sometimes by pleasurable experience, that they cannot find in their lips a single spiritual word to breathe out secretly into the ears of God or before the ears of their fellow men, except the Lord the Spirit create it for and in them. The word of the lip, when it is such as the Lord calls fruit, is that which comes from the heart: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer." It is the heart must prompt the tongue, as we read: "The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips." Unless heart and tongue go together, there is neither fruit in the one or the other. The Lord, then, by his blessed hand in the soul, creates a spiritual work within, and raises up spiritual feelings, spiritual desires, spiritual sensations; and as he produces this spiritual experience by putting forth his power in the heart, he creates also the fruit of the lips, that these spiritual sensations may find a vent through them. For it is as necessary that the Lord should create the fruit of the lips to *express* them, as that the Lord should create the fruit of the heart to *feel* them. We have, for instance, sometimes spiritual sensations heaving, fermenting, and working in our bosoms, but we cannot give them vent. They are sometimes too deep for utterance, "groanings which cannot be uttered," as says the apostle. Many of God's people cannot express what they feel, they have a clear experience, but a confused speech, they know what experimental truth and divine teachings are, but cannot defend the one nor explain the other. The Lord, therefore, must not only create the spiritual sensations, but he must create the spiritual expressions, that out of the heart, through the mouth, the fruit may come to his honour and praise.

The first sensation usually that God creates in the soul, is a feeling of its own guilt, ruin, and misery; and the first fruit of the lips that he creates as springing out of and corresponding with this spiritual sensation is *confession*. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to

forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But of all humbling things confession is one of the most humbling. It is so even to man. We often feel ourselves to be wrong, but we cannot confess it. There is that wretched pride and self-justification often working in a man's heart that he absolutely will not confess his faults to a fellow-creature, when his conscience all the time is condemning him. And so it is spiritually. It is a very hard spot to come into the presence of God with confession. Confession must be, as it were, squeezed out of us, pressed out of our heart by heavy burdens laid upon the conscience. An honest heaven-taught soul knows that there is no use mocking God with hypocritical confession, that to confess iniquity with the mouth and hug it in the bosom, is but to add sin to sin, that it must not, with Gehazi, stow the two talents of silver in the house, and then go and stand before its Master unabashed. But wherever the soul is truly humbled before God, and confession is created as the fruit of the lips, it always implies a desire to be spiritually delivered from the filth, guilt, and the power of the sin acknowledged. Thus confession, as one of the first and the earliest fruits of the lips, flows from a spiritual feeling of the burden of sin, a solemn hatred to it and abhorrence of it, as laid upon the conscience, a cry to the Lord to pardon it, and an earnest desire, in the strength of the Lord to be delivered from its dominion. Honest confession, then, as springing out of a heart made tender in God's fear, is a supernatural creation of the Lord's. To mock God with saying we are sorry, and then rush the next moment into the sin we profess to be sorry for, is but to deceive ourselves and insult him. Yet this is what we have done a thousand times, and shall do again if grace prevent not. So that no man comes to honest confession except God works confession in his heart; and thus making the heart and tongue move together, he creates confession as the fruit of the lips.

Now there is no promise of pardon of sin till there is confession of sin. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." But how many there are who talk about pardon and forgiveness, who have never yet been brought to an honest confession; who have never yet put their mouth in the dust,

bewailed themselves in the sight of God, nor acknowledged their sins in the bitterness of soul-trouble, with tears of contrition flowing down their cheeks and the sobs of godly sorrow heaving from their bosoms!

Another fruit of the lips which God creates is *prayer*. The Lord himself must pour out upon every child of his "the spirit of grace and of supplications," for unless he is pleased to create this fruit of the lips, there is no more spiritual prayer in our heart than there is in a corpse. We may indeed mock God by carnal petitions, or go through a formal round of daily prayer; but as to any spiritual breathing out of our wants into the bosom of God, as to any faith in blessed exercise whereby we come to the throne of mercy and grace, and, according to the injunction of the Holy Ghost, pour out our heart before him, there is not a single grain of this fruit till the Lord himself by a supernatural operation upon conscience, first creates the desire, and then gives power to breathe forth that desire in supplication at his feet. Now of this spirit of prayer, every living soul has a measure. When the Lord quickens the soul into spiritual life, he always gives "this spirit of grace and supplications;" and when once given, it is never wholly lost out of the heart. For the Lord who first creates this fruit of the lips, mercifully keeps it alive in the soul. "I will water it every moment," he says. He therefore feeds the lamp of intercession in the soul with the oil of the blessed Spirit, the unction of the Holy One; and though to our feelings we are often as dead and prayerless as if we had never felt the breath of the Spirit within, yet the Lord secretly again and again works upon the heart and causes this fruit to grow upon the lips. In this respect, as in others, we pass through many changes. We may sometimes, for instance, be in trouble, and yet cannot pray; be exercised in our minds, and yet cannot go to the throne of grace, nor vent our desire for deliverance into the ears of the Most High. We are often, too, in a state where there is no sigh nor cry going up out of the heart; when the world seems to have full possession of us, and there is scarcely even the faintest desire to be brought out of this state, and to feel the weight and power of eternal things. Nor can we even feel what a sad state this is to be in, nor cry to the

Lord to revive us again that we may rejoice in him, unless he once more create this fruit of the lips, and draw out our heart towards him.

But *praise and thanksgiving* is also a fruit of the lips, and as such is the special creation of God. What a sweet thing it is to bless and praise God! There is no feeling upon earth to equal it. To bless God for his unmerited mercy, for his undeserved favour, and for the testimonies of his goodness, is indeed a sweet employ. It may indeed be called a feeling and a foretaste of heaven, for will not the bliss of heaven much consist in blessing and praising God, in singing the "song of the Lamb," in giving vent to the happy feelings which will occupy and fill the soul? God teaches all his people, sooner or later, to bless and praise his name. But then they must go into very dark holes and corners, must often sink very low in their feelings, must be taught very sharp lessons within, must see themselves to be utterly helpless, and at times feel almost hopeless, in order that this fruit of the lips may be created by the hand of God in them. How often are we in that state when we can neither pray nor praise; when sullenness, frowardness, and peevishness seem to take such complete possession that so far from praising God, there is no power even to seek his face; and so far from blessing him, there are even dreadful things working up in the heart against him, which awfully manifest the enmity of the carnal mind! Those who are painfully exercised with such feelings are certain therefore that it is God's work to enable them to praise and bless his holy Name. And does not the heaven-taught soul come sometimes into this spot: "O that the Lord would give me something to praise him for, would bring me out of this trial, break this wretched snare, remove this awful temptation, lift me out of this providential difficulty, bless and water my soul, comfort my heart, strengthen my spirit, give me some testimony of his covenant love!" Says the soul: "O how I would then bless and praise him! I would spend all my breath in exalting his holy Name." But when the Lord withholds from the soul the blessings it so eagerly covets, it can only look at them at a great distance, view them wistfully, and long to experience them. But it says: "Until they

come with power, until they are brought in with sweetness, until they are sealed upon my very heart, so as to take full possession of my breast, I cannot, I dare not, bless and praise his holy Name." O what a dependent creature a heaven-taught soul is! How it hangs upon the Spirit of God to work in it that which is well pleasing in his sight, how convinced it is that it cannot feel nor confess sin, that it cannot breathe forth prayer nor praise unless the God of all grace create by his own powerful hand these blessed fruits of the lips! Are you so helpless in your feelings as this? Are you such complete dependants upon sovereign grace? Then you are spiritually taught of God; for it is God's teaching in the soul which brings a man to an experimental knowledge of his own complete helplessness before him.

II. But we pass on to consider the other part of the text. " Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near."

"Far off!" What means that? It means that the soul passing through that experience is separated, in its feelings, and at an infinite distance from God. There is an expression in Psalm 61 which throws a light upon the words "far off:" "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I" (verse 2). David there speaks of himself as being at the end of the earth, and from that distant spot crying unto the Lord, he places as it were the whole habitable part of the globe betwixt himself and God. He speaks of himself as at the very furthest bound of creation; not resting in God's bosom, nor lying at his footstool, nor taking hold of his strength, nor brought experimentally near by the application of the blood of sprinkling. The words "far off" and the corresponding expression "from the end of the earth" point out an experience of distance. But what has brought the soul into this state of felt distance from God? A sense of sin laid on the conscience; for it is sin which makes the separation, according to those words: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God." Sin has actually separated; felt sin experimentally separates the soul from God. It drives it, so to speak, to the end of the earth, to the utmost limit of creature existence. Now this inward sense of being

far off, is one of the most painful feelings that a quickened soul can experience. The ungodly, who are really afar off, know nothing experimentally of distance from God, for they have never been brought spiritually near. They have felt no "cords of love, no bands of a man" drawing them with sweet attraction to the throne of the Most High; they have never sighed after the sweet manifestations of God's mercy and love; but they live gladly and wallow wilfully in those things which separate the soul from its Maker. But those who are far off in their feelings, are such as have seen something of the beauty of the Lord, and felt the evil of sin, who spiritually know Jehovah's purity and the creature's impurity, and have experienced the inward curse, bondage, and condemnation of a holy law. A spiritual discovery of his purity and holiness, making manifest their own vileness, has thrust them down from him; not daring to draw near, nor able to approach; not feeling any spiritual access, but sighing and mourning over their evil hearts in the wilderness, in desolate places; and unable to move a single step forward because the Lord does not draw them by his smile. A man must know something experimentally of this before he is brought near. How can he know the feeling of nearness if he hath not known a feeling of distance? How can we know what it is to be brought from the end of the earth, by the manifestation of God's mercy and love, unless we have been driven there, in our feelings, by some manifestation of the wrath of God against sin? But to see the blessed Lord and not be able to draw near to him; to view his atoning blood at an infinite distance from us, his glorious righteousness well nigh out of sight, and his lovely Person out of the reach of our spiritual view, so as not to enjoy any access to these glorious realities, to know this experimentally, is to be far off from God. And I believe that God's people know very much of this feeling. There is not much nearness in our day: not much dandling on the knees, not much smiling upon the soul, not many love visits, nor tokens communicated. There is, indeed, abundant talking about them; and there are abundance of people who profess to have them, but I fear they are, for the most part, cheats and counterfeits. The real people of God, the true-hearted family are, for the most part, afar off upon the sea, for it is a dark and cloudy day in

which we live.

But the Lord has spoken of another character, and described him as one that is "near;" that is, one brought experimentally nigh, who has felt the blood of sprinkling reconciling him to God, who has had the veil taken from his heart, who has had power communicated to approach unto God, and had a measure of spiritual access unto and blessed communion with him. But what is remarkable is, that the same promise is given to each: "Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near." These two characters seem to include all the quickened family of God: for all who are made alive unto God are in one of these two states, experimentally far off or experimentally near, enjoying God's presence or mourning his absence, fasting or feasting, lamenting or rejoicing, crying or blessing, dandled in the bosom or weaned from the breast. We find no intermediate state spoken of, no middle class, they are either far off or they are near in feeling. God in this text seeming to recognise no other states but these two. Let me not, however, be misunderstood. We are often in neither one nor the other, but not as a matter of Christian experience. We have an experience of the flesh as well as of the spirit, and this experience of the flesh is coldness, deadness, worldliness, unbelief, and other corruptions. But the Lord does not recognise this as Christian experience, though too often the experience of a Christian. We say, therefore, that so far as we are under the teachings and leadings of the Spirit, we shall be experimentally far off and mourning distance, or experimentally near and enjoying access. Therefore, spiritually viewed, "far off " or "near" includes all. But there are an abundance of persons everywhere who are neither one nor the other. They are never near by the spiritual manifestations of God's presence, they are never afar off in soul-trouble and soul- sadness. They occupy what they consider to be a middle spot, which is in fact no spot at all, for they know nothing of frowns or of smiles, of banishment or of return; they know nothing of God's anger nor of God's love, guilt nor pardon, misery nor mercy, helplessness nor help, weakness nor strength, but stand upon an empty profession, having the mere shell and outside of truth without being led by

the Holy Spirit into the secrets of the sanctuary.

To God's people then, summed up in these two classes, those that are far off, those that are near, there is a promise given; and that promise is redoubled to point out its certainty: "Peace, peace, to him that is far off, and to him that is near." Bunyan well represents this in his *Pilgrim's Progress*, where he speaks of Christian after being entertained in the House Beautiful, going to sleep in the chamber called Peace. What blessed sensations are couched in that word *Peace*! It was the legacy that Jesus left to his church: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you." The apostle says of it that it "passeth all understanding." Now many even of the Lord's people seem as if they wanted and were expecting raptures. There is, I believe, a vast deal of enthusiasm in the natural mind of man, as is evident from what I may call its religious history in all ages; and this leads many who, in other points, seem rightly taught; to look for wonderful visions, ecstasies and raptures, things which nature can imitate, or Satan, as an "angel of light" counterfeit. False churches have had abundance of these. There are some most remarkable accounts in the legends of the Roman Catholic Church of the ecstasies and raptures of their so-called saints. Satan, as an "angel of light" can counterfeit these things to delude souls. But, I believe, Satan cannot bring the peace of God into the conscience. He may kindle a sort of infernal ecstasy; he may dazzle the mind with his juggleries and witcheries, and lift a man up in his own conceit into the "third heavens;" he may work upon the natural spirits and intoxicate the mind with the light and airy gas which he breathes into it. But he cannot speak gospel peace to the conscience; he cannot bring a holy calm into the soul. He could lash the waters of Gennesareth into a storm but there was only One who could say to them: "Peace, be still!" Satan may raise a storm in our carnal mind, but he cannot allay it; he cannot pour oil upon the waves, he cannot bring peace to the troubled breast and enable it to rest upon God. Of all spiritual blessings, none seem preferable to peace; and I believe that is what a child of God covets more than anything. For O how much is implied in the word *peace*! Is not man by nature an enemy to

God? Then to be saved he must be reconciled, and that implies peace. Is not his heart often troubled, as the Lord said: "Let not your heart be troubled!" Then he wants peace. Is not his mind often agitated and tossed up and down by conflicting emotions? Then he wants peace to calm it. And when he has to lie upon his dying bed, O if he can but lie there in peace, peace with God through Jesus Christ, and a holy calm comes over his soul, flowing out of manifested mercy and felt reconciliation, it will beat all the raptures in the world. How often we hear of a triumphant death-bed; and how Arminians of all shades and grades are continually trumpeting forth from their pulpits and publishing in their periodicals, triumphant deathbeds! May God, in his mercy, give me a peaceful one! It is better to close one's eyes with the sweet enjoyment of the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, than to have all the raptures and ecstasies which may spring out of an excited nature. But to be blessed with peace, through the blood of sprinkling, before the soul glides out of its earthly tabernacle to enter into the haven of peace above, this indeed will make a death-bed happy, this will extract every thorn from the dying pillow, and enable the departing believer to say, with holy Simeon: "Lord, now lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

The word is redoubled, like Pharaoh's dream (Gen.41:32), to show the certainty of it: "Peace, peace;" as though the Lord would not content himself with saying it but once. He was so determined that it should come that he says: "Peace, peace." There is also another thing connected perhaps with the reduplication of the expression, that it becomes more especially promised to each of the characters mentioned in the text. Peace to him that is far off, and peace to him that is near. Perhaps thy soul is far off upon the sea, tossed up and down with doubts and fears, and exercised with sharp temptations and afflictions. There is peace promised to thee, though in thy feelings thou art far off from God. But another here, perhaps, is in a different state; his soul is indulged with some nearness of access to the throne of mercy. There is peace for thee; for thou needest peace as much

as thy brother that is far off. If his troubled soul requires it to bring him near, thou needest it to keep thee near. Both need it, and both shall have it, for the promise is given to such.

III. "I will heal him." *That* closes the promise; that is the finishing stroke to God's manifested mercy. "I will heal him." As though the Lord had said: "He is a poor leprous wretch; he has an incurable disease upon him; he must die of his wounds, and bleed to death unless I step in; but he shall not die of his wounds, he shall not bleed to death, I will heal him. Whatever be his malady, whatever be the wounds of his conscience, I will cure him; he shall not perish; though he is beyond all human cure, he is not out of the reach of my healing hand."

These are sweet and precious promises, are they not? But *where* must we be, and *what* must we be, in order to value them? What must we know and feel to have a part in them, and to experience them? Must we not be spiritually in the same spots to which they are addressed? If, for instance, we can always confess our sins; if we can pray when we please, and bless God when we please, what manifested interest have we in the promise: "I create the fruit of the lips?" If we never are far off in feeling or never near in feeling; if we are never tossed upon the wave or never borne into the harbour of safety; what can we experience, what can we want to know of the promise: "Peace, peace?" If we are never sick and diseased, full of wounds and bruises and putrefying sores, a mass of filth and corruption before God, what manifested interest can we have, or want to have, in the promise: "I will heal him?" All God's promises are adapted to certain stages and states, certain characters and persons; so that unless we are experimentally in those states or those stages, and are those characters, the promises, however great and precious, are absolutely nothing to us. When the Lord, therefore, puts us into these states, it is that he may make the promises precious; and when he ratifies and fulfils any promise in the soul, he endears that promise by that very state in which the soul was before the promise came. Thus until we come into such desperate circumstances that none but the God of all grace can, by stretching out his hand, save and bless us, until we are utterly weaned from creature help, false

hope, carnal wisdom, and fleshly strength, we are not in a fit state to receive the manifold mercy of God. We are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and know not that we are wretched and poor and miserable and blind and naked (Rev.3:17).

Every soul, then taught of God, that is in this state, has an interest in this promise. You may not be able to realise it, you may not be able to rise up to it, but I know this, you will be crying to God to fulfil it in your souls. You cannot do without the manifestation of peace, more or less powerfully in your conscience; and if the Lord has brought you there, he will in his own time and way open up these sweet promises, and convey the riches couched in them into your poor and needy heart. To him may we be kept ever looking; on him may our eyes be ever fixed, that he would fulfil his promises in our soul's experience, and do for us far more than we can even ask or think!

For are not these blessings worth seeking? When sickness comes and death draws near, when weeping relatives and anxious friends surround the dying bed, will you not want peace, peace, in your soul, that you may be able to look with joy into eternity, and resign your departing spirit with calm and holy confidence into the hands of God? Sin has set us far off from God. Where this is truly and deeply felt, we shall want to be brought near by the blood of sprinkling. And this alone will give support in life comfort in death, and happiness in eternity.

THE FRUITFUL BOUGH AND THE STRONG BOW

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, July 27th, 1856

"Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: The archers have sorely grieved him and shot at him, and hated him: But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." Genesis 49:22-24

In reading the Old Testament records we are struck with this circumstance, that in the case of many of those who were raised up for signal purposes in the Church of God, there was that in their birth, or in their life, which was marked by some peculiar divine interposition. One feature of this nature is particularly remarkable in some of the most eminent saints and servants of God—that their mothers were naturally sterile. It was so, you know, with the mother of Isaac, the heir of promise, of Jacob, of Samson, in a very marked instance. It was so **to come to New Testament times** with the mother of John the Baptist. The mothers of all these eminent servants of God were naturally barren; and as a desire for offspring amounted, in Eastern wives, almost to a passion, God seems to have taken occasion thereby to manifest His prerogative, and display the sovereignty of His power, even in the circumstances of their natural birth.

You find this in the case of Joseph also. As he was to be a marked instrument in the hands of God, eminent as a saint, and eminent as a preserver of God's people in Egypt, he had to spring in the same way from a barren mother. You well know that Rachel was sterile, and that, in answer to prayer, God gave her a son, whom she named Joseph, as a pledge **the name signifying. "he shall add"** of further offspring.

Now Jacob, before he dies, assembles his sons around him, and pronounces over them what we cannot exactly call blessings,

because to some no blessing was given—but he bids them "gather themselves together that he may tell them that which shall befall them in the last days." Having spoken of one, and then another, he comes down at last to Joseph; and upon him he pronounces this special benediction, which we shall now endeavour to open up, as the Lord may enable. "Joseph," says he, "is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall. The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him; but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob."

I shall, with God's blessing, in endeavouring to unfold the mind and meaning of the Holy Spirit in these words, show:

I. First, Joseph's fruitfulness; for he is specially marked out here, by the finger of God, as being "a fruitful bough."

II. Secondly, the source of that fruitfulness; that it was not in himself, but that "he was a fruitful bough by a well, and his branches ran over the wall."

III. Thirdly, Joseph's persecutions and bitter afflictions, "for the archers sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him."

IV. Fourthly, Joseph's victory: "But his bow abode in strength."

V. Fifthly, the source of that strength: "The arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob."

1. **"Joseph is a fruitful bough."** You cannot but remember that striking parable which issued from the lips of Him that cannot lie **Joh 15**, where the Lord uses those solemn words, "I am the Vine, ye are the branches. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." Thus in the vine—the visible Church of Christ—there are unfruitful as there are fruitful branches. I need not dwell at any length upon the

circumstance that these unfruitful branches never had a living union with the stem. No man that knows truth for himself can believe for a single moment that the unfruitful branches which were cut off by the judgment of God, had the same union with the living stem that the fruitful branches had. It would be an insult to the doctrines of grace, and to that God who revealed them, to say that the branches, which bore no fruit were in the vine in the same vital way as those that did bear fruit. But Joseph was eminently "a fruitful bough;" and when the husbandman or vine-dresser came and looked at the bough, under the verdant leaves his searching eye beheld the rich, ripe clusters.

What is **fruit**? There may be much fruit that is worthless; nay, more, really poisonous. A few years ago a man took his station upon Blackfriars bridge, and held in his hands a basket of fruit, very tempting to look at; many persons bought of it, and some went home and died. What had that man in his basket? Why, the fruit of the belladonna, or "deadly night-shade," the berries of which have all the appearance of beautiful fruit; and yet to eat them is death. Thus it is not the appearance of fruit **for the eye, unless skilled, cannot discern the good from the bad** that stamps it as good and genuine. There may be much fruit **hedge fruit, for instance** called by that name, but not fit to be put upon the king's table. When, then, the blessed Spirit speaks of fruit, and calls Joseph "a fruitful bough," He means fruit produced by the grace of God, fruit which weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, and judged by the scrutiny of an unerring eye, claims and deserves the name. The only fruit, then, that is worthy the name, is that which is produced by the Holy Ghost, and springs out of a vital union with the Son of God. And all fruit, called such, that does not spring out of this vital union, and is not brought forth by the operations and influences of the Holy Ghost upon the heart—men may call it what they will. God will never put it upon His table. But Joseph was "a fruitful bough," inasmuch as the fruit that he bare was of God's own producing.

Let us spend a few moments in looking at this fruit; for it is a very important matter to know whether we are fruitful boughs or

not. But bear in mind that the bough is not always or often conscious itself of the fruit it bears; nay, the more the bough is loaded with fruit, the more it droops and sinks; the heavier the fruit, the lower the bough. But, assuming that the saints of God cannot often nor always see in themselves that fruit which is visible to others, we may take a glance at what the Holy Ghost, in the Word of God, calls by that name.

1. **The fear of God** in a tender conscience is a special fruit that grows upon the gospel bough. This fruit is found in every living child of God, for God's own promise is, "I will plant my fear in their heart, that they shall not depart from me." "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Some of you may be mourning, as you will ever have reason to mourn, over your own barrenness and unfruitfulness in the things of God. But have you godly fear? Has the Lord planted that divine fruit in your soul? That is the first grace; all others will come as the Lord is pleased to bring them in, and to make them manifest.

2. **Faith in God;** faith in His Word, truthfulness, greatness, power, glory, justice, and majesty, which ever is accompanied by a godly reverence of His great name; that living faith of which He is the author, and which is exercised upon His divine perfections, is a fruit of the Spirit; for "faith is the gift of God." No man can produce faith in his own soul; it is the special work of God to produce faith in Himself; and when this faith—for it is the same faith that believes in God that believes in Jesus **as the Lord said, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me"**—when this faith believes in a revealed Jesus, in Christ made known by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, in blood sprinkled, in a righteousness brought near, in a love made known, in a Surety discovered and made manifest; when faith not only embraces God in His terrible majesty, but Christ in His Person and work, what a special fruit and gift this is of the blessed Spirit.

3. When "**a good hope** through grace" is raised up in the soul, through some testimony, smile, promise, word, or inward evidence of interest in a precious Christ—when this "good hope"

is opened up in a believer's heart—and this door is often opened in the valley of Achor, amidst much confusion and trouble—this is also a fruit that hangs upon the gospel bough.

4. When **love**, too, is shed abroad in the believer's heart, and he can say with Peter, "Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love thee," because he has felt and found Christ very precious to his soul—that love is a fruit which hangs as a rich cluster upon the gospel branch; for love is expressly mentioned by the Apostle as part of the fruit of the Spirit.

5. Where there is **peace** also with God, through believing in Jesus Christ, and peace with the dear children of God; when the Prince of Peace sways the sceptre of His grace in the realm of peace, the believer's heart; that is a blessed gospel fruit.

6. When the blessed Lord is pleased to manifest His loving-kindness, and to swell the tide **of joy** in the soul, so that it is able to joy in God, and rejoice in Christ Jesus "with joy unspeakable, and full of glory;" that is a fruit that grows upon the gospel bough; for "love, joy, peace" are preeminent in the catalogue of spiritual fruit, given by the Apostle **Ga 5:22**.

7. Shall I not add, also, **resignation** and **submission** to the will of God, with tenderness of conscience, humility of mind, brokenness of heart, contrition of spirit, love to the dear children of God? Are not all these gospel fruits? But time would fail me to enumerate and describe one by one the blessed fruits that hang upon the gospel bough, and by the possession of which a man becomes manifested as a fruitful branch.

We are very imperfect judges of the fruit as regards ourselves. Many of the dear saints of God, in whom the eyes of others can see the rich, ripe clusters, hidden, it may be, by the verdant leaves of profession, mourn and sigh daily over their leanness and barrenness. "My leanness, my leanness! Woe unto me!" is their continual cry, when they examine themselves as in the sight of God. As the gardener looks under the leaves to find the rich

clusters, so they take up, so to speak, the leaves of their profession, one by one, and say, "Do I bring forth fruit? Do I live to His praise? Is my walk consistent? Is my conscience tender? Do I manifest any godly fear? Is the blessed Spirit producing in me those fruits which are to the honour and praise of God?" And when we feel, as we do feel at times, so much in our carnal mind to sink us low, and so little in our spiritual mind to lift us high, we are ready to faint, and say, "Lord, is there **any** fruit produced in my heart, in my lips, or in my life?" Yet, with all the complaints that the dear saints of God make of their barrenness and want of fruitfulness, in the sight of a holy God they are fruitful boughs, for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. The tears you shed, the sighs you heave, the desires you utter, the brokenness you experience, the contrition that is working in your heart when looking unto the Lord for some manifestation of His love to your soul—all these are so many precious fruits of the Holy Ghost hanging on your bough; and yet you see them not. You want to be different, to live a holy life, not to have a sinful thought, not to speak an idle word, not to do a foolish or sinful action. But you are hampered and hindered in running the race; and with all your desires to live to God's glory, what with your carnal mind, what with the snares spread for your feet, what with the temptations of Satan, the cares of life, and the anxieties of business, your mind seems to droop as falling so short of being what you would be, and producing what you fain would produce.

II. I pass on to our second point—the **source** of Joseph's fruitfulness. There is one sentence from the mouth of God, written by the pen of the prophet Hosea, that shows us what is the source of all real fruitfulness: "From me" **not from** thee "is thy fruit found." And there is another sentence written by the same inspired pen, in which God, speaking of Ephraim, says, "Ephraim bringeth forth fruit unto himself." Self was the ruling source of all the apparent fruit that grew upon Ephraim's bough, and as he bore fruit only to himself, God despised it and rejected it.

We have the secret **source** of gospel fruit here pointed out. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough **by a well.**" In Eastern climes, and in fact to some degree in our own more humid climate, trees, shrubs, or flowers cannot grow unless they are continually watered; in the East more particularly the vine requires a perennial spring in order to make it even live, much more blossom, and bring forth fruit. Thus Joseph's fruitfulness sprang from this source, that he was planted "by a well." And what was this well? What said the Lord to the Samaritan woman? "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a **well of water** springing up into everlasting life." You well know that the operations and influences of the Holy Ghost are compared again and again in Scripture to water. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth in me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly **or heart** shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit." Again, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." I need not, therefore, occupy your time with showing that the well is a scriptural emblem of the Holy Ghost, who alone makes us fruitful in every good word and work. Yet there is something in the emblem that casts a sweet light upon the source of all fruitfulness. A well is hidden from view; it lies deep. Men may pass it by, and not know its existence; but it is there.

The vine, then, dipped its roots in quest of the well. There is in trees and plants naturally and instinctively a search after food; and the food of the plant is the source of its fruit. Plant a tree upon a barren spot, and it will spread its roots till it finds a fruitful soil; a shrub upon a wall will drop its roots down till it reaches the ground; a sapling planted a little distance from a stream will spread its roots till it reaches the water, as though there were an instinct in the very tree itself, to find out that which shall be a source of life and fruitfulness. If, then, a tree, a vegetable, can from some instinct go in quest of that which shall sustain its natural life, shall not much more a child of God go in quest of that which shall sustain his life, and maintain his fruitfulness? As,

then, the vine dips its roots into the well, and keeps drawing up continual supplies of moisture to make the leaf green and the fruit rich and ripe, so a child of God who feels his poverty and necessity, and yet knows something of the sweet operations of the Holy Ghost in his heart, spreads out the roots of his faith, hope and love in quest of this perennial supply. The thirstier the vine is, the more room there is in its tubes and veins to draw up the moisture in the well; so the more a Christian feels his dryness and barrenness, the more room there is for the supplies of living water to keep him alive and to bring forth every good word and work.

The source of all fruitfulness is the well. If he be a minister, he never can bear fruit to be a blessing to the people, unless he dip his roots well therein. And if, my hearer, you be a gospel bough, you must dip the roots of your faith and love into the same living well. The Holy Ghost must be the supply of all divine life, and the source of all divine fruitfulness. Now, every secret desire that springs up in your bosom, every longing petition for the operations of God's grace in your heart, every yearning longing after the bedewing of His mercy upon your soul, every mournful complaint, every trickling tear, every lamenting sigh that you are what you are; as Hart says, "Tis winter all the year with me;" these lamentations, what are they? They are the going forth of the roots of your religion after the well; they are the instinctive movements of the life of God in your soul to get supplies out of the fulness of Christ; and every complaint, sigh, cry, and lamentation over your barrenness and want of fruitfulness, is really the putting forth of the life of God in your heart, which life of God is in quest of this ever-flowing supply.

Not so with those not acquainted with the depths of the Fall and the barrenness of man. They can do without the well; they want no Holy Ghost to begin, no Holy Ghost to maintain, no Holy Ghost to complete the work of faith with power; they want no faith of God's giving, hope of God's inspiring, love of God's shedding abroad; they want no God-given prayer, or God-given answer; nor do they wish for the Lord. and for the Lord alone, to work in

them. They can manage their religion for themselves; they can manufacture some imitation of the holy anointing oil; they do not want the Spirit to drop it into their breast; they can get the pestle and mortar, and the drugs, and compound a counterfeit that will be good enough for them. Not so with the saint of God; he must have the holy anointing oil; he must have the well into which he may dip the roots of his faith, and from which he may draw living supplies; for without them he has nothing and is nothing but barrenness and death.

But there is another thing very noteworthy spoken of Joseph: **"His branches run over the wall."** You see there was that fruitfulness put forth in him which developed itself not merely in leaves and fruit, but also in the length and strength of the branch. Of all trees and shrubs the vine is the weakest; as the prophet Ezekiel says. "Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon?" it is helpless and prostrate; and as such needs a trellis or wall on which to hang and expand itself to its utmost length. What is this wall? Need I answer? You have answered it already in your own bosom: **Jesus Christ, the Son of God!** He is the wall, as the Holy Ghost is the well; and as the branches of Joseph, the fruitful bough, ran over the wall and rested with all their weight upon it, so do faith, hope, love, and all the spreading tendrils and branches of divine religion rest and hang upon the wall. Christ.

Now, there is no limit to the extension of the vine but the length of the wall. I have seen a vine, which has covered ten or twelve houses. It can spread itself as far as the wall extends; and the branches run over it as though they delighted in spreading themselves as far as they can go. So with the faith, hope, and love of a child of God. When he finds the solid foundation that the Person of the Son of God, God and man in one complex Person, Immanuel, God with us, affords faith, he expands his whole soul upon Him. What is the vine without a wall? Prostrate, lying on the ground. And what is the fruit without it? Crushed in the dust; trampled upon by the foot of every passer-by; trailing in the mud and dirt; but when supported by a wall, the fruit is not crushed,

not trodden down, but stands forth in all its luxuriance and beauty. We bear no fruit to the honour of God, to the good of His people, and the profit of His Church, except as we rest upon Christ. When we hang our all upon His glorious Person as God-Man, on His atoning blood, justifying righteousness, dying love, and risen power, and feel what a solid foundation Jesus affords us to rest our weary souls upon, then we may spread; there is no let or hindrance then. If we spread upon the ground, we only spread in the dust; if we bear fruit upon the soil, it is only mingled with mire and mud. Let us be raised on the wall; then we may extend our length and breadth, and reach as far as the Holy Ghost may lengthen our branch and cause it to bear fruit.

Bear this in mind, as indispensable to all fruit—the **well** and the **wall**. If no well, no fruit; if no wall, what fruit there is will trail upon the ground and be tarnished with the dust. The two go together. Where there is no well there is no wall; and where there is no wall there is also no well. Where the Holy Ghost is at work upon the heart, there alone is Christ; for He takes of the things of Christ and reveals them to the soul. His delight, His covenant office, is to form Christ in the heart the hope of glory; so that wherever there is the well there is the wall. It is through these two things, or rather two Persons—the operations, influences, and teachings of God the Holy Ghost, the third Person of the glorious Trinity, and the finished work of the Son of God—that all the fruitfulness of the Church is produced.

III. I pass on to show Joseph's **afflictions**, and bitter enemies with their **cruel persecutions**. Now, one would have thought that Joseph being so eminent a saint, and having conferred such benefits upon his brethren, would have escaped their malicious shafts. But no, it was not so; nay, it was his very fruitfulness that drew it forth. Be a barren bough, and you will not be worth shooting at; it is only wasting powder to shoot at you. Be a fruitful bough, be an honour to the Church of God; manifest in your families, in your business, and in your movements generally, that the grace of God is operative and bringing forth fruit in you,

you will have archers; and these archers, as in the case of Joseph, will hate you, and shoot at you, and sorely grieve you.

1. But who are these archers? They would not be spoken of in the plural number unless they were many and diverse.

i. The **profane world** carries a bow, and arrows in the quiver, and often shoots against the saints of God. The profane world hates the Church of God; the more it sees of the image of Christ in the Church the more it hates it, for the "carnal mind is enmity against God;" and where the carnal mind reigns and rules, there will be bitter enmity against all who bear God's image. Such will ever shoot at you words of slander, calumny, malice, unkindness; there is no arrow in their quiver which they will not discharge against you. Yet, after all, they are but indifferent marksmen—they rarely know where to hit us; their arrows, for the most part, go wide, and very few hit the bull's eye.

ii. Not so with the next archers of whom I shall speak, the **professing world**. These are, many of them, the bitterest enemies that the Church of God has to encounter, for they hate power, they hate the life of God in the soul. They like well enough the fruitfulness that springs from themselves; but not that which springs from the operations of the grace of God. They hate a religion which their very conscience tells them they do not possess; they abhor an experimental, vital work of God upon the soul, because it condemns them, and makes them feel that they are destitute of that which they see in the saints of God. Their enmity, therefore, being drawn forth by the power displayed in their hearts and the fruit manifested in their lives, they shoot at them arrows, even bitter words, and often sorely grieve them. Place two servants in the same house, one a child of God, and the other, a professor; take two daughters in the same family, one a living soul, and the other dead in profession; and you will see how Peninnah can vex Hannah, how the professor can vex the possessor. What grievous words and unkind speeches will be continually uttered to harass and distress the mind.

iii. These are not the only archers. Sorry I am to say that some of the keenest archers that shoot at Joseph and sorely grieve him are the **saints of God** themselves. As Hart said, no doubt from painful experience:

From sinner and from saint
He meets with many a blow.

The children of God are, for the most part, very tender in their feelings; and many of the dear saints of God have many questionings and fears as to their own sincerity and uprightness before Him. Many also are deeply exercised with powerful temptations, and are pained and grieved with the hidings of God's face and the workings of sin in the carnal mind. Now, all these feelings give, so to speak, a butt and target for the arrows to be shot at. We do not fear **them**, but we fear lest what they say is true; we do not fear the archer, but we fear the arrow that he shoots, because **according to an ancient simile, which has been well versified by a modern poet** it is often tipped with a feather from one's own wing:

Keen were his pangs, but keener far to feel
He owned the pinion which impelled the steel;
While the same plumage which had warmed his nest.
Drank the last life-drop of his bleeding breast.

It is when the arrow is feathered from our own wing that it strikes most home. Now, have you not sometimes been guilty of an inconsistency, an infirmity, a slip, a foolish word, of something that has been taken to feather the arrow? And has any dart quivered in your wounded soul so sorely and deeply as the arrow the flight of which has been guided to the mark by the feather you yourself have afforded from your own breast?

iv. **Satan** is the very prince of archers, the Robin Hood of bowmen. He knows where to hit, and his target is the carnal mind. The rebellion, the blasphemy, the filth, the wickedness that

he can stir up, what Scripture calls his "fiery darts," how these stick when they are shot by this infernal archer!

v. Then there are the arrows discharged from our **own carnal mind**—the infidel workings and base imaginations of our deeply fallen nature, and these discharged from our own bow. How keenly they stick in our conscience, in our new man of grace, and what work they often make.

2. Now, one would have thought that Joseph being a fruitful bough could have looked with complacency, almost with holy scorn, upon these archers, but it was not so; "they sorely grieved him." To be sold by his own brethren into Egypt; the dreams and visions God had given him to be derided; to be cast into prison as an ungodly man through the very person who was tempting him to ungodliness, and there to be neglected and forsaken; how these archers had shot their arrows against his bosom, and sorely grieved him! It was because he had the fear of God, because his feelings were tender, that the arrows found a place. Had he a bosom of steel, had he a heart of stone, the arrows would have fallen off blunted and pointless; but it was because he had tender feelings, a living conscience, warm affections, godly fear, and a work of grace upon his soul, that he presented a tender spot for these arrows to stick in; therefore the archers not only "hated him, but shot at him, and sorely grieved him."

IV. Did they prove Joseph's destruction? Did any one drain his life blood? Did he sink and die like a wounded hart? Did he fall upon the plain and gasp out his forlorn life? No; for "his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." He then had a bow; he could shoot too. And what was his bow? and how did he direct the arrow? He picked up the arrows that were shot at him, or rather he took them out of his own wounded bosom; and instead of aiming these shafts against those who had so sorely grieved him, he shot upward; he launched his arrows towards the throne of the Majesty on high; he turned their bitter shafts into prayers, supplications, and petitions. Thus the very arrows shot at him he

turned into petitions wherewith to approach the throne of God. He drew his bow even up to the heaven of heavens; and that is what you should do. Never return evil for evil; never return railing for railing. When you are shot at by the archers, do not shoot at them again. Take your arrows and bring them before the throne; present your feelings wounded as they are, your groans and sighs, with your warm petitions, and spread them before God who hears and answers prayer; and you will find the benefit and blessing of it. They will beat you at shooting if you shoot at them. They can use language that you cannot. A man of birth and education, drawn into collision with a street ruffian, cannot bandy words with him; he must pass on—he would soon be beaten in the strife of words. So you must never shoot arrow against arrow with those archers who sorely grieve you. You have a tender conscience; you have the fear of God; you weigh your words; you know what will grieve your mind when it comes back upon you; and you are therefore sparing of your speech. Cease from that war; return not a single arrow. Let them shoot away; take their arrows; direct your bow upward; turn them all into prayers and supplications; and in due time sweet answers of mercy and peace will come into your bosom. Thus Joseph's bow "abode in strength," and all their arrows neither struck his bow out of his hand, nor broke it asunder. He could shoot as well as they, but not in the same way, nor at the same object.

Perhaps the words may apply to a minister whose "bow abides in strength." He has to shoot the arrows of God; as we read, "Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies." It is good when his bow abides in strength, and the arrows of truth, which he shoots reach hearts. O, this evening, if God should have directed an arrow from my bow into any heart, what a mercy for that soul will it be! The arrows of truth may stick deep and wound for a time, and yet they are blessed arrows, because in due time healing, pardon, and peace come to repair the wounds which they make.

V. We come to **the source of Joseph's strength**. We have seen the source of his fruitfulness, and now we see the source of his

strength: "The arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." It is a singular expression, "the arms of his hands:" yet to my mind there is great beauty in it. Look at a man's arm and a man's hand; and ask yourself, which is the stronger, a man with a strong arm and a weak hand, or a man with a strong hand and a weak arm? "Why, of course," you say, "the man with the strong arm, for there, all the muscles are; there are the levers of motion." So "the arms of his hands" is to my mind a beautiful idea, because if the arm is strong, the hand is but the means the arm makes use of to do what it requires. So "the arms of Joseph's hands were made strong;" and then he could hold the bow, direct the arrow, and shoot to some good purpose.

I am here reminded of what I once read in Latimer's sermons. Our ancestors, you know, were celebrated bowmen; victories were won at Cressy and Agincourt by the English yeomanry, who were skilled in the use of the bow. Latimer says, in a sermon preached before the king, that no man could be a good archer who did not learn from his boyhood; and the custom, he tells, us, was for the father to put his hands upon the son's hands, to teach him how to shoot, and throw the whole strength of his body into the bow. Looking at this as explaining the expression, it seems to me replete with sweetness and beauty. When the boy drew the bow, it was not the strength of his own arm that drew the string, nor was it the keenness of his eye that directed the arrow to the mark. The child appeared to draw the bow and to direct the arrow; but the hand of the father was upon the hand of the child, and the eye of the father was guiding the eye of the child; thus though the child seemed to draw the bow, it was the strength of the father that really pulled the string. So "the arms of Joseph's hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." God put His hands upon the hands of Joseph, drew the bow for him, directed the arrow, and hit effectually the mark.

Apply this to your experience. When you pray effectually it is not you that pray; it is the Spirit of God that prays in you; for He helpeth our infirmities, and intercedeth for us with groanings,

which cannot be uttered. When you believe, it is the Spirit of God that works faith in you; when you hope, it is the Spirit of God that produces hope in you; when you love, it is the Spirit of God that sheds abroad love in you; it is the arms of His hands that are put upon your hands, and they are made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. We seem to pray, though God prays in us. We seem to believe and hope and love; but it is the work of the Spirit upon our hearts. So the secret of Joseph's handling the bow to good purpose was that the hands of God were upon his hands, and they were made strong by the mighty God of Jacob.

Now, no minister can ever be blessed to the saints of God unless he holds Joseph's bow, and unless his arms are made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. We read of a man who shot a bow at a venture, and the arrow hit a king's breast. Who prompted the man to draw the bow? Who guided the arrow that reached Ahab's guilty heart? Was it the man that drew the bow, or was it God that prompted him and aimed the shaft? Clearly it was God. So it is with every servant of God. If his arrow reach the conscience of any of the election of grace, it is God who sends the arrow into that sinner's heart. Unless God give him Joseph's bow, and make the arms of his hands strong, he may shoot away—the shot will only be a random one; it will never hit the mark, never bring a sinner down, never lift a saint up, never profit the Church of God. If ministers be fruitful boughs, the source of their fruitfulness is a well, and they rest upon the wall; and though the archers may shoot at them and sorely grieve them, yet their bow abides in strength, and they never let it go. The bow of prayer and supplication they never let fall out of their hands; the weapons of their warfare are not carnal, but spiritual; they shoot the arrows of truth, for the arms of their hands are ever made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.

We see, then, Joseph's fruitfulness; we see the source of it; we see the persecutions his soul was grieved by; and we see the final victory that he gained. God of His infinite mercy lead our souls into the same blessed track, apply His truth to our hearts, that our bow may abide in strength, and that the arms of our

hands may be made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.

The Fruits and Marks of the Lord Being Our God

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Tuesday Evening, July 10, 1849

"I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go." Isaiah 48:17

God has a peculiar people. We may believe it or we may believe it not; our faith or our unbelief does not alter the solemn fact. *That* stands upon the foundation of immutable truth. "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself." (2 Tim. 2:13.) But I may go a step further. I may assume there is not a single individual in this congregation who doubts that truth. I may suppose there is not a person present here this evening who is not persuaded that God has a peculiar people. But you may believe that, and yet have no interest in it. There are hundreds of persons who believe that God has a peculiar people, who live and die without being one of that peculiar people. Balaam believed that God had a peculiar people; for he would have cursed them if he dared, and was only prevented from cursing them by the restraining power of God. When Ahithophel took sweet counsel with David, and walked to the house of God in company with him, their "sweet counsel" was not upon human merit, or the sufficiency of works; but it was, no doubt, upon grace, and the things connected with grace. Yet he lived and died under the wrath of God; and when his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself. (2 Sam. 17:23.) Such was the end of that great professor—David's loving friend. And Judas too, no doubt, preached free grace as well as the rest of the apostles; for had his preaching been different from theirs, when they came home from their mission, they would have said, 'Lord, why, Judas does not preach the same gospel as we do; he cannot be of thy sending, one of thy disciples, because he preaches a different doctrine from us.' Yet Judas died under the wrath of God. It is therefore no mark, nor proof of our interest in

the doctrine of election that we believe it, or make a profession of doing so. We want some other proof, some other evidence, than a mere belief, in our judgment, of God's having a peculiar people.

What want we, then, if this be not sufficient? What is needful? To this question we may answer, that one or two things is necessary. The first and highest proof is, the *immediate testimony* of God in our conscience. When God speaks to the soul with a divine power, and says, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness;" (Isa. 41:10); or, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee;" (Jer. 31:3); when God thus shines with his own light into the soul, this is the highest testimony we can have upon earth; it is the witness of the Spirit to our spirit that we are the "children of God;" and we can have no higher. But in the absence of this higher testimony, where this shining in of God's presence, mercy, and love is withheld or withdrawn, there is *another* testimony to our interest in God's electing love: and that is, the fruits and evidences that flow out of our interest in it. Thus, if the root be hidden, the stem may appear; and if we cannot see, by the Lord's own shining, our names written in the book of life, yet if we can trace the fruits and effects that flow out of electing love, then we have a testimony to our interest in it, lower indeed, and not so blessed, but still scriptural and safe.

In our text, the Lord brings forward *two* of these blessed fruits. It runs thus, "I am the Lord thy God." These are the very highest words God can speak to the creature. "I am the Lord *thy* God." But how art thou to know it? What is the evidence, what the divine proof of it? "Which teacheth thee to profit; which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go."

Thus, we may argue from the words both *positively* and *negatively—positively*, thus, 'If the Lord is my God, then he is teaching me to profit; then he is leading me in the way that I should go'; *negatively*, 'If the Lord be not my God, then he is not

teaching me to profit, and he is not leading me in the way wherein I am to go.' And thus the words, (as the Lord may be pleased to bless them,) may be for the comfort and encouragement of the living family, and a word of warning and conviction, if it be his will, to some of his elect, still lying in the ruins of the fall.

In handling these words, I shall, as the Lord may give me grace and wisdom this evening,

First, speak a little upon the meaning of the first leading feature, "*I am the Lord thy God.*"

Secondly, upon the "*teachings to profit*," with which God is pleased to bless the soul; and

Thirdly, the *leadings of God* in the way wherein he would have us to go.

I.—Upon my first point I shall not speak at great length, as my object is to dwell more on the teachings and leadings of God: and yet I cannot pass over this portion of my text, for it contains everything a child of God can enjoy here, and everything he hopes to enjoy hereafter.

"*I am the Lord thy God.*" If the Lord is our God, we have everything that we can ever want to have; for in giving himself to us he gives us everything. What sweet and blessed feelings are raised up in the soul, when we can believe that the Lord is our God! When we *cannot* believe it; when we cannot raise up our faith so high; when doubts and fears oppress the mind, and darkness fills the soul, then everything appears against us. For, if the Lord be not our God, where are we? what are we? what will be our end? and where will be our eternal portion? But if the Lord be our God, then we have everything that can make us happy here, and fill us with bliss and blessedness hereafter. What a sweet and blessed feeling, then, it is in the soul, when the Lord speaks thus, "*I am the Lord thy God*," who brought thee into being. It is I that formed thee in the womb, and brought thee

forth into thy present existence; it is I, the Lord thy God, that has fed thee, and clothed thee from that hour up to the present moment. It is I, the Lord thy God, who has preserved thee on every side. When thou wert upon a sick bed, it was I, the Lord thy God, who visited thy soul, raised up thy body, and gave thee that measure of health which thou dost now enjoy. It is I, the Lord thy God, who placed thee in the situation of life which thou dost now occupy; it is I, the Lord thy God, that deals out to thee every trial, that allots thee every affliction, that brings upon thee every cross, and that works in thee everything both "to will and to do of my own good pleasure." When we can thus believe that the Lord our God is about our bed and our path, and spying out all our ways; when we can look up to him, and feel that he is the Lord our God, there is no feeling more sweet, more blessed, or more heavenly. But, as I before hinted, there are times and seasons, and these more frequent than the other, when we cannot raise up faith so high: when our evidences are beclouded, our signs not seen, the soul sitting in darkness and having no light, Satan powerfully tempting, past sins coming to mind, and such a cloud of darkness resting upon the soul that we cannot believe any one promise. Yet, if the Lord be our God, our darkness, our unbelief, does not alter his love. He is still the Lord our God, in darkness as well as in light; he still rests in his love, though we cannot raise up faith so high, and though our soul may be sunk fathoms deep in doubt and fear.

But there are fruits, evidences, marks, tokens of the Lord being our God, though we may for the most part walk in darkness and have no light; and these marks and evidences we have in the text before us, which leads us to our second point,

II.—Which was to shew, that if the Lord is our God, He *teaches us to profit*.

It seems as though the Lord were here drawing a distinction between the teachings of men and the teachings of God, and pointing out one mark, as though he would fix our attention upon *that* as a sign whereby we may know whether the teaching that

we have had is the teaching of man or of God. To use an illustration. It is like the mark upon a bank note. Take a note to the bank, and the clerk will look at the water mark, or fix his eye upon other signs, and if he find them present, he knows that the note is genuine; but let them be absent, and he knows the note is counterfeit. So it is with respect to the teaching of men and the teaching of God. I may profess a certain creed, and take a certain stand in doctrine: whence did I get this profession, or this creed, and how came I possessed of this knowledge? If it came from man, there is this certain mark upon it—it was not to profit; it never did my soul any good; it never came with any blessing to my heart; it left me just as it found me. But, on the other hand, if what I know, if what I believe, if what I feel, has been wrought in my heart by the power of God; in other words, if the religion that I profess is of God's teaching, then there will be this mark upon it, it has been to profit. Now, just look at your knowledge of divine things, and at your profession. You profess a certain creed; you have a certain measure of knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Now just look at the character of your knowledge and profession, and see what you can find of the stamp of God upon it. If you can find this stamp upon it—that it has been to profit, then you may say, this is the teaching of God. But, on the other hand, if it be not to profit, then you may say, it is but the teaching of man. We read of those (and the Lord is against them) who are taught the fear of God by the precept of men. A man may get his religion from men, but will that profit his soul? will that save him from the wrath of God? will that stand by him in a dying hour? will that be to his peace and comfort on a death-bed? No! No; when most wanted, it will all flee away, like the smoke out of the chimney, and chaff from the threshing-floor. But if his religion has been taught him by God, and wrought in his soul by a divine power, it will be not only to his profit here, but it will be to his profit hereafter; for "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise not only of the life that now is, but of that which is to come."

Let us, by way of contrast, put side by side the teaching of man and the teaching of God. I will mention several things whereby

we may know what teaching is to profit, and what teaching is not to profit; and then you may compare what takes place in your heart with what I shall endeavour to lay down from God's word and experience.

1. True teaching *humbles the soul*; false teaching puffs it up with pride. Weigh that against your profession and knowledge of divine things, and see what your religion has done for you viewed in that light. Has it humbled you? laid you low in your own eyes? brought you to nothing in your own sight? Then it has been to profit, and you may bless God for having given you his own special teaching. But, on the other hand, has it puffed you up with pride? made you think highly of yourself? exalted you in your mind above the people of God? filled your mouth with boasting, and your heart with arrogance? Then it is the teaching of man; were it the teaching of God, it would have humbled you and brought you down to the very dust.

2. Again. Teachings which are to profit, *soften and melt a man's heart*, as Job says, "God maketh my heart soft" (23:16); and we read this especial promise, that the Lord "will take away the heart of stone and give a heart of flesh:" in other words, that he will melt and soften the spirit. Now see if you can find any of these effects in your soul from what you believe and hope to be special teaching. Has it softened, melted, broken, humbled, dissolved your spirit? When eternal things have come with weight upon your soul; when you have had views of the Lord Jesus Christ; when the word of God has been opened up with power to your heart; when you have heard the servants of the living Jehovah; when you have been upon your knees before God; when your souls have been engaged in divine matters, has there been a softening, dissolving, melting effect produced? Or, on the other hand, has your profession rather hardened your heart, and instead of making it tender in God's fear, produced a light, trifling, indifferent state of mind.

3. Again. Teachings which are to profit make sin *exceedingly sinful*, fill us with shame and confusion of face before God, cut us

up in our feelings, and make us loathe and abhor ourselves in our own sight as the veriest monster of iniquity. Divine views of what we are as fallen sinners in the sight of a holy God will be sure to make sin exceedingly sinful, will cut up root and branch all creature righteousness, and make us feel that of sinners we are chief. But that teaching which is not to profit, makes sin to appear a light thing, gives us very slight and superficial views of its nature; does not hold up to us its awful character; does not fill us with the deepest abhorrence of it; nor make us loathe ourselves in our own sight as the vilest of the vile; but seems rather to excuse and justify it, and make sin to appear not such a very dreadful thing. Nay, it will insinuate there is no great harm in this or that indulgence, and that a child of God may do what other children of God have done. But that is the very teaching which is from beneath and not from above, and is that wisdom which is "earthly, sensual, and devilish." If your religious feelings, from whatever source they come, make sin to be in your eyes not exceedingly sinful; if they never fill you with self-abhorrence; bring no godly sorrow into your heart on account of it; cause no tear of contrition to fall down your cheek; no self-hatred to spring up in your breast; but rather fill you with light, vain, and trifling thoughts concerning sin, depend upon it, that teaching is not from above, but from beneath, for it wants this mark—it is not to profit.

4. Again. Teaching to profit makes *Jesus precious to the soul*. When God is pleased to manifest the Lord Jesus Christ in any measure unto us, and we get glimpses of his Person, glory, blood, obedience, sufferings, and love, it will make him exceedingly precious to our souls; and when he becomes exceedingly precious to our souls, then we may say, this teaching is to profit. "Unto you which believe he is precious." "Whosoever hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me." But if, on the other hand, our profession of Jesus Christ never brings any of these blessed feelings into our heart; if we have but a doctrinal knowledge of Jesus, and no discovery of him to our souls by the operations of the Spirit, there is no such admiration, no such adoration of him, no such hope in him, no such love towards him, no such delight

in him,—it is but a letter Christ, a nominal Jesus, a seeing of him in the word of God, but not a seeing of him by the eye of a living faith. If such be our teaching and profession, it is not of God—for it is not to profit.

5. Again. If we are taught of God, and our teaching is to profit, it will make us *spiritually-minded*. If ever the Lord Jesus Christ is made in any measure precious to our souls, it makes us spiritually-minded, it takes our affections, lifts them above all earthly things to heaven, and fixes them for the time where Jesus sits at God's right hand; and then we shall want nothing but to have communion with the Lord, and to live to his glory. But if, on the other hand, the views of Christ which we have, or profess to have, only make us cleave more to the flesh, only strengthen the spirit of the world more in our hearts, and foster an idolatrous attachment to the things of time and sense, then we may say that these views of Christ are not of God, because they are not to profit.

Now it is good for a child of God to be comparing his religion with this mark as given in God's word. For instance;

1. When you *read a book*, a religious book, put it into this scale; weigh it by this test; does it do my soul good? Is there profit in it? What blessed feelings does it produce in my heart? Am I convinced by reading it of the shallowness of my religion, and that I must learn deeper things yet than I know already? Does it wound me? Does it shew me in what instances I have gone astray? Does it leave a solemn and abiding impression on my heart? Does it shew me more of the exceeding evil of sin than I ever saw before? and do I find when I put it down that I am in a solemn, humble, spiritual frame? Then, I can say, this book is to my profit, and I get good thereby. But if, on the other hand, the book only hardens my heart, and darkens my mind, so that I can think lightly about sin and the evils of my nature, seem enabled to indulge more in some besetting temptation, to walk more loosely, not to watch so carefully lest I be entangled, and get strengthened and encouraged in carnal ways from the book that I

have read, Oh, let me put it away; this is not the teaching of God! And why do I know it is not the teaching of God? because it does not profit my soul.

2. So in *hearing a minister*, (I do not say you are to go and be as some who are watching to make a man an offender for a word; God is utterly against that,) this is what you should do: you should ask, Is it to my profit? what feeling, what impressions does it leave upon my spirit? When I go from chapel, can I plunge into the first carnal conversation which comes across my path? Can I go home, and be as carnal and as worldly as I was before? Or, is there some solid, solemn, spiritual impression left on my heart? Does it lead me to prayer? Does it make God's word sweet? Do I go home and spend the rest of the day engaged more or less in divine things? Do I feel my heart drawn more from earth to heaven? Am I shewn more and more of my own sinfulness and misery, and more of the beauty, blessedness, and suitability of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do I feel a solid, abiding, spiritual impression left upon my soul, so that the things of God lie with weight and power upon my mind? When I lie awake upon my bed on the Lord's day evening, is my mind more drawn up to the Lord than it was before? On the Monday, when I go about my business, do I still carry with me what I heard on the Lord's day? Does it separate me from the persons with whom I have to work, and the business I have to do? And am I from time to time during the day lifting up my heart to God, and asking him to visit and bless my soul? Can I trace these things to what I heard on the Lord's day before, and feel that what I heard was really made profitable to my soul? Now this is how we are to weigh sermons and ministers: whether they are made profitable to us: by this we know what is the teaching of God.

3. And so with respect *to our companions*, who make a profession of religion. When we go into their company and converse upon the things of God, we should weigh what effect it has left upon our minds. Has their company made us light and trifling? Has it made us think less of sin? Has it given greater looseness to our own carnality? Has it brought a hardness, deadness, and

barrenness into our spirit? Has their conversation robbed us of any sweet frame that we were in before? Has their company entangled us in any snare, or opened any door to temptation? Then these companions are not to our profit, and what is ministered by them is only to our harm, and not to our good. But, on the other hand, if we have fallen into the company of an exercised child of God, and his conversation has been blessed to our soul, has drawn up our affections more to the Lord, made prayer more our element, shewn us that we have gone astray, convinced us that we have walked in wrong paths, softened and melted our soul, then we say, his conversation has been to my profit; I have got good in speaking with this child of God; I will see him again; the Lord may bless his conversation to my soul.

4. And thus it should be with *every hymn* given out. It should be, is this to my profit? Does it bring a sweet and blessed feeling into my soul! Does it solemnize my mind?

5. So with *every chapter* we read; so with *every petition* we put up. So all the day long with everything we do, we should be continually watching the Lord's hand, and saying inwardly, Is this for my profit? Is this for my good? Am I learning real religion thereby? This minister, this work, this book, this person, this circumstance, this company, this occupation, this engagement, this line of life, this way of business—what is it doing for me? Is it doing me harm or good? Is it for my profit or for my injury? If it is for my profit, doing my soul good, melting my heart, softening my spirit, bringing Jesus near, separating me from the world, fostering a spirit of prayer in my breast, making me to walk with the Lord in sweet and blessed communion with him, it is of God. Why? Because it is to profit; it is doing my soul good, bringing life and feeling to my heart, communicating sweet and blessed impressions to my soul. I feel that it is doing my soul good; let me then avoid everything else, because I know it is not for my good, but my injury. This, then, is the way whereby we may, if we be honest to ourselves, weigh in the scales of the sanctuary whether the teachings we have, or profess to have, are to profit.

If we are God's children, all *his* teachings will be to our profit. He will teach us sometimes by providences; they shall be to our profit. He will teach us by afflictions; they shall be to our profit. He will teach us by trials; they shall be to our profit. He will teach us by temptation; it shall be to our profit. He will teach us by enemies, who will shew us our faults when friends would not; it shall be to our profit. He will teach us by ministers; it shall be to our profit. He will teach us by books; he will teach us by hymns; he will teach us by the Scripture; teach us by his various dealings with us. If we are his children, all these will be to profit. By all these things we shall be instructed. Now this is the grand difference between a child of God, and a child of the Wicked One. All that the child of God goes through is for his profit, all that the child of Satan goes through is for his injury. Everything heaps blessings on the head of the one, and everything heaps curses on the head of the other. If he has sickness, it is a blessing to a child of God; if in poverty, it is a blessing to him; if he is persecuted, it is a blessing to him; if he is in temptation, it is a blessing to him. Whatever he passes through, however rough, however difficult, however painful, however opposed to flesh and blood, it is all made a blessing to him. But, on the other hand, it is all made a curse to a child of the devil. Look at Saul, and look at David. Here was Saul; everything was made a curse to him; the very throne which he sat on, the crown which he wore, the sceptre which he carried in his hand, all made a curse to him, all plunging him deeper and deeper into perdition. And here is David; everything made a blessing to him. Not a single thing he passed through but is overruled and made a blessing to his soul. And so it is with the child of God; everything is a blessing to him; it may not come as a blessing, but it will end in one. All that God sends upon his children ends in their good. What a mercy, then, to have a hope that we are in the right way, that the Lord is teaching us to profit! I want you that desire to fear God to weigh this matter well in your heart. Do not say, 'I know *this* and *that*; I have made a consistent profession many years; I am sound on the point of election; I am a member of a gospel church; I hear *this* and *that* minister.' But look at this. 'What has my religion done for me? What has my profession wrought in my heart?' Let me fix my

eyes upon this one thing; let me draw my attention away from everything else, and fix my eyes as closely upon it as the clerk at the Bank fixes his eye upon the water-mark—What have I learned to profit? Do I bear Scripture marks of being one of those whom God is teaching? If I do, then I am one of God's children, for "all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children." (Isa. 54:13.) But if we cannot find any of this profitable teaching, we must write upon all our profession, "Tekel; weighed in the balance, and found wanting."

III.—But we may pass on to our third point; "I am the Lord thy God, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go." Now there is a way that we should go, and there is a way that we should not go. And the way whereby the Lord leads us is the way that we should go. But what is the way that we should go? We may look at it in two points of view: *first*, as a way of *providence*; and *secondly*, as a way of *grace*.

1. There is a way whereby we should go in a way of *providence*; and it is the Lord, and the Lord alone, that can lead us in the way that we should go in temporal matters; and it is a mercy if we can wait and watch his guiding hand, for if left to ourselves we shall be sure to go the way that we should not go. But how may we know whether it is a way that we should go, or a way that we should not go? Here is an opening for you; you can establish your business in a better neighbourhood; or enlarge it; or change your position of life; or take some situation; or embrace an opportunity that seems likely to be beneficial to your interests. Now how are you to know whether this be a way whereby you should go, or the contrary? What says conscience? Is it a *right* way to go? Shall I bring temptation upon my soul by going in that way? Shall I sin against God? Shall I provoke him? Shall I commit known evil? Shall I put myself into a situation where temptation will be too strong for me? Shall I cause the Lord to hide his face from me? Shall I bring his correcting hand upon me? Shall I find nothing but briars and thorns there? It may seem a very nice way, a very flesh-pleasing way, just what a worldly person would like, but it may be just such a way as a child of God dare not

take. Now if we are made willing that God should lead us in the way wherein we should go, and that we should not choose our own way, he will take care to lead us in the right way. It is true that the Lord does overrule all our crooked ways for our good, though we may have to repent, grieve over, and suffer for them; it is our mercy the Lord does overrule all our ways, though they may bring much pain and grief into our hearts. But still, how much better it is, how much wiser, how much safer to walk in a God-honouring way, than to walk in a God-dishonouring way; to walk in a right way instead of a wrong way; to walk in a straight way instead of a crooked way; to walk in an upright way instead of a deceitful way; to walk in the fear of God, and not to walk according to the lusts and wishes of our fallen nature. But, it is our mercy, that if we are the children of God, he will lead us in the way that we should go.

2. But this is more true still in a *way of grace*. Now in a way of grace we often know not what is the way which we should take, for he promises to lead the blind by a way that they know not; and we cannot often see the leading of God. We desire to be right, but we cannot always see how we ought to act, or what we ought to do. Here is one way that would not be dishonouring to God, and here another that would not be dishonouring to him, and still we know not which to take. But the Lord says, "I will lead you in the way whereby you should go." There shall be sooner or later an opening up of the will of God, an inward admonition, a leading in the way of providence, a word resting on the mind, and all fulfilling the promise that he will lead you by the way that you should go.

But how contrary this way is to our own way! We would walk in an easy path, the Lord leads in a rough one; we would walk in a flesh-pleasing path, he would have us to walk in a God-fearing one. We would have our own will gratified, our inclinations followed; we would have as much of the world as we can embrace, and yet have the favour and love of God, and go to heaven at last. But no; if we are to walk in the way that we should go, we must be led in a straight and narrow way, an

afflicting way, a way we should have never chosen for ourselves, a way in which flesh and blood cannot possibly walk. Yet the Lord himself says, "he leadeth thee in the way that thou shouldest go;" he leadeth thee in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ; he leadeth thee to know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings; he leadeth thee in the path of tribulation, that you may know more of a suffering Jesus and have union and communion with him. What a mercy it is that the Lord should lead us in the way; in a way of prayer, in a way of watchfulness, in a way of supplication, in a way of desire, in a way of hungering and thirsting after righteousness, in a way wherein none but himself can really satisfy and bless our souls, "in a way which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen," (Job 18:7), in a way wherein his redeemed walk, and his redeemed alone; in a way which none ever chose for himself, and which only God could choose for him, but in which he constrains him from time to time to walk.

Now you may be tried in your mind from time to time to know whether the Lord is your God. God's people are often thus tried; for they cannot take up an empty profession; nor can they rest upon a sound creed, nor walk in the path of presumption and vain-confidence. They want the Lord himself sweetly and blessedly to speak into their souls, "I am the Lord thy God;" and they want nothing more. But even when they have not that, are there no marks in their favour, no tokens for good, no signs and evidences of the Lord being their God? Yes; he is their Lord in the dark as well as in the light. He has left these two marks upon record for their comfort and encouragement. "I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way which thou shouldest go." 'I teach thee to profit; I make my blessed word to sink with a divine power into thy soul; I cause my doctrine to drop like the rain, and my speech to distil like the dew; I open thy eyes to see; unstop thy deaf ears to hear; touch thy heart to feel; I bring the truth home to thy conscience. Thus I teach thee to profit; my teachings and dealings with thee are for thy good; not to puff thee up with pride, not to harden thy heart and sear thy conscience, but to thy profit, that thou mayest be a

partaker of my holiness, and have a foretaste of heaven before thou arrivest there, to make thee a companion for the saints above that walk in the full light of God's countenance.' Now can we find this mark? We may have doubts and fears, and temptations, and sinkings, and many gloomy things to distress our minds; but can we say this with an honest conscience, 'What I have learned of religion, and the things of God, has been I believe for my profit. I have been taught things in the school of affliction, and in exercise and trial, that I could have learnt no other way; I have seen the emptiness of profession, the folly of resting upon a mere letter creed, and brought to this point to know that none but the Lord Jesus can bless my soul, and to wait upon him with earnest cries and sighs for a sweet application of his love, blood, and grace; and at times and seasons I can say, I have seen him by the eye of faith, and have felt and embraced him as my salvation.'

If we can say this, then we can say the teaching of God has been to our profit. And if we can find that the leadings and dealings of God in our soul have been to lead us in a way we should not otherwise have walked in; if we see that in providence and grace the outstretched hand of God has led us in right paths, we can add also, 'the Lord has led me in the way that I should go; a way which my conscience tells me I should walk in, but which I never could or should have walked in, had it not been for his leadings. And thus, if I can find these two marks of his teachings and leadings in my soul, then I have two blessed evidences of the Lord being my God.

But whatever be our profession, whatever our creed, if these two things be not there; if what we profess to have been the teachings of God have not been to our profit, but have hardened our heart, seared our conscience, puffed up our minds, made us think lightly of sin, and plunged us more into the world than before; if all men can see that the teachings of God that we profess to have experienced, have not been to our profit; it is not all our boasting that the teaching of the Lord has been ours that will make them believe it. If they can see that we have not

walked in God's ways, but in paths of our own pursuing, we may speak very strongly and boastfully, and may say, 'I am sure that the Lord is my God;' but if we do not bear spiritual marks that we have walked in the way wherein God leads his people, will God witness it? will his people agree with it? and will an honest conscience add its verdict? I say, boldly, No.

The Fruits of a Living Religion

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Thursday Evening,
November 11, 1858

(A Posthumous Sermon.)

"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the praise and glory of God." Phil. 1:9, 10, 11

A religion that does nothing for a man's soul is practically worthless, and a religion that never manifests itself in a man's life is as worthless as a religion that does nothing for the soul. Death is stamped upon both. Religion to be worth anything must be a living religion, a religion that proceeds from a work of grace upon the heart, communicating life to the soul, and exercising an influence wheresoever it exists, and in whomsoever it resides, for where there is a springing up of life in a man's soul it must be made manifest by his words and actions. What a cutting sentence issued from the truth-speaking lips of the Lord of life and glory against those branches that bear not fruit! How he declared that his Father would take them away, gather them in heaps, and cast them into the fire to be burned, and in what a decisive manner in the parable of the vine did he stamp the religion that brings forth no fruit unto God. When we read the Apostle Paul's epistles, we cannot help seeing how his heart panted for the spiritual edification of the church of God! What prayer and desire he had continually in his bosom that they might have not only every blessing, but that these blessings might be made manifest in the heart, lip, and life! How he threw his whole soul into the matter! And when he wrote with his pen he only expressed the continual longings and breathings of his soul. He tells these Philippians, who had a choice place in his heart, what he prayed for.

I.—First, *"That their love might abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment."*

II.—Secondly, That they might *"approve things that are excellent,"* or, as we read in the margin, *"Try things that differ."*

III.—Thirdly, That they might be *"Sincere and without offence till the day of Christ."*

IV.—Fourthly, That they might be *"Filled with the fruits of righteousness,"* which he says, *"are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God."*

Who can say with these words staring him in the face and sounding in his ears that the Apostle was not for a godly life, when he speaks not only of faith in the heart, but also of the manifestation of that faith by the fruits of righteousness?

I shall, with God's blessing, open up the subject in the same order I have stated, in these four points in which I have recapitulated it.

I.—First, *That their love might abound yet more and more in knowledge.* In expressing this desire the Apostle assumed, I may say, he knew that they possessed love, that that grace of the Spirit had been communicated to their soul; that being born of God they knew what it was to love God and Jesus Christ, as revealed in the word of truth. He knew that they loved the things of God; for he felt a sweet union with them; he loved them and they loved him. His love came from above and their love proceeded from the same source. As two small streams of water flowing down the pane of a window, when they get to the bottom mingle and form one drop; so their love mingled with his and became one. He assumed, therefore, that they possessed love, God's greatest and choicest gift. The best proof of a spiritual birth is love to God and his dear Son; and the best proof of having passed from death unto life is love to the brethren. The Apostle

prays that their love might abound yet more and more, that they might not be satisfied with a little of it, but that they might have a large measure of it communicated and imparted to their soul, that they might possess and enjoy it in a far greater and richer measure than they had yet experienced. And he also desires that their love might abound in *knowledge*. We cannot love those whom we don't know. We cannot love God till we *know* him, nor the Son of God till we *know* him, nor the people of God till we *know* them, nor the truth of God till we *know* it; therefore there is a union between knowledge and love. It is not a letter knowledge, a speculative, dry doctrinal knowledge; but a spiritual knowledge, a knowledge communicated by a divine revelation, let down into the soul by spiritual manifestations, and divine acquaintance with divine things by a divine power. Now this is the only knowledge really worth possessing, to *know* God by his own manifestations and Jesus by his own revelations, sweet visits and affections, by tasting how sweet and precious they are. Head knowledge can never communicate spiritual love, it merely stands in the letter. A man may have his heart full of enmity to God and yet have his head full of the letter; he may hold the clearest creed, and possess the soundest theory, with a brain crammed with texts of Scripture, and all the while his heart may be hatred itself towards God, and as a necessary consequence, towards the people of God. But spiritual knowledge, divine teaching, and heavenly acquaintance with the truth as it is in Jesus, must be the parent of spiritual love; for to know God is to love him. We cannot know him except he reveal himself, and he reveals himself not as the object of knowledge only, but of truth and love; and the more we know of God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, the more we know of his love, of his death, and his justifying obedience, the more we shall love him. The reason we are so cold is because we don't know him. Thus the Apostle prayed that their love might abound yet more and more in *knowledge* and in *judgment*.

It is a very blessed thing to have a spiritual *judgment*, and there is scarcely any gift or grace in which the people of God are for the most part more deficient. You will find many of the true saints of God are simple-hearted people, and very deficient in judgment.

Give them a book or pamphlet to read, and they know not whether it be true or false, they have so little judgment in these matters. And it may be as well perhaps that the majority are like a flock of sheep; it may be a good thing that the children of God have little judgment. As in an army, it would not be good for all to be leaders and officers; there must be the common soldiers to obey as well as leaders and officers to command, so in the church there are and should be pastors and guides to proclaim salvation to the people and point out the paths of peace and righteousness. But still it is a blessed thing if God has been pleased to bestow a little judgment on the soul; for, for the want of it, we are apt to be led astray, and find it hard work to direct our works and words aright.

But there is a marginal reading, which seems to give another meaning. It is *experience*. And we may assign that meaning to it; for the word in the original means both. So he prays that "their love might abound in knowledge and in *experience*," tasting it and perceiving it, having a sensible feeling toward it, and a sweet realization of it. This is the best way of cultivating spiritual love. God may have given you a liberal spirit in order that you may minister to the wants of those among his people who are poor in this world's goods, and thus in setting you in the body has assigned you the place of the hand; or perhaps he has made you a foot, and a willing one, ready to toil in the dust for the benefit of the church, and to run on her errands, and this he can do without making you an eye, an ear, or even a nose to smell the scent of truth, as Isaac smelt the smell of the raiment of his son. But you may possess what is better still, and that is a sweet perception in your soul of the truth of God, and have a blessed experience in your heart of the love of God, and thus your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge, and in all perception, taste, and experience of God's truth, and that is the best way whereby we can know what the love of God is. It must be shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, and then there is an inward acquaintance with it, a blessed realization of its power and unction. Do you feel your love very deficient? How cold your heart often is, and how lifeless, stupid, fond of these earthly toys

you are, and quite unable and even unwilling to raise up a thought God-ward? But are there not times and seasons when you mourn and lament it should be so, that you cannot be what you would, and love the Lord as you would? Yet, how the Lord seems to drop down love to himself, which draws your affections up to him! Oh! may our love abound yet more and more, if the Lord has given any measure of his grace, in knowledge and in all judgment! May both our love to God and to the saints abound, not as a shallow, scanty brook, but like a flowing river. But I pass on to our

II.—Second point, Where the Apostle prays for our Philippian brethren, that they "*might approve things that are excellent.*" It is a blessed thing to have a standard of divine truth in the soul; just as when the judge sits upon the bench and has to administer the laws of the land, he has above him a standard, which is the statutes of his country, wherever he administers justice. Now if he had no standard his decisions must be ever faulty and wrong. But being guided by a certain standard, he is able to administer the laws of the country justly. So in grace, if we had no spiritual standard of what is right and what is wrong, of what is good and what is evil, how could we walk in any way before God or his people? The Lord said to Jeremiah, "If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth." And ministers, of all men, should have a standard in their consciences so as to approve things that are excellent, which we only can do as we have a spiritual mind to discern things that are excellent. The things that are excellent are the things of God; whatever he has illuminated by his glory is excellent, but whatever springs of and from man, is vile. Now if a man carries about with him a blessed standard in his own judgment, heart, and conscience, when he looks at things that God hath stamped with his grace, he will say, "These are excellent;" but of the things of man he will say, "These are vile." How it turns things topsy-turvy, and sets up God's will and the ways of God as the only things godly, and overturns every thing that man has set up, and everything that God despises as vile. This is just contrary to what the world does. They despise the things that God loves, and love the things that

God hates; for the carnal eye can only see carnal objects, and approve of carnal things. But the spiritual eye sees spiritual things, the spiritual judgment discerns spiritual objects, and the spiritual affections cleave to spiritual things. Now this will influence our lives and act upon our conduct. If we consider the truth of God to be excellent in which salvation is, we shall approve it by delighting in and walking thereby, by maintaining it wherever we go, and showing by all our actions that we approve of it as a thing most excellent. Now if an officer of our Queen were to see her Majesty insulted, his profession would call upon him to start up, meet and avenge the offence; so in a spiritual sense, wherever you are and Jesus is mocked, you should draw your sword, like the soldier, and cut the mocker down with the truth, whether it be in a railway carriage or wherever it may be; wherever the word of God is trodden upon in your presence you must manifest your disapprobation against it. Whenever you hear any word against the people of God, the truth of God, the servants of God, and do not draw your sword, how can you be true soldiers, when cowardice is stamped upon your actions? Never think of sneaking through life as a coward. You know what is reserved for cowards, that their portion is with dogs! Never be ashamed of the Lord Jesus Christ; for he that is ashamed of him and of his gospel before men, he will be ashamed of before his heavenly Father. *"Approve things that are excellent,"* and if you do you will make it manifest. The books that you read will be books written by men of God, while the ministers you hear will be men sent of God to preach the gospel, and who will be commended to your conscience.

But the margin gives another reading: *"Try things that differ."* Many things differ. There are different opinions on different points, different ways of having the subject brought before our notice, different courses to take upon different matters. Now the Apostle calls upon us to try these things that differ, to weigh them in the balance, and see whether they bear the stamp of God. As a person in a shop has to examine different articles to see which are good and which are bad; or a person, who receives coins, has to see whether they are all legitimate coinage and of

proper weight, whether the notes are of the right authorities, to try which is right and which is wrong, which is valuable and which is worthless, so in grace, we are continually called upon to exercise our judgment. Here are different doctrines which you are to try by the word of God, by your own experience, by the feelings produced by them, and by the way in which they are commended to your conscience, you must exercise your judgment in these matters as a man taught of God. Thus you "*try things that differ*" and as different things come before you in the exercise of your judgment you are called upon to try them, weigh them up, and see how far they are consistent with God's truth and the walk of a godly man, and the more we are exercised the more we shall try these things. Passages of Scripture may seem to come with power to the soul, we have to try them, whether they are applied by the Holy Ghost, or are merely the result of memory. In weighing the word, we are to try whether it comes with a blessing from God or whether it may not be the stirring up of the natural feelings and passions. In talking with God's people all may *try things that differ*, whether they be of God, or those things they have learned from and through men. Not in a capricious spirit, nor in a censorious manner as if we set up ourselves as judges, and thus break the command of Jesus,— "Judge not that ye be not judged;" but in a way of soul concern, desirous of knowing what to do, and wishing to have some light upon our path that we may do the will of God. In all these points there will be much room to try the things that differ. A Christian is not to go through life blindfold, but must have his eyes open, for he will be called upon to exercise his judgment on a variety of subjects. If then the Christian has to do so, I advise you to follow that course. But you may say, "Is he to take everybody's views and examine them in the light of Scripture?" Yes, surely, for he is not to be like the poor Papists, under the guidance of the Priests; but he must exercise his judgment: I for my part, should be very sorry for any of my people, to pin their faith to my sleeve. Try the matters, search the Scriptures and seek for light in your conscience. I desire to bring nothing before you for which I have not good ground, let it be believed upon the testimony of God; for that is the only testimony worth having. But I pass on to our

next point.

III.—*That ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.* Sincerity lies at the base of all true religion, and a man who has not a religion in his conscience to give him a grain of sincerity has very little religion. So that to be sincere is a main thing in religion; for it runs through the whole of a man's course. If he is not sincere in the beginning we have no reason to believe that he will be sincere in the middle, and if he is not sincere in the middle we have no ground to hope that he will be sincere in the end. What do you think of men and women taking them apart from religion if they are not sincere? Ah! the insincerity that is stamped upon the life and actions of men! but what a black and fatal mark it is if stamped upon religion! you may have very little experience, faith, hope or love, your evidences may be cloudy; but are you honest, before God, can you and do you say,— "Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts?" Is your soul lying open and naked before the eyes of him with whom you have to do? "*And without offence;*" that is without a *stumbling block*; without meeting with a stumbling block *in yourselves, or putting* a stumbling block in the way of *others*. It is very good to walk and not to stumble in the way of other people, and so adorn the doctrine you profess. But, have not persons been deterred from coming to this chapel, by the conduct of parties resorting here? Have we not had great drunkards here, men who will come to chapel on a Sunday morning and get drunk in the evening? What can cause greater reproach than this? The world expects consistency, and if our life is contrary to our profession the world sees it. I can of course perceive we give offence in the ordinary sense of the term; but it means here putting a stumbling block in their way and so they stumble at God's truth; because they have seen conduct in persons who have come here that they could not sanction, and thus they take offence against the truth preached here. They might have known that no such conduct was sanctioned in this place; but the stumbling block was so palpable that they stumbled over it; therefore, we are bound so to act as not to put a stumbling block in the way of others. That there are many

things going on in us that we must condemn, we cannot deny, but still may it be our desire to walk so as not to give offence to the people of God, nor stumble those who are seeking the way to the city of God. But I pass on to

IV.—My last point, *"That they might be filled with the fruits of righteousness, which as he says, are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God."* He was like a farmer, that wanted a good crop. He was not satisfied with 14, 16, or 18 bushels to the acre; but he wanted 40 or 50, that would make the very stalks crack with the load put upon them, that so they might be filled with the fruits of righteousness. Or to adopt another figure; he was not satisfied to see two or three pecks of apples upon his fruit tree; but he wanted to see the boughs bend as if ready to break under their burden. This is what he wished to see religion doing for them. That its inward fruits which are faith, hope, love, peace in believing, humility, meekness, temperance, patience, and every other gift of the Holy Ghost might abound richly in them. These are the fruits of righteousness externally; godly love, self-denial, and a living to the honour and glory of his great name. If men despise the saints of God, whatever contempt they may pour upon them, be it known unto them that only the saints of God bring forth fruit, and in the great day it will be declared that they alone have brought forth good works, and if heaven were to be gained by good works the saints alone can produce them, so that the rest are justly condemned; because they never brought forth good fruits. They have lacked motive; therefore, condemnation will be stamped upon their best and most glorious works; but the works of the saints of God having been done from right *motives* are good. Not that any man will stand before God upon the footing of his good works; for the best works are inherently sinful; therefore, what justification can there be in them? But it will be declared before men and angels that the righteous have done good works; for the whole is the work of God in them, and he will say of them, "I was an hungred and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me, sick and ye visited me, I was in prison and ye came unto me." Then the

Apostle's desire was that they might be full of the work of righteousness, the crowning point of all which was the praise and glory of God. Who can say with these words standing before his eyes or sounding in his ears that the religion which I preach and you hear leads to unrighteousness, that you or I countenance things ungodly, or do not desire to do those things which are pleasing in God's sight; therefore we repel as libels the charge that we do not contend for the fruits of righteousness. We might use a harsher term for all who declare that we who profess the fruits of righteousness, preach ungodliness, but we will content ourselves with that term; and say they are libellers, and we challenge them to produce good works, and while they produce theirs we will produce ours, being subjects of the work of grace upon the heart to the praise and glory of God. Then we may well bear any reproach. We shall ever have to feel and bemoan our slips and falls, infirmities and shortcomings, and be obliged to adopt the language and spirit of the Apostle—"That which I would I do not, and that which I would not that I do."—This is one thing; but to continue in sin that grace may abound is another. The Lord, if it be his gracious will, impress these realities with a divine power on our hearts, so that we may bring forth those fruits in our lives which are to his honour and glory.

The Fruits of Sin and the Fruits of Holiness

(A Posthumous Sermon)

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning, July 25, 1869

"What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:21-23

How few, speaking comparatively, of the living family see and admire the infinite wisdom of God in devising, executing, revealing, and applying the wondrous scheme of redeeming love. They freely acknowledge God's power; his mercy, his goodness, and his love have each their tribute of thankful praise. But how few seem to enter into the infinite wisdom of God in the contrivance and execution of that wondrous plan whereby he saved sinners. And yet how full the Scriptures are of it. How the Apostle breaks forth into a burst of holy admiration: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." How he says: "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden mystery, which God ordained before the world unto our glory." "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." And so he is termed "the only wise God." Now how does the wisdom of God shine forth in this way to draw forth such admiration from the mind of the Apostle? Assuming the entrance of sin into the world, the fall of man, and the state to which sin had reduced man, there were two problems to be solved, and both of such a nature that nothing but the wisdom of God could properly solve them. These two problems were: first, how man as a sinner—and by man I include all those in whom the purposes of God were fixed—how man as a sinner could be pardoned without any infringement of the justice and holiness of

God. The other problem was, assuming the entrance of sin and the depravity of human nature which ensued therefrom, how could man be made capable of inheriting the blissful presence of God if he were pardoned?

To make this matter clear, we find these two problems continually cropping out in our society. There is a large class, especially in London—called the criminal class—men who live by depredation, who have no honest means of livelihood, but live by robbery, theft, and cheating of every kind, so as to prey on the very vitals of society. Now here are two problems connected with this criminal class: what is to be done with them? When they are detected, apprehended, and proved guilty of some theft, or violent highway robbery, or some breach of the law, what is to be done with them? Will you forgive them? Well, if you forgive them, you encourage others to join this horde of criminals; you make society itself scarcely endurable; you fill the country with alarm; you encourage thousands of reprobate characters to join the criminal class, and you give property into their hands to be preyed upon, and spoiled, and robbed. Well, then, you cannot pardon them. So you punish them: and you shut them up in prison for certain periods of time, according to their offences; or if guilty of murder, you hang them, and justly hang them, according to the righteous sentence of God and man. Now, you see if man were pardoned, there would be an infringement of God's justice; and yet if no mercy were shown—and the law has no mercy—if no mercy were shown in the case of those spiritually criminal, where would be that blessed attribute that lay in the bosom of God, and where would be the display of his sovereign grace?

Now take the other problem as regards society. You put the man into prison; you try to reform him; he has his chaplain and his Bible in his cell, and tracts to read, and a number of people trying to reform him. But for the most part he is incorrigible and irreformable, and he comes out a greater villain than he went in. Then what is to be done with him? He may be deterred from crime by punishment, but it has no effect upon his moral nature: he is a criminal still, because a criminal in heart; and therefore,

the man is just what he was before.

Now see God's way of solving these two problems, because we are all a criminal class; we have all the halter round our neck; we have all openly or in secret committed crime that has brought us under the stroke of God's justice; we all deserve to be sent headlong into the bottomless pit; there is no man, woman, or child here that does not deserve eternal perdition. We are a criminal class, even if kept from open crime. Then what is to be done with us? Are we all to be tumbled headlong into hell? Is there no mercy to be shown? Must the whole human race perish under God's deserved wrath, and none escape? Where would be God's mercy, goodness, and grace, if we were all sent headlong to perdition—tumbled into hell without mercy? No; the goodness and mercy and grace of God could never suffer that; and therefore a way must be devised, whereby mercy can have its claim. And this problem was solved by the incarnation, suffering, blood-shedding, and death of his dear Son. That was God's way of solving the problem—to show his hatred of sin in laying upon his dear Son what we should have endured had he not stood in our place and stead.

But now there is the other problem to be solved. Here is this same pardoned sinner. We will say God has pardoned him, washed him in Christ's blood, and clothed him in immaculate righteousness: can he take him to heaven just as he is? Is he fit for heaven because pardoned, because washed in the blood of Christ? Is there no internal meetness for it, no work of regeneration necessary, no conformity to the image of Christ required? How does God solve that problem? By sending the Holy Spirit into man's heart to transform him and make him a new creature in Christ—to give him a nature capable of heavenly bliss—to qualify him for heaven by making him meet for the inheritance, as well as washing away his sins and clothing him in a robe of righteousness. And thus God has solved those two problems. Had I time, I could show you the connection between the two—how it is the same way of salvation that pardons and forgives, as has the means of communicating that new creature

and that heavenly birth whereby the soul is made meet for its eternal inheritance.

In opening up the words of our text this morning, I shall endeavour to show

I.—*First*, what are the fruits of sin, which are here spoken of as twofold: shame and death.

II.—*Secondly*, what the gift of God is, to bring us out of this shame and death, which is, "eternal life through Jesus Christ."

III.—*Thirdly*, what are the fruits and effects of the communication of this eternal life: namely, to make us free from sin, to become the servants of God, to have our fruit unto holiness, and the crowning end to be everlasting life.

I.—The apostle here appeals to men's consciences; and there is no more powerful way of eliciting an answer to truth than finding an echo in one's own breast. He says to these Roman believers, "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" Can you look back and see what fruit you have gathered from those boughs? It was a large, and, as you thought, a goodly tree; it spread itself in all directions; there were fruits that grew upon every branch, either in promise or possession. Now take a view of what fruit you gathered from that tree when you lived under its shadow and when you fed upon its fruit; when you took up your abode there night and day and wanted no other shelter and no other provision. Now, he says, your eyes being opened to see what fruit that tree bore, you found there was nothing but shame; that shame hung upon every branch; and the fruit that was sweet to your taste when you fed upon it, turned into ashes in your mouth; and looking back upon it, you can see nothing but what covers you with shame and confusion of face. And what else? Why death. All you gathered from that tree was what Eve gathered when she ate the forbidden fruit. You gathered death: death temporal, in the separation of body and soul; death spiritual, in being alienated from the life of God; and

death eternal, in being cast into the lake of fire. And this is all the fruit you have gathered from those things in which you walked and lived.

But to make the matter a little more clear, I shall take up several characters, and take them up to a certain point and period when they began to be ashamed, and began to see what fruit they had gathered from those boughs, and what the end of sin was in death. And I shall take them in separate cases, and bring them up to that point when shame began to enter their hearts.

1. And I take first of all, the man that lives in open sin: one of those profane, ungodly, harum-scarum men whose delight is in all manner of sin and ungodliness. Many of these are manifested to be vessels of mercy. The end proves that God has had thoughts of them of good, not of evil; that their names were written in the book of life; that in the midst of their vileness and profanity, still the eye of God was upon them. During this time, they knew no shame. They are thought to be very jolly companions; they can sing a song, and often not of a very moral character; and they can utter a joke, and they can pop out an oath, and they can drop an ambiguous expression, and they can stare modesty out of countenance, and they are, as they think, fine fellows, hectoring about as though this world were everything and eternity nothing. All this time they are strangers to any sense of shame, or any apprehension of death. They are destitute alike of any shame as to their own conduct, or any fear of the consequence of death cutting them down at a stroke and consigning them to the lake of fire. And so they go on, without shame or fear. There may be some here who have lived this sort of wild, profane, ungodly life—I like to throw my net as far as I can, to catch as many fish as possible;—there may be those here, who have gone on in the way I have described up to a certain time, and yet, in the infinite mercy of God, have been brought to faith and repentance.

2. Now I will take another character—a man upright, consistent, very different from those wild, profane, ungodly creatures of

whom I have been speaking; a man with something like a religion so far as it went, consistent in character, life, and conduct. And yet, all the time this man might have been guilty of many secret sins—a prey to secret lust, carrying on ungodly practices in secret, a sly drinker, a real hater of God and godliness, having great contempt for gospel truth and those who love the ways and works of the gospel, but still maintaining a whitewashed outside profession; keeping the outside clean, and yet with all manner of abominations working within. Now this man knows no shame. Now and then he may have a prick of conscience, or wish it might be better with him, or hope some day to return and reform; but at present he goes on in his secret practices, without shame or fear of death.

3. Now I take a third case—a man with a strong pharisaical profession of religion; built up on the platform of self-righteousness; a Pharisee to the back-bone; consistent in life, abstaining from practices generally denounced, and maintaining integrity and uprightness in all his dealings. This man knows no shame before God on account of any ignorance he may have of God's truth, any alienation of heart from his ways, any secret contempt of his servants, any delight inwardly in sin though not outwardly practised, or any sight or sense how in God's sight the Pharisee is a smoke in his nostrils—"a fire that burneth all the day."

4. Now I will take another character, just to complete my circle of faces, to make up my drawing, and to present it in as many lights as I possibly can: a man in a profession of religion; and he shall be a Calvinist, an ultra-Calvinist, if you like; a man strong in his knowledge of the doctrines of grace as any real partaker of the grace of God, and as bold an advocate for them, and yet destitute of the life of God, with no divine teaching to make his conscience tender, having no implantation of the fear of God in his soul, no knowledge of the only true God or of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent; but bold, arrogant, presumptuous, built up in doctrine, and nothing but doctrine, without anything of the love or fear of God in his soul. This man knows no shame, and is not ashamed of his

arrogance, nor his bold claims upon God, nor his ignorance of divine teaching or divine testimony, nor his want of godly fear, nor his want of marks and evidences of the teaching of God in his soul. He has no shame. He is as bold as brass. And as to death, he has no fear about it. He has a vain confidence which he thinks will carry him through it. But as to knowing anything of spiritual death in the alienation of his heart from God, or any apprehension of the second death, such things rarely trouble his thoughts.

I have taken all these four characters up to a certain point; I have taken them to the line of death. I have brought them along the broad road, each one really in the broad road, though in seemingly different paths; and I bring them to a certain point, and there they all four stand. They are different as regards many things externally; and yet, viewed by the eye of God, all dead in sin, and therefore destitute of any experimental knowledge of Jesus. Now, having brought them to that line, there I shall fix them.

II.—And now I shall, with God's blessing, begin to open something about my second point, which is, the gift of God in eternal life, and this gift of God being through Jesus Christ our Lord. It hath pleased the Father that in his dear Son should all fulness dwell, and the fulness of life, for he is the life; and in this fulness we receive grace for grace. Now it is his gracious purpose and heavenly will that life should be communicated to these four characters whom I have brought up to a certain point as in the vision of Ezekiel, where bones in some measure came to bones and flesh to flesh, but life has not entered into them.

Now I come to the point when this eternal life, which was given them in Christ Jesus, was breathed into their souls out of the fulness of Christ and God said "Live." And I shall take this life in its workings in them and upon them, and show, as the Lord may enable, how it operates in their minds and works in their hearts, what it leads them to do and feel, and how it brings them over the line of death and lands them in the line of life, where they are

in grace manifested, and will find in the end everlasting life in the mansions of heavenly bliss. Now for the most part I believe God works very gradually in the soul. I am in no way a friend to what are called sudden conversions; not that I deny or dispute them; but taking the majority of God's people, the life of God is communicated in a very secret way to them. There must be a moment when it is communicated; but we know it more by secret movements, sensations, and feelings, than from being able to say exactly when or how this life was communicated. One of the first things this man begins to feel is a sense of shame. As his eyes begin to get gradually opened and something comes over his mind that he never knew or felt before, a kind of softness and tenderness never before experienced, he begins to look about him and feel for the first time some measure of shame. The ungodly know no shame: as the prophet says, they have a whore's forehead and refuse to be ashamed. When, then, there comes some feeling of inward shame before God, it looks something like the beginning of a change which may issue, and often does issue, in a manifestation of divine life. Whilst sin is at work in us, there is no shame. When a man is drinking his glass, or when he is practising some secret lust, or when engaged in some covetous bargain, or entangled in some light and gay company, the sense of shame is drowned in the excitement of the moment. The lust is so strong, or the pleasure so great, or the excitement so attractive, that all sense of shame is drowned. But by-and-by, the man begins to awake. His lust is over; the excitement is gone; his drunkenness, like Nabal's, is out of him; and now the man begins to feel a sense of shame. And as he is ashamed of himself, assuming that the life of God is in his soul, he begins to feel shame before God. Ashamed of himself, he looks up as he never looked up before, and sees there is a God above, and that this holy God has been viewing him in all his accursed practices, taking notice of all his doings. And he looks up and sees the holiness of God, what majesty there is in him, and what a pure God he has had to deal with; he sees how this God is looking into his heart and searching out all his ways, and has been watching him in his mad fits, in his drunkenness, in his whoredom, in his oaths and curses, in his "jolly life," as he called

it; that the eye of God has been all the time marking this. And he looks up and sees that he has a just God now to deal with; he is in hands from which he cannot escape; and there is an arrow of conviction planted in his conscience. He begins to bleed, inwardly bleed, and his conscience begins to be very sore; and overwhelming feelings of shame and confusion cover him, and he does not know what to do with himself. His sin is so great he thinks he never can be forgiven, and he cannot help crying for mercy. Now this man has passed over the border of death into the line of life. And he begins to confess his sins with real shame of face; and not only so, but to forsake them, because if ever he is tempted to do the like again, shame comes over him so much more than before, conviction speaks so loud and clear, and the arrows seem shot in so much more closely, and conscience testifies so much more emphatically, that he is compelled to give up these things which bring him into such straits and trouble.

Now I shall take the other character. Here is a man who has been living a very consistent life, with a smooth outside profession, but a victim to secret lusts: a sly drinker, unclean though maintaining a decent exterior, and doing things that conscience when asleep never testified against. But now, conscience being awakened, and the arrows of God in him raising up conviction, his sins begin to be manifested in their true light. "Well," he says, "it is true I have not been an open sinner, but O I have been worse: I have been a secret sinner. I have not gone to those outward lengths others have gone to; but O if men could see my secret sins and practices in the dark, and know what wicked thoughts I have been continually harbouring, and what books I could read, and how I fed my imagination with every vile, adulterous, and obscene thought, and how, if not moved to sin outwardly, I feasted upon these vile things inwardly, they would think me worse than those who have sinned openly." And the man feels ashamed of himself, and wonders how he could have been such a beast, such a black, vile, filthy creature; how he could give way to such evil in his heart and yet maintain such a decent outside. And with this begins to work death. "The end of these things is death." Perhaps he is laid upon a bed of affliction and the gaunt

spectre draws nigh. "O," he says, "there is only a step between me and death; and suppose this slender thread were cut, and God said, 'This night thy soul shall be required of thee,' where could I stand before this holy God? O my sins! my sins! my crimes! my crimes! They are more in number than the hairs of my head. How can I stand before this holy God? O how I blush with shame, knowing what I have been, and that I have done the things, thought the things, imagined time things I have done! O what will become of my soul?" Here is a man with death in his conscience, and with spiritual death in feeling alienation from God. And here he is in that sense spiritually dead; and he looks forward and says, "What is it to die? That is but little. But O to be swallowed up for ever in eternal torment, and to be cast into the lake of fire, and there to lie for ever under the wrath of God; how can I endure all that?" Now as these thoughts roll over his mind and agitate his soul, he begins to see "The end of these things is death." "All my secret lusts," he says; "all my vile imaginations: what is the end? Death! death! death! Death temporal, death spiritual, death eternal. The end of these things is death."

Now I will take the man bitter in Pharisaisim, full of his own righteousness, with no knowledge of salvation by the blood of the Lamb, but resting wholly upon the work of the creature. Now when the law begins to enter that man's conscience with any divine power, laying bare its spirituality and what the law really is, O he finds he has been only looking to the shadow of the law, and did not know the substance; looking to the letter, and not knowing the curse, and power, and authority of it; and he begins to see and feel, "O, if I stand upon this foundation, I must be for ever lost." And as the man already described was weaned out of his secret sins and hid his face in shame before God; so this Pharisee, when driven out of his Pharisaisim, begins to see and feel such shame as a person would feel turned naked into the street. He blushes before God on account of what he feels he has been, and his Pharisaic self-righteousness appears to have been one of the greatest of his sins.

And now I take the man—for I cannot go through all as clearly as

I could wish—now I take the man built up in doctrine, in vain-confidence, in arrogant, presumptuous profession; knowing nothing of the fear of God in a tender conscience, nor of any work or teaching of the Spirit in his soul; and having brought him up to the line of life, I shall take him over the line and show how God works upon his conscience. Now this man, after a time it may be, comes under the sound of experimental truth, or is cast into the company of God's people who speak a little about the secret dealings of God upon their soul. At first he begins to rise up in rebellion against it all, denounces those who give in their adhesion to the doctrines of grace, and tries to stave off any working of conscience, by appealing to this man's authority and the other man's authority, and trying to beat down all this by pouring contempt upon it. But, somehow or other, the word begins to find an entrance into his conscience; it is too powerful to be resisted when the servant of God speaks with authority. It comes, according to God's determination, with secret power into his heart; and when he hears the people of God talk, and sees the grace of God in them, and finds they have something which he has not, and feels he is destitute of the main thing, he begins to look at his religion, weigh it in the balance, and it seems very wanting of that which satisfies God, and can satisfy a conscience, made tender in God's fear. Well, now he is brought over the line, and he begins to look at his arrogant presumption and vain-confidence as one of the worst of all his sins; that he, without any, or with little experience of the things of God in his soul, should take so high a stand, that he could lay hold of doctrines with a presumptuous hand, the power of which he never felt in his soul, and build himself up in the letter of the word without knowing anything of the teaching of the Holy Spirit in his heart. O he will view himself as a presumptuous sinner, and fear lest the lot of the presumptuous sinner should be his—taken from God's altar to die. And how he is ashamed of his boasting profession; what death he sees to be in a profession without any experimental knowledge of the truth of God; and what death in the letter of God's word, even in the sublimest truths of God's everlasting Gospel, unless they are brought into the heart by divine power—he sees there is death in them. And he has been

presumptuous, as described, in laying hold of God's truth with his own hand; God never having brought it with divine power into his soul. Now he is thoroughly ashamed of himself, and does not know where to hide his head; and when brought into the family of God, will get into some corner pew, as having been such a presumptuous sinner. "No," he says, "I deserve to be doubly damned: damned for my sins, and damned for my presumption." This man is brought over the line of life.

Now, having brought these into the line of life, God will deal very tenderly with them. He won't deal with them after their sins, nor reward them after their iniquities. God's way is to bring them down into the dust, and when he has brought them there, he won't take them out of the dust and cast them into hell. He abases the proud, but he exalts the humble. You get your mouth in the dust; you confess your sins before God; you lament them, bewail them, and forsake them: God will never take those sins and tie them like a millstone round your neck and hurl you and them into the depths of an unfathomable sea. He that confesses and forsakes his sins shall find mercy. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But if we go on sinning and repenting, sinning and repenting, this is not the character spoken of in the word, whose sins God pardoned. But if, with all your sins, temptations, and all that conscience testifies against, you can only put your mouth in the dust, confess your sins, mourn over them (which is God's own gracious gift), and forsake them, God will not impute those sins to you, but put them away, cast them behind his back, and give you, sooner or later, sweet testimony that he has pardoned you for Christ's sake.

Then here comes in the profane wretch: his ungodly life and what he has done in the days of his ignorance will not be imputed to him. He was brought out of sin that he might be a monument of eternal mercy, a trophy to the Lamb; and he will never be put to shame. He is ashamed of himself, but God is not ashamed of him. He is ashamed of his sins, but they are cast behind God's back.

So with the man who has been living in the secret practice of sin. That man may take a very low place; he will never forgive himself; whenever he thinks of his sins, it will be with shame and confusion; he will loathe himself in his own eyes and abhor himself in his own sight; and the more God forgives him, the less will he forgive himself; the more God's mercy shines into his soul, the more will it lead him to repentance; the more he views the sufferings of Christ, the more ashamed he will be of his iniquities, and the more he will mourn to see and know **[what]** he has been and is what he is.

And take the man who is brought out of Pharisaic profession into some knowledge of the way of salvation. Though that man always feels ashamed of himself as a Pharisee, and looks back at the time and says, "O what a fool I was to be such a blind Pharisee, so obstinately determined against God's way of salvation; I can never forgive myself for my Pharisaic pride;"—yet God will not impute that to him, but freely forgive him, because he has cast all his sins behind his back, and drowned them in the depths of the sea.

And so even with that last of the characters I have described, because the rarest to be called by the grace of God: even that man's arrogance and presumption will not be imputed to him, if he is brought to renounce, to confess, and to forsake it, to feel really ashamed of himself and his ways, and loathe himself on account of his arrogance and daring presumption, God will not impute that sin to him; with all his others, it is cast behind God's back.

Now is there a man or woman here present who has ever known anything of the movements of divine life in his or her bosom, who does not look back with shame to the things he or she has said and done? "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" Why, you had little enjoyment even at the time; it was all poison, and all they did was, when you awoke out of your sleep, to fill you with shame and confusion. The end of those things carried nothing but death. So we find to this day.

Whatever be the allurements of sin or the temptations in which we are entangled, when we are brought out of the excitement of them, when awakened out of them, there is nothing but shame for us, and with shame, a sense of death; that all we have done has been to deaden our souls, cause God to hide his face, withdraw the light of his countenance, and bring a sentence of condemnation into our own heart.

III.—Now it is by these various ways that God appears to make us free from sin, and to make us servants of himself, that we may bear fruit unto holiness; and the end be everlasting life. When we are sick of sin, then there is a measure of freedom from it. There is a being made free from the guilt of sin by the application of atoning blood; a being made free from the filth of sin by the washing of regeneration; and a being made free from the power of sin by the dominion of grace, from the love of sin by the love of God shed abroad, and from the practice of sin by the possession of godly fear. And thus we are made free from sin so far as we are made partakers of the life of God, so as no longer to walk in sinful ways and practices, because we are made free from it by being brought into the practice of grace.

God's people are made free from sin, liberated from it by blood and regeneration, and the word of God upon the soul, and his fear planted in the heart, and the teaching and testimony of the Holy Ghost within, and by the power God puts forth in subduing it. They are led to do the things pleasing in his sight, to seek to know his will and do it, to keep his precepts as well as to believe his promises; to be given to him body, soul, and spirit; to be unreservedly his, that he may dispose of them according to his sovereign good pleasure. God has not sent his dear Son that we might serve sin and Satan and the world, but that we might have the blessed privilege and holy freedom of serving God, attending to God's word, listening to God's voice, seeking God's glory, doing the things that God has bidden, abstaining from the things that God has forbidden; that we might live a life of faith and prayer; might walk in sweet communion with Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and that we might fight against sin and Satan, resisting

even unto blood; and not being entangled in things that bring guilt upon the conscience, reproach upon the cause, and trouble to the family of God with whom we are connected.

How careful we should be in our walk and conduct, in our life and conversation, in all our movements in the Church and in the world, to live as becometh the Gospel, in all holy obedience to God's revealed will; and to make it manifest we have a work that God has wrought in our heart, that gives God the glory, and does not put shame and disgrace upon the doctrine we profess.

This is having fruit unto holiness. The very word "holiness" is lost out of the churches. Our godly Puritan ancestors contended for "holiness;" but from how many preachers do you hear the word "holiness" drop? Why, is it not legal in our day to talk about holiness? "O," says one, "you talk about holiness: you are one of the legal tribe: away with all your fleshly godliness!" But God's word is not to be talked down thus by clamour, and its head cut off by the stroke of a preacher, be he an able man or a weak man. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" and that word will stand, let man call it legal or not. Some of these men who have been cutting at holiness may find they have been cutting at God's truth, and they may find it a barrier they will never pass. It is a grief to God's people that they cannot be holy: they love holiness because they have a holy principle in them; and if they could, they would be as holy as God is holy, and never sin again: holy in thought, word, and deed, and live a holy, godly, and unspotted life! It is their grief and burden they cannot do so. When men begin to talk against holiness, they are Satan's servants and not God's. The Seraphim cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth." It is our grief and trouble and burden that we cannot be holy. As Hart says,

"But I would be holy."

Now God sends his word, his chastising strokes, his afflictions, to make us partakers of his holiness. If we have not our fruit unto holiness, how can we believe the end will be everlasting life? Are

we to live in sin and die in sin? Are we to live unholy and then go to God who is holy? Are we to believe the end, the blessed end will be everlasting life, and have no fruit unto holiness? God has put them together: dare you rend them asunder and say, "O we want everlasting life; but as for fruits of holiness, we don't care about them?" Is not the word of God plain and positive here?—"Now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." Take it as God has revealed it; rend it asunder if you dare. Will you take God's book to tear leaves out of it? Take God's word as God has revealed it; take God's precepts because God has revealed them; take God's promises because God has given them; take God's truth because it is in the word of God; and take what God gives because God has given it. This is the feeling of a reverent mind; this is the feeling of a believing heart; what God has given, that I must take. And those who thus walk will find the end everlasting life. They will find they have not believed in vain, nor walked in vain, nor fought in vain, nor struggled on in vain; but the end, everlasting life, will crown all.

GENUINE DISCIPLESHIP

A Sermon preached on Tuesday Evening, August 1, 1843, at Jewry Street Chapel, Aldgate, on behalf of the Aged Pilgrims' Friend Society

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, 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

There is one feature in the Lord's ministry, when he was tabernacling here below, that has often struck my mind; and that is, the absence in him of the spirit of proselytism. He never sought to make proselytes; to allure, by concealing the difficulties of the way, the rich, the noble, or the learned to become his disciples: but he invariably set before all who professed any wish to follow him, that it was a path of tribulation, self-denial, and crucifixion in which he walked, and that they, as followers of him, must tread in the same footsteps. And, connected with this, the Lord never suffered any to deceive themselves into a belief that they were his heart-whole followers when his all-seeing eye penetrated into the insincerity that reigned in them. Judas Iscariot, you will say, was an exception. He was so; but it was to fulfil a certain purpose (John 17:12); and if Judas was an exception, though the Lord did not specially point him out with his finger, his ears were not spared the same truths which the Lord set before others, that those who followed him must take up the cross, and deny themselves.

It appears from what we read in this chapter, that there were some, if not many, who "believed in Christ," but in whose hearts the Holy Ghost had not wrought "the work of faith with power." (2 Thess. 1:11.) We read (John 5:30) "As he spake these words, **many believed on him.**" There we have the express testimony of the Holy Ghost to their believing. But **how** did they believe? Did they "believe **with the heart unto righteousness?**" Did the

Holy Ghost raise up in their souls "the faith of God's elect?" (Tit. 1:1.) Their words and their actions prove the contrary; for when the Lord addressed them in the faithful words of the text, their immediate answer was: "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man; how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" The pride of their hearts was immediately touched, and the viper in them started up in a moment with all its inbred venom. And the conclusion of the matter was, as you will perceive if you read the chapter, that the Lord said to these very men who "believed on him" with their heads, and not with their hearts: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." (John 8:44.) What positive proof, what indubitable evidence, that a man may believe in his head in the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet be a child of Satan, and his end be Perdition!

The Lord, then, instead of alluring these professed disciples on, set plainly before them the real state of the case: "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."

We have in these words, **first**, a test of discipleship: "If ye continue in my word."

Secondly, the **genuineness** of discipleship: "Then are ye my disciples **indeed**."

And **lastly**, the **blessings** that spring out of genuine discipleship: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

I. The Lord, when he said, "If ye continue in my word," was not laying down continuance as a **condition**, so much as a **test**. Their "continuing in the word" would not **make** them disciples; but would **manifest** them as disciples. And thus the words are to be understood. Not as though their continuing in the word would bring them into the fold; as though **then** they were carnal, but if they continued to profess, nature would by some mysterious process be transmuted into grace. Such is not the meaning of the words; but it was put before them as **a test** of discipleship; the

converse being the truth—that their **not** continuing in the word would prove they were **not** disciples.

We will then, with God's blessing, look a little at this test of discipleship: "If ye continue in my word;" and we will look at it, not so much as connected with the characters to whom it was addressed, as a test of discipleship to God's redeemed and regenerated family.

1. The word "**continue**" clearly points to some previous reception of truth, or to some work begun and carried on with power in the conscience. The "word," then, in which the Lord says they were to "continue" must in some degree have fastened upon their conscience, laid hold upon their heart, and been by a divine power engrafted into their minds, before they could continue in it. For clearly they could not **continue** in what was never **begun**. And this leads us to consider what is the first beginning of a work of grace upon a mans soul, which consists in the spiritual fastening of divine truth with power in his conscience. Some word **(and by word we are not to understand in every case exact letters and syllables, but some scriptural truth,)** is fastened with a divine power in the conscience; is lodged by the Holy Ghost in the soul. And what is the consequence? No sooner is the word lodged in a mans conscience, than it produces a certain definite effect; and the Lord has given us several parables, to point out the nature of this effect.

He compares it for instance, in one parable, to leaven: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened." (Matt. 13:33.) There the Lord points out what is the inward effect of the word of God lodged in a mans conscience, by comparing it to the effect produced by the lump of leaven in the three measures of meal. It ferments, it heaves, it rises, it penetrates and pervades the whole mass; the dough is no longer the same substance that it was; a change takes place, and chemists would tell you a chemical change, whereby it is no longer what it was before, mere flour, and salt, and water, but the leaven so diffuses

itself and penetrates into it, and as it were regenerates it, that a new substance is formed, which when baked we call **bread**. Thus it is with the word of God lodged in a mans heart. It does not lie there as a stone on the pavement, inoperative, without producing any effect in the spot where it is lodged; but it diffuses a secret influence through a mans soul, and by it he is begotten again. According to those words: "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): "Born again," says the apostle Peter, "by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." (1 Pet. 1:23.)

But the Lord uses another figure to shew the same work. He compares the kingdom of grace in the soul to seed cast in the ground. There we have the effect of a work of grace, equally clearly and definitely pointed out. The seed does not lie like a pebble in the tilth into which it falls; but no sooner does it reach the seed-bed, than a process, a change takes place. Light, heat, and moisture all combine; and the effect is that a root is shot downwards, and a blade rises upwards. Thus it is with the word of God lodged in a mans heart; the light, heat, and moisture of God's Spirit working in the word cause it to germinate and take root, so that it fastens downward into the conscience, and springs upward into a God glorifying profession. This is all the difference betwixt receiving the word in the letter, and receiving it in power.

Again: the apostle James, speaking of the same work, compares it to a graft. How beautiful and yet how simple are scripture figures! I have often admired them. And what is remarkable, they are not only so simple, but they are universal. We find very few figures taken from the customs of the East, which in this northern clime would not be understood; but such figures are employed as are universal to the whole race of men. Seed-sowing for instance and bread-making are known not only in all countries where civilized man dwells, but are alike familiar to all, even the most uneducated classes of people. And this figure—grafting, which is carried on in every climate where fruit is to be found, is equally simple and intelligible. But how sweetly does it point out the work

of grace upon the soul! There must be a wound first made in the stock, in order that the scion may fit into it; and thus not only grow **into**, but grow **out of** it; for it is in this close and living union between the scion and the stock that the whole success of grafting consists. Thus the word of God does not lie on a mans conscience, as a withered stick might lie upon a post, utterly dead and inactive; but the heart being wounded by God's Spirit, forms a bed (**so to speak**) for the engrafted word to lodge in; they meet together, they coalesce, they grow into each other, and they bring forth fruit to God's honour and glory. Vital religion will always be of an operative nature; it will not be a mere profession; a something put on to satisfy conscience, or to please others; but is an eternal reality, begun and carried on in the heart by the Holy Ghost.

2. Now wherever the word is thus lodged in, and grows into and out of a mans conscience, he will "**continue** in it." He will never (**for God never will suffer him,**) relinquish his profession. He may sink into the greatest depths of soul trouble, he may mount into the highest heaven of soul enjoyment, he may for a time be buried in the world, he may backslide after idols, he may be numbed with torpidity, and carried in his feelings to the very north pole of darkness and ice, so that all vital godliness may seem frozen up in his heart; and yet the life of God's Spirit in his soul never can leave him. Being once quickened into **spiritual** life, he is quickened into **eternal** life; for the Lord has said: "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." (John 6:47.) And therefore he will "continue in God's word." Whatever be the temptations his soul is beset with, (**and there will be thousands of temptations to drive him back**); whatever snares the world and the flesh spread for his feet, (**and in some of those snares his unwary feet will often be entangled,**); whatever blasts from hell Satan may breathe upon him, to fill him, if possible, with a measure of his own infernal blasphemy and malice, still he holds on. "The righteous shall hold on his way" (Job 17:9): "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18): "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of

my hand." (John 10:28.) They "continue in Christ's word," because "He which hath begun the good work" carries it on, and finishes it "until the day of Jesus Christ."

But wherever God makes a man honest by a work of grace upon his heart, **(and if grace has not made you honest before God and man, you have at present no proof that you know any thing whatever of grace,)** he continues just in that line of teaching that the Holy Ghost favours his soul with. He does not sail into unknown latitudes, and, seizing hold of the helm, pilot his own ship. He does not take up with other men's experience, work with other men's lines, speak with other men's tongues, and drink into other men's sentiments. If he do this, he is not "continuing in," but departing **from** "the word." **He** only "continues, **in** the word," who keeps wholly and solely to God's teaching in his soul. The moment that a man gets out of the track in which the Lord is spiritually leading him; the moment he takes up with an experience which God has not wrought in him, or lays hold of doctrines that God does not bring into his heart with power, he is not "continuing in the word."

One grand mark then and test of genuine discipleship is to keep in the path which God points out; to advance no further than God leads on, and to fall no backwarder than he draws forward. And to know, to feel, and to act upon this, is to be in the spot so sweetly described (Matt. 18:3), where the Lord declares, that "except we be converted, and become as little children, we shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." The little child does not chalk out a path for itself; it does not profess to feed itself, to clothe itself, to teach itself, to guide itself, to carve out its future prospects in life. The very mark of childhood is dependence upon the parent; and the moment the child gets out of the parent's hands, and sets up for itself, that moment it loses the grand characteristic of childhood. And so a professor of religion, the moment he sets up for himself, and turns away from the guidance of the blessed Spirit in his heart and conscience, loses the character of a disciple, because he departs from the simplicity of spiritual childhood.

II. "If ye continue in my word, then **are ye my disciples indeed.**" What a stress the Lord lays upon that apparently little adverb **indeed!** And how the Lord, by the use of that little adverb, points out that there is a discipleship, which is not a discipleship **indeed!** It corresponds with an expression in the prayer of Jabez: "Oh! that thou wouldest bless me **indeed!**" (1 Chron. 4:10.) Jabez knew that there were blessings which were not "blessings **indeed;**" that is, not real blessings, not spiritual and heavenly blessings, such as alone can satisfy a God-taught soul. And thus the Lord Jesus, whose eyes are as a flame of fire to discern betwixt the righteous and the wicked, saw and pronounced a solemn sentence in the expression, "**Then** are ye my disciples **indeed.**" As though there was a great possibility, and more than a strong probability, that many who at that time were disciples nominally, were not "disciples indeed."

What then is it to be a disciple "**indeed?**" It is to be made such by the Lord himself. How did the Lord make disciples upon earth? Did he not call them with his own voice? Do we not read, that "he called unto him whom he would?" (Mark 3:13)—no more, no less. And have we not, in nearly every case, a definite account of the Lord's individually calling each? In order then to be a "disciple indeed," the Lord by his own blessed voice, speaking with power to our souls, must have made us his disciples.

But we will, with God's blessing, look at a few marks of genuine discipleship; and may God enable us to believe that we possess them.

1. Discipleship implies **devotedness.** When the disciples followed the Lord, they devoted themselves to him. Thomas spoke what they felt in their hearts, when he said on one occasion, "Let us also go to Jerusalem that we may die with him:" implying such a devotedness to him, that neither life nor death should separate them. If then a man has not, as the Apostle says, "given himself to the Lord" (2 Cor. 8:5), yielded himself up to his blessed hands, to be taught by him and him only, and to embrace him as "his

Lord and his God," if he is not brought, by a divine work of grace upon his heart, to embrace his blood as the only atoning sacrifice for sin, his righteousness as the only justifying robe, his grace as the only salvation from "the wrath to come," his love as the only heaven begun below and perfected above; if he has not, in the depths of his soul, thus given himself wholly and solely unto the Lord to be his for ever; he lacks one mark of true discipleship. He is yet half-hearted; his "heart is divided, and he is found faulty" (Hos. 10:12); he has not yet "taken up the cross, and denied himself, and followed Jesus." He is yet like the rich young man, whom the Lord bade, as a proof sincerity, to sell all that he had, and give unto the poor, and come and follow him. (Matt. 19:21.) The root of devotedness was wanting in him; the Lord therefore struck a blow at that cursed root of covetousness, which is the bane of gospel devotedness.

2. Another mark of genuine discipleship is, **separation**. Did not the disciples separate themselves from all things when they followed the Lord? Levi leaves the office of publican, at which he earned his livelihood; Peter and his brother Andrew, James and John leave the one their nets, and the other the ship and their father, and followed him (Matt. 4:18, 21); they all separate themselves from what they were engaged in, that they might cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart. Not that I mean to say, we are called upon to act precisely as they acted, in giving up those worldly callings in which grace found us, unless they are inconsistent with the will and word of God, as in my case it was to continue in a worldly system. Because the scripture expressly says that "every man is to abide in the same calling wherein he was called." (1 Cor. 7:20.) But what I want to point out is, that separation from things evil is the very mark and test of genuine discipleship. Separation, for instance, from a world dead in wickedness; separation from another world dead in profession; separation from all God dishonouring doctrines, from all reckless and careless professors, from all things that in any way bring a reproach upon the gospel, or are opposed to God's glory and to God's truth. And this not merely **outward** separation,—that is in a measure easy;—but **inward** separation: separation in heart

from the spirit of the world; separation from that spirit of covetousness, which as a canker seems to be feeding upon the very vitals of God's Church; separation from formality, self-righteousness, superstition, will worship, and all that "leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy;" inward separation of heart, soul, and spirit, whereby we yield ourselves up unto the Lord, that he may "work in us that which is well pleasing in his sight."

3. Another mark and test of genuine discipleship is **an utter prostration of our own wisdom**, our own strength, and our own righteousness at the feet of the Lord. Whom do we profess to serve? The Lord God of Israel. In giving up ourselves unto the Lord, in yielding up ourselves to his service, it is not some earthly monarch, whom we profess to devote ourselves unto; he could not demand all that is in us, though he might claim our outward service. But in giving ourselves up to the Lord Jesus Christ, in receiving him into our hearts as "our Lord and our God," in submitting to his righteous authority, in "kissing the Son," and bowing ourselves before his sacred feet, we prostrate before him every thing inconsistent with hi? Inward dominion and kingdom in our hearts. Our own strength stands in the way of **his** strength, for "his strength is made perfect in weakness;" then the genuine disciple has his own strength prostrated before the Lord, that the power of Christ may rest upon him, and shine forth in his infirmities. The genuine disciple prostrates too his righteousness at the Lord's feet; he tramples it under foot as "filthy rags;" he looks upon it with contempt and shame; he feels that it is nothing but pollution and abomination before God; and thus he casts it away at the feet of Jesus, that he may stand clothed in that comely robe, which the Lord of life and glory wrought out and brought in. And he prostrates also his wisdom, so as no longer to be wise in his own eyes nor prudent in his own sight; but renounces all wisdom except that which comes from God's own mouth into his soul. As we read (Prov. 2:4-6), renouncing his own wisdom, he "seeks for divine wisdom as for silver, and searches for her as for hid treasures, knowing that the Lord giveth wisdom, and that out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." And thus he prostrates all his own wisdom at the

foot of the cross, that the Lord may be his "wisdom," as well as his "righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." (1 Cor. 1:30.)

4. Another mark and test of genuine discipleship is **a being conformed to the likeness and image of Jesus**. What is the disciple to follow his Master for? Is it not to catch some resemblance to him? Is it not to be imbued with a measure of his spirit? Is it not to be penetrated and pervaded with his meekness and gentleness? Can a whole-hearted disciple walk with a broken-hearted Lord? Can a proud, presumptuous professor walk in sweet communion with a lowly and humble Jesus? Can one whose heart is in the world, and whose affections are completely buried in the things of time and sense, walk with Him, who was not of the world, but in every word and every action was separate from it, though he walked and moved in it? Can any one a prey to hypocrisy walk with Him, whose every word and every thought was uprightness and integrity? "The disciple is to be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord." (Matt. 10:25.) He is to think as Jesus thought; for says the Apostle, "we have the mind of Christ." He is to speak as Jesus spoke; for his "conversation is to be seasoned with salt." He is to walk, in a measure, as Jesus walked; for "he hath left us an example, that we should follow his steps." The genuine disciple catches **(so to speak)** the spirit of his Master; just as the cloak of the rising Elijah fell upon the worshipping Elisha, so does the spirit of the Lord fall more or less upon those who walk after him and cleave close unto him.

These **(and doubtless there are more,)** are some marks of genuine discipleship; and these marks test the reality of a mans religion. It does not signify what a man professes in the mere letter of truth; the mere profession of certain doctrines does not affect a mans heart, nor touch a mans conscience. A man may be in his sins, and under the wrath of God, just as much under the profession of the highest Calvinism, as though he were grovelling in the mud holes of the lowest Arminianism. Vital godliness is something deeper than a mere profession, and something higher, because a thing spiritual and supernatural. The mark then of a

genuine disciple is not that he gives in his adherence to a certain creed, or believes, that such and such a minister is sent of God to preach the gospel, or belongs to such or such a church, or has gone through such an ordinance. Vital godliness is something very different from this mere husk, which is well enough to encircle the kernel, but is a thing totally distinct from it. To be a "disciple **indeed**" is to be a disciple in ones heart and spirit, made such by the supernatural and secret operations of God upon our conscience.

III. But we pass on to consider the blessed fruits and results of genuine discipleship. They are twofold, as stated in the text: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." **Spiritual knowledge**, and **divine freedom** are the two blessed fruits and results of genuine discipleship.

But what is "the truth" spoken of in our text? It is not confined to certain doctrines, which are emphatically distinguished by the word **truth**: as it is said in common parlance, Such a minister preaches **the truth**, when all the truth perhaps that he preaches is contained in and confined to the five doctrinal articles that bear the name of Calvin. But "the truth" comprehends every thing, be it doctrine, be it experience, or be it practice, that God has revealed in his word of truth; and especially it embraces Him, who said of himself, "I am the way, and **the truth**, and the life." To "know the truth," then, is to know every thing connected with the Person, work, blood, love, grace, and glory of Jesus, as revealed in the scriptures of truth. We cannot admit a lower definition than that; we cannot take **a portion** of the truth, and say **that** and **that only** is "**the truth**." We cannot take one isolated street, or one little alley in London, and say **that** is the metropolis. No; we must take the whole circuit. And so to say this or that doctrine is "the truth" is incorrect; it is a part of "the truth," but "the truth" is not to be shut up in such a nutshell—is not to be limited nor confined to a few particulars. There are, I believe, some ministers and some hearers who would confine all the truth in the land to their pulpit, or their chapel; and call every thing lies and error, which their dim eyes do not see, and their

tiny fingers do not grasp. But none can be said to have **the whole** truth who have not had the whole Bible spiritually revealed in their heart, and worked out experimentally in their soul. And where is such a minister or such a people to be found? "The truth," then, that is the whole truth, contains every thing of an unctuous and savoury nature, every thing that God has revealed for the salvation and edification of his Church. In a word, every line of the bible is "the truth," when God is pleased to make it known in our souls as such.

1. But the grand force of the promise lies in the word **know**: "Ye shall **know** the truth." What! in the future? Why should the Lord put it in the future tense? He would not allow that they knew it yet; they neither had the word, nor had they continued in the word. In order to "know the truth," they must not only have the word lodged as a vital principle in their conscience, but they must "continue in it," and be "disciples indeed;" proving their genuine discipleship by their adherence to the Lord at all costs and all hazards, cleaving to him through all the difficulties, temptations, and trials that their souls might be led into. To "know the truth" is to know it by a spiritual and supernatural revelation of it. Not to compare scripture with scripture, passage with passage, and parallel with parallel, and thus to elicit truth, as a man may elicit some truth in mathematics, or work a Rule of Three sum. People think if they can get a Concordance, or collect a number of parallel passages, and compare one passage with another, they have got hold of the truth; they have indeed in the letter, but this is not the power. **That** is another thing; that can only be made known in the heart by God's special application, and by the Spirits supernatural and unctuous revelation of it. And this all genuine disciples know. Genuine disciples feel their ignorance, their darkness, their spiritual inability to communicate to their own souls a saving and savoury knowledge of the truth. Their part is often to walk in "darkness which may be felt," to "grope for the wall like the blind, and to grope as if they had no eyes, and to stumble in desolate places like dead men." But many of our modern professors when they come to hear a minister of the truth preach, if they can but carry away his divisions, or recollect

the substance of his discourse, are sure they "know the truth," when perhaps the Holy Ghost has never sealed a single portion of the sermon upon their hearts, nor made known any line of it with power in their consciences. Now it is the very ignorance felt by God's people, the very darkness of mind under which they often groan, the very clouds that hang over their path, which are blessed of God to teach them that they cannot instruct or guide themselves into a spiritual knowledge of the truth; and thus they are led to cry, and groan, and supplicate, and wrestle, and beseech the Lord to apply his own word of truth with power to their souls. And as the Lord is pleased to enlighten the eyes of their understanding, and to apply his truth with a divine unction to their hearts, they begin to know by soul experience, and by inward revelation, such a measure of truth as He himself makes manifest in their consciences. As the Lord, then, leads them to "know the truth"—for instance, the truth of his declaration with respect to their own vile, deceitful and corrupt natures, they "set to their seal" that God spake truth when he said, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." (Jer. 17:9.) When they read that from within, "out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, fornications, murders, adulteries," and all that awful catalogue of human wickedness and crime (Mark 7:21), they "set to their seal" that the Lord of life and glory spoke the real truth of the case. And when the Lord the Spirit leads them to see the glorious God-man Mediator at the right hand of the Father, they know that there is such a blessed Mediator, because he hears and answers the requests of their soul. In the same way are they brought to know the efficacy of atoning blood; the beauty of justifying righteousness; the sweetness of undeserved grace; and the love-taste of eternal glory. And thus they "know the truth;" not because this or the other minister preaches it, not because this or that eloquent or experienced writer has unfolded it, not because this or that Hymn Book contains it, no, nor even because the scriptures themselves reveal it, though through the scriptures all saving truth comes; but they know it by its being let down with power into their hearts, and experimentally and spiritually revealed in their consciences.

My friends, how many truths have you learned in this way? Say you, I believe in personal and eternal election, particular redemption, imputed righteousness, final perseverance, and all the doctrines of grace. So you may, and there are thousands in hell who do the same, for even "devils believe, and tremble;" but do you know these things, as the Lord Christ instructs his people into the knowledge of them? by first having the word fastened upon your soul with power, continuing in that word through many grievous temptations, painful exercises, and soul tribulations, proving your discipleship by cleaving to the Lord and yielding your soul up wholly and solely unto him, and then, as the Lord is pleased to lead you step by step and line by line into the truth, receiving it from his own blessed lips as a special and spiritual revelation in your conscience? That is the way to "know the truth;" and if a man live and die without "knowing the truth" in that way, he lives and dies in his sins, and where God is he will never come.

We live in a day very trying to God's real family. There is so much profession and so little possession, so much truth in the letter and so little truth in the Spirit, so much of the form and so little of the power; and we are so easily drawn aside, we so love to be deceived, we so gladly drink down the delusive draught, that unless God himself is pleased in a special manner to undeceive us, and drag us through painful temptations and soul exercises, as through briars and thorns, and thus strip off every rag of creature wisdom, strength, and righteousness, we never seem to come rightly at a knowledge of the truth. And I think those who hear ministers of doctrinal truth are of all persons the most likely to be deceived; because when they are pleased with a mans eloquence or gift, or yield a complete assent to what drops from his lips, they are so fully satisfied that it is "truth," that they look very little at the way in which the truth is received into their own heart. Nay they may pride themselves to think that they have the truth in their chapel, and rest in that, when, were the matter probed to the very bottom, it would be found in many cases that

they received it not from God, but only from the lips of their minister.

2. —But the second fruit and result of genuine discipleship is, **spiritual freedom**. "The truth shall make you free." What are we by nature? Slaves and bondsmen; slaves to sin, to Satan, to the world, to pride, to prejudice, to presumption, to every thing hateful and horrible; and only so far as the Lord brings us out of our wretched serfdom, do we come in any measure into real spiritual freedom. But **what** freedom is this? Oh! says one very trippingly upon the tongue—'Oh!' answers another in a moment from some corner of the chapel—'Of course it is gospel liberty that the Lord is speaking of. I do not doubt it; but just as "**the truth**" may perhaps include a little more than is contained in your church articles, and embraces a wider range than what is wrapped up in most Established or Dissenting nutshells, so the **freedom** of which the Lord speaks, may possibly (**I throw it out as a suggestion,**) have a more extensive scope than some of you may dream of. There is a freedom from things, distinct from gospel liberty, though gospel freedom will produce it. Gospel freedom consists, we know, in a freedom from the curse and hard bondage of the law; in a freedom from the wrath of God; in a freedom from agonising doubts and fears. And God's people, when they "know the truth," and are blessed with a feeling reception of it, are favoured with this freedom. But is there not such a thing, think you, as being made free from the world? I am afraid, if we were to follow into their shops and counting-houses some who talk much of gospel liberty, we might find that the world's fetter had not been struck off their heart. We might possibly find that some who could boast very largely, and talk very fluently of "standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free," had a golden chain, though invisible to their own eyes, very closely wrapped round their heart-strings. There is no use then talking about Christian freedom and gospel liberty, unless a man has liberty from something else; if he is not made free, for instance, from the power of **covetousness**, for the Scripture declares, that "a covetous man, who is an idolater, shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." To be made free, then,

implies a liberty, not only from the curse of the law and so on, but also from the world, and the spirit of covetousness in the heart. There is a being made free also from the tyrannical empire of **respectability**; from the desire to rise in life; from the miserable system of outliving ones income, in order to cut a respectable appearance in the eyes of neighbours. Many who talk about gospel liberty, and would scorn any thing like imputation of bondage, are under the dominion of this tyrant, Respectability. And there is a being made free **from the power of sin**. I greatly fear, if we could follow into their holes and corners, and secret chambers many who prattle about gospel liberty, we should find that sin had not yet lost its hold upon them, that there was some secret or open sin that entangled them, that there was some lust, some passion, some evil temper, some wretched pride or other, that wound its fetters very close round their heart. And there is a being made free from **self** also: from proud self, presumptuous self, self-exalting self, flesh-pleasing self, hypocritical self, self in all its various shapes and turns, self in all its crooked hypocrisy and windings. We should then very much understate what this freedom is if we said—'Oh! it is a freedom from the curse of the law, a freedom from eternal wrath and damnation, and left it there. No; we must extend the circle somewhat wider; and if we extend the circle, we may find that some, who boast much of gospel freedom, have not yet reached the bound of gospel liberty.

But "the truth shall make you free." And who want to be made free? Not those who are boasting of self-assumed freedom. The Jews, to whom the Lord spoke it, could not bear the imputation. Said they, "We be Abrahams seed, and were never in bondage to any man; how sayest thou, We shall be made free?" What an insult to talk to **them** of being made free; as though they were not free always! But they had forgotten the Babylonish captivity; they had forgotten the captivity under which they were at that moment to the Romans. Self deceit so blinded them, that they resented as an insult the imputation that they were not free, at the very moment when the Roman coin was circulating among them, carrying with it the mark of their subjection. And think you, this will not bear a spiritual application? Freedom! what, think you

that I am not free yet? am I in bondage?—will say many a one who is a slave to his lusts. Many cannot bear to be thought in bondage, who have never yet known any thing of being made free by the truth. But the truth will make a man really free. It will free him, not merely as to those things, in which gospel freedom is said chiefly to consist; it will make him free from the fear of man, from the smiles of the creature, from bowing down to any person to gain his good opinion; it will make him free before God, so as to walk before the Lord with an enlarged heart.

"He is the free man whom the truth makes free, And all are slaves beside," sang a Christian poet; and when the truth, any part or portion of it, comes into a mans heart, it makes him free, because it has a liberating effect. And if time sufficed, I might endeavour to point out how every part and particle of God's truth in a mans conscience, from the first teaching of God upon the soul, has the seeds of freedom in it, and works in him a freedom from those things, in which he was entangled.

We have seen then a little of what it is to be a genuine disciple, and what are the blessed fruits and effects of genuine discipleship; and if we are enabled, by God's blessing, to trace out in our souls honestly that we possess the marks and tests of genuine discipleship, we stand interested, whatever be the darkness of our mind, in all the promises made to those who are Christs, and in all the blessings stored up in heavenly places for them.

But my business this evening is, to speak a few words on behalf of the Aged Pilgrims Friend Society. A friend, speaking of it, remarked to me the other day, that "of all Societies it was the worst supported." "This witness was true." And it caused this question to arise in my mind. What are the causes of this general want of support? This effect cannot arise but from certain causes; what then are the causes of this general indifference to its wants and claims?

1. The first cause that strikes my mind is this. The patrons and the supporters of, as well as those who are supported by this Society, profess those doctrines of sovereign, discriminating grace, which are hateful to the bulk of the professing world; and therefore, from their very profession of truth, a stigma is necessarily cast upon the Society. Those who are wrapped up in self-righteousness will of course turn their backs upon it, and cannot support a Society, which fosters what they consider most pernicious heresies.

2. Another apparent cause of its want of support, is that it does not lend its aid to, what the late Thomas Hardy used to call, "mans godship." You know what the old serpent said to Eve, when he breathed his poisonous words into her ears: "Ye shall be as gods." His temptation was to elevate her into godship. Now man, unhumiliated man, never can do with any thing that does not flatter this imaginary godship. Bible Societies and Missionary Societies, from the Christian knowledge Society down to the humblest Tract Society, all flatter mans godship. They say—'Co-operate with God; it is your province to convert the world; send forth your Missionaries, and convert all men to a knowledge of the truth.' This exalting men into gods is wonderfully pleasing to the flesh; and thus all rush forward to contribute to a Society, whatever it be, that flatters them by making "lords many and gods many."

3. Another cause, as it strikes my mind, is the general poverty of those who love the truth. God has "chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom;" and therefore, the bulk of God's people being poor, they have so little to contribute to the wants of others, that this Society cannot command those subscriptions and those sums, which are readily contributed by such as love a flesh-pleasing gospel.

Without going further, I think these three causes will sufficiently account for its want of support. But is not that a great reason why we should give ours? Suppose, as we were walking in the street, there were some pitiful accident (**so called**) to take place,

and the people held back, and no body would go forward. Some human being was crushed, and lay bleeding, and dying, and all stood aloof; would not the very circumstance of their standing aloof, not merely draw forth the pity of our heart towards that suffering object, but induce us, for the sake of suffering humanity, to lend some aid? And if the religious world, who support the various Bible and Missionary Societies, if the numerous chapels and churches in London that despise the truth, hang back, who are to come forward? Why, those surely who believe the same truths, whose hearts are touched by the same Spirit, who are brothers and sisters of the Pilgrims whom the Society supports, and who are "bound up in the bundle of life" with them and their common Lord. Thus the very reason why we should come forward, those of us who have it in our power, is because others hang back; their keeping back is the very thing to push us forward.

And who are the persons, whom we are called upon to support? They profess to be—and we trust that they are—pilgrims; Aged Pilgrims; travelling on to a better country; only needing a little more of this worlds good; pressed down with poverty; suffering often perhaps pangs of hunger and want; fearful of being ejected from their little tenements, and of being turned out of their garrets **(which, though uncomfortable to us, are comfortable to them,)** by some cruel landlord. How anxiously do they watch for the coming of the visitor! I have no doubt the husband says to the wife, or the lonely widower, or desolate widow to himself or herself—"Tomorrow the visitor comes; there will be the money for the baker, or for the rent." How anxiously he is looking for the sum he is to receive! Yes; but how is water to come out of the well, if there is no water in it? Or if we lock up the handle of the pump, how is the water to flow? **You** must give the spring; it is your part, your privilege, to help to fill the well; and then the visitor has but to drop the monthly bucket, and draw up a supply for the Aged Pilgrims. How painful it must be for these poor creatures, when the time comes, and there is no money for them! I am told that the Society has been sometimes driven actually to want the money for the next payment, unless

by some miraculous and providential interposition; and God has sent some person, with grace in his heart and money in his pocket, just in time to help them out of the present difficulty, that they may look up to Him in the next emergency.

I hope we shall see this evening, then, a liberal collection. And to the marks of genuine discipleship which have been brought forward, I hope I may be able to add another; and what is that? "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, that ye love one another." But how are we to show our love, except by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and giving drink to the thirsty?—which the Lord himself will acknowledge as done to Him, when he will separate the sheep from the goats.

But I will add no more. Exhortations fall with little power, where God does not own them to the heart. And therefore I will conclude with reading a statement that has been put into my hands.

"This Society has extended its valuable aid to 1, poor aged members of the mystical body of Christ, amongst whom have been distributed £22, . There are at present 47 pensioners, who receive £10,10. per annum, or 17s. 6d. per month; 117 at £5. 5s. per annum, or 8s. 9d. per month; and 169 approved candidates, who receive 4s. a month. In the whole 333; amongst whom are distributed monthly, at their own habitations, upwards of £126. The income arising from annual subscriptions does not exceed £905; while the expenditure is £1575; leaving a deficiency of £579, two-thirds of the amount of the subscriptions, which presses heavily on the Committee, and which they have to make up by obtaining donations and collection sermons wherever they can. Every department is filled gratuitously. Annual subscriptions, Donations, and Legacies, will be thankfully received."

Getting and Losing

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday Evening, August 6, 1846

"A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away." Ecclesiastes 3:6

The blessed Spirit saw fit under the old dispensation to make much use of proverbs and aphorisms; and there seems to be in that mode of instruction something peculiarly suited both to the character of the people, and also to the time in which the holy Scriptures were written. In those days, compared with our own, there was very little reading or writing; and therefore it was very desirable that instruction should be conveyed in short sentences (such as we find in the book of Proverbs), which might be easily remembered. And when these pithy sentences were written in what is called an *"antithetical"* form (that is, where one clause is opposed to, and as it were balances the other) like the point of an arrow, it gave the instruction a keener edge, and fastened it more deeply and firmly in the heart. But, besides this, we are to bear in mind that the Old Testament was given to the whole people of Israel. That dispensation did not resemble ours, in being restricted to the elect of God: it was a national dispensation; and therefore the Old Testament was, to a certain extent, a national book. We find, therefore, not only in the books of Moses, but scattered up and down the Sacred Writings, and especially the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, most clear and beautiful lessons on what is generally called "morality," and the guidance of conduct in the various relations of life.

But though the genius and character of that dispensation were national, yet God had an elect family, who were spiritually taught, in the same way as God's elect family are taught now. The Holy Ghost, therefore, in revealing these Proverbs, pointed sayings, and aphorisms, so indited them, that under the external cover of moral instruction there was spiritual instruction deeply couched.

So that, whilst the Proverbs afforded the most beautiful lessons of morality to those who looked no farther than mere morality, they also afforded blessed lessons of spiritual instruction to those who were enlightened by the Holy Ghost to see into the kernel, and were not satisfied with merely handling the shell.

Thus the Holy Ghost, in this chapter of Ecclesiastes, treating on the various incidents of human life, declares, that "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away." Here is a great deal of moral, natural truth. It is true, literally and naturally, that "There is a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted." But, under these natural incidents is contained spiritual instruction; and what appears to me to prove that there is an experimental meaning couched under the whole, is the expression—"*a time to kill.*" It cannot surely be true, literally and naturally, that there is "a time to kill;" for that would make the Holy Ghost sanction murder. "Thou shalt not kill" is one of the precepts of the Decalogue. The blessed Spirit, therefore, could never mean, literally and naturally, that there was "a time to kill." So that from this clue I gather that the Holy Ghost had a spiritual interpretation in view—"a time to kill" by the application of God's law to the conscience; a season to slaughter the soul, so as to cut off all hope and help. And thus, this one expression, "a time to kill," seems at once to take our minds from the literal and natural interpretation of the whole; and to shew us there is a spiritual, experimental interpretation which lies hidden beneath the surface.

But what says the text? "*A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away.*" When God favours a man in providence, when he smiles upon his plans and arrangements, it

is with him "a time to get." But if the Lord do not prosper a man in providence, he may rise early, and go to bed late; he may keep the best accounts, and lay out his plans in the most complete way; if it be not "a time to get," every hope and fair expectation will be entirely blighted. Thus also, there is "a time to lose," as many of our railway gentlemen have found. And how many too of the Lord's people have experimentally found in natural things there has been "a time to get," when the Lord has prospered every undertaking; and how painfully have they also found there is "a time to lose," when, as with Job, messenger comes after messenger to tell them of the loss of their worldly prosperity. So also, literally and naturally, there is "a time to keep" what a person gains by honest industry; and there is "a time to cast away" in acts of charity and liberality.

But shall I confine myself to this mere literal interpretation, which floats upon the surface? Shall I merely dip my hand into the froth and foam of the text, and leave untouched the spiritual treasures that are couched beneath? I cannot do so. I shall therefore, with God's blessing, entirely discard all further allusion to the literal and natural interpretation of the passage; and come at once to the spiritual and experimental signification.

The text, you will observe, is divided into two portions, each containing two clauses; these, I hope, with God's blessing, to take up and consider separately. May he who alone can give the blessing, clothe with power what may be spoken in weakness.

I.—"*A time to get.*" The Lord, in answer to a question put by his disciples, declared that "The Father hath put the times and seasons in his own power." (Acts 1:7.) Thus, there is appointed "a time to get." But to get *what*? Why, that which shall do our souls good for eternity; that which shall save us from "the wrath to come;" that which shall translate us from "the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son;" those "treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." (Matt. 6:20.)

But let us examine more closely the spiritual things that a living soul "gets." Of the things thus got some are painful, and others pleasurable; some are attended with sorrow, and others with joy; some kill, and others heal; some bring down, and others raise up.

i. Among the *painful* lessons experimentally learnt in the school of divine teaching are,

1. *A spiritual knowledge of God's holy character*; a gracious sight into, and a divine acquaintance with, Jehovah's perfections, his purity, his holiness, his majesty, his greatness, his omniscience, his omnipotence. Thus to know "the only true God" by the manifestations of himself to the soul, is a branch of heavenly getting. But this we cannot get without a corresponding discovery of our own deformity and vileness, our loss of the divine image, our alienation from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us, because of the blindness of our heart. Job had this discovery of the purity of Jehovah, when he said, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job. 42:5, 6.) Isaiah, under a view of the glory of the Lord in the temple, cried out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5); and all Daniel's comeliness was turned into corruption when he saw the Lord by the side of the great river. (10:8.)

2. *A knowledge of the spirituality and breadth of God's holy law*, whereby the soul is brought in guilty before God, is another of those painful gettings which a living man has to experience. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." Through its application guilt falls upon the conscience. "Whatsoever 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." (Rom. 3:19.) This cuts up self-righteousness, brings to light secret iniquities, and makes the offence to abound. It discovers sin of the eye, heart, hand, and tongue, and curses and condemns the least deviation from a perfect righteousness.

3. *A sound conviction of sin* is also one of the things got by the Lord's living family; not merely those natural convictions that go and come, that ebb and flow, and leave the soul for the most part as they found it, under the power of lust, and in the services of Satan; but that sound conviction of sin which penetrates into the very heart's core, and never leaves the sinner's conscience till it brings him to the Redeemer's feet; which never wears off till the blood of atonement is applied to the conscience; which brings out of the world, separates from dead professors, makes a man honest and sincere, leads him to sigh and cry to the Lord for a sense of his pardoning mercy, and finally issues in a blessed deliverance.

4. *A knowledge of the corruptions of our fallen nature*—of our unbelief, infidelity, pride, hypocrisy, worldly mindedness, carnality, sensuality, and selfishness, with all the abounding evils of our deceitful and desperately wicked heart, is another branch of this painful getting. Without it there will be no humility or self loathing: no dread of falling, nor desire to be kept; no knowledge of the superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of sin; no justifying of God, no condemning of ourselves.

5. *A knowledge of Satan's temptations, wiles, and snares*, of his craft and power, subtlety and malice, serpent windings and lion roarings, is another part of this painful getting.

ii. But there are gettings of a different kind—of a *pleasurable* nature. Such as,

1. *A spirit of grace and supplications*; and the "time to get" it, is then, and then only, when the blessed Spirit is pleased to communicate it. Wherever, by the Spirit's application of God's holy law to the conscience, there is got a sound conviction of sin, there is got, under the operation of that only and almighty Teacher, a heart to pour itself out in supplications, sighs, tears, and breathings at the footstool of mercy. "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them."

2. There is, also, "a time to get" *a knowledge of Jesus*; as we read, "this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3.) There is "a time to get" this knowledge of Jesus Christ; a knowledge of him as the Saviour from "the wrath to come;" a knowledge of him as "the Mediator between God and men;" a knowledge of the efficacy of his atoning blood to cleanse a guilty conscience; a knowledge of his justifying righteousness to clothe the needy, naked soul; a knowledge of his dying love shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost; a knowledge of his glorious Person; a knowledge of his tender sympathizing heart; a knowledge of him as "able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him."

3. There is "a time" also "to get" *faith*. When the blessed Spirit is pleased to raise up this precious grace in the soul, he draws it out to lay hold of the promises that he applies, the blood that he sprinkles, the Saviour that he reveals, the love that he sheds abroad, and the truth that he makes experimentally known.

4. There is "a time" too "to get" *the pardon of sin* by the sweet manifestations of pardoning love to the soul.

5. And to mention summarily other branches of this heavenly getting, there is "a time to get" *a knowledge of interest in the love and blood of the Lamb*; at "a time to get" *a spiritual sight of the Lord Jesus Christ in his sufferings*; "a time to get" that *union and communion with him* which is life and peace. There is "a time," also, "to get" *heavenly affections, spiritual delights, tender sensations, holy longings, divine feelings*. And, to add no more, there is "a time to get" *everything which fits the soul for a glorious and happy immortality*.

iii. But you will observe that the blessed Spirit has said, there is "*a time to get*." And this time is in his hands who holds all times and seasons at his own sovereign disposal. This indeed is a lesson which the Lord's people have, for the most part, painfully to learn; that though they see the blessings revealed in the gospel,

they cannot get them except when they are dropped into their heart and shed abroad in their soul by the Holy Ghost. But what are these times to get?

1. One time is *a time of affliction*. This is, for the most part, the time that the Lord first begins the work of grace upon the sinner's conscience. The Lord often makes use of affliction to take the sinner aside, as it were, that he may speak to his heart. A sick bed separates him from the world, or some family affliction shews him the emptiness of all human happiness, or some reverse in circumstances brings down his pride and ambition. And at this season the Lord often opens his ear to receive instruction; and thus the time of affliction often proves "a time to get." So also, with respect to the manifestations of grace, mercy, and love—it is, for the most part, in times of trial, of sorrow, and despondency; in times when there is no hope for the soul except in the free mercy of God, that any real blessing is got from the Lord.

2. *A time of temptation* is also usually "a time to get." In seasons of temptation, we get a knowledge of our own weakness and wickedness, learn our helplessness against Satan's temptations, and experience the Lord's delivering hand.

3. There is also a time *to favour Zion* and when that set time comes it is "a time to get." Before that time arrives, we may try to get; but, like the disciples, we toil all night, and get nothing. But when the set time arrives, the net is cast on the right side of the ship, and the blessings come as it were spontaneously to hand.

II.—But there is not only "a time to get," there is also "*a time to lose*;" and the one season is set over against the other. And just as it is the blessed Spirit, and he alone, who brings about the "time to get;" so it is the blessed Spirit, and he alone, who brings about the "time to lose."

But what does a man lose? In the same way, as what he "gets" is for his soul's good, his everlasting profit, his eternal peace; so

what he "loses" is only that which, were it not parted with, his soul would be a sufferer. For instance,

1. There is a losing of *our own righteousness*. O how many there are who are building their hopes of heaven entirely upon this sandy foundation! But not so with the Lord's family. There is "a time" for them "to lose" this cobweb garment; a time when creature righteousness is taken from them, and they are stripped of those filthy rags which cannot shield them from the eye of omniscient justice. And when is this time? When there is a discovery to the conscience of the perfections of Jehovah; of the purity of his law; of that holy majesty and justice which eternally dwell in him, which require a righteousness pure, spotless, and undefiled, and can accept no other. Thus, when the Lord is pleased to bring before the eyes, and let down into the soul, a sense of his greatness and majesty, and applies the edge of his spiritual precepts to the conscience, then is the time when we begin to lose our own righteousness; then it appears in our eyes as nothing but filthy rags; then we know, that if we have no other righteousness, we must be eternally lost; and thus we are made to part with it, that we may be clothed with the Lamb's imputed righteousness, and so stand before God without spot, or blemish, or any such thing.

2. There is a losing also of *our fleshly holiness*. What Christian in days past has not aimed at creature holiness? Even after he had been convinced that his own legal righteousness will not save him, yet how hard he has toiled and tugged to get some gospel holiness, something in himself that he can look upon as spiritual and heavenly, something of an evangelical nature that he can present to God, and lay down before him as acceptable in his sight. But there is "a time to lose" this fleshly holiness, however dressed out in a gospel garb, as we lost our legal righteousness. And when is that time? When the corruptions of our heart are laid bare, when sin is allowed to come in like a flood, so as to sweep away all those dreams (for dreams they are) of fleshly holiness and creature perfection; when we are put into Satan's sieve and have our religion riddled backwards and forwards till every sound

grain seems gone, and nothing rises to the top but the chaff which the wind blows away; when the Lord puts the soul into the furnace of affliction, and nothing comes to the surface but the dross and scum which are taken away by the Refiner;—*then* is the "time to lose" this fleshly holiness that we once so dearly prized, and so ardently and anxiously longed to obtain. It is lost, utterly lost, when the Lord gives us a sight of what we are, and gives us a glimpse of what *He* is.

3. *Our own wisdom*—there is "a time to lose" that. There was a time, doubtless, with us, when we fancied ourselves very wise; especially when we had made some little progress, as we fancied, in religion, and had stored a few doctrines in our heads; when we had read a few authors, or had studied the Bible, and compared passage with passage and chapter with chapter. We doubtless congratulated ourselves on possessing a vast amount of wisdom, and thought we knew everything because we had some understanding in the letter of God's word. But there is "a time to lose" all this wisdom. When we get into difficulties, trials, temptations, and perplexities, then our wisdom all disappears, and we find it little else than ignorance and folly. It does not avail us when most needed. It cannot guide us into paths of peace; it cannot keep us from evil or error. Like a broken tooth, or a foot out of joint, it gives way the moment any weight or stress is laid upon it. (Prov. 25:19.)

4. There is a time, also to lose *all our self-strength, self-confidence, and self-dependence*. Strength to stand against temptation, to overcome sin, to crucify the flesh, to pluck out right eyes and cut off right hands; to believe, hope, or love; to think, speak, or do any one thing spiritually good; to bless, comfort, or deliver our own souls; to raise up one sigh, cry, or desire Godward;—in all these things we painfully learn that strength we have none.

But there is "a *time* to lose." And this time is in the hand of the Lord. We can no more bring upon our souls "a time to lose," than we can bring upon our souls "a time to get." When the "time to

get" comes, then we get what the Lord is pleased to bestow. "That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good." When the Lord bestows a blessing, when he gives a smile, when he drops a word, when he favours the soul with some intimation of his goodness and mercy, it is "a time to get." But when the Lord hides his face, withdraws his presence, allows the corruption of the heart to work, lets Satan stir up that filthy pool we carry within us—then it is the "time to lose." "Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled, thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust." (Psalm 104: 2:.) If we are the Lord's, he will bring upon us, sooner or later, the "time to lose;" and then we shall lose everything that thousands rejoice in—yea, everything that creature can boast of, or put its confidence in. Wherever there has been "a time to get," there will be also "a time to lose." These two are closely connected; the one is the mortise, the other the tenon; the one is the sinking bucket in the well, and the other the rising bucket; the one is the day of adversity, and the other the day of prosperity, which the Lord has set the one over against the other.

Now, there may be some here, with whom it is "a time to get." Some, perhaps, are getting convictions of sin such as they never before felt; some are getting a knowledge of the perfections of God's character which they never before were acquainted with; some are getting views of Jesus that their souls never before were favoured with; some are getting promises, some are getting invitations, some are getting peace, some are getting encouragements, some are getting evidences, some are getting testimonies, some are getting whispers, and some are getting smiles. And then, perhaps, in this congregation (as we would hope there are some of the Lord's people here present this evening) it is with others "a time to lose." They find all their own righteousness beginning to fade before their eyes and becoming as filthy rags; they find the corruptions of their heart made manifest, so that they are losing by degrees all their fleshly holiness; they find the workings of secret sin continually boiling up within; they feel their strength oozing away, and that they have not the power they thought they once had to stand against

indwelling evil; they find they have not power to read God's word as in times past, nor power to cry unto the Lord, nor power to realize his presence, nor power to believe, hope, or love. Thus with some, it is "a time to get;" and with others, it is "a time to lose." Happy getting! happy losing! The getting is of God, and the losing is of God! Yes; it is a mercy to get, and it is a mercy to lose. It is a mercy that God should ever favour our souls with his own times and seasons to drop something worth having into our hearts; or to take something away worth losing; to give us that which shall make our souls meet for eternity, and to strip us of that which is nothing but deception and delusion.

III.—There is also *"a time to keep, and a time to cast away."* Is it not one thing to *"get,"* and another thing to *"keep?"* Is it not one thing to *"lose,"* and another thing to *"cast away?"* It is so naturally. There are some people who can "get"—persons who have a peculiar turn for business, and whom the Lord favours with natural wisdom and earthly prosperity. Whatever they put their hand to seems to succeed. Yet they cannot keep it; they cannot retain what they have earned: it flies hastily out of their hand, or dribbles insensibly away. So spiritually; we must "get" before we can "keep." Is it not so naturally? Before a man can keep a thing, surely he must get it. And so it is in divine things. "A time to get" comes before "a time to keep." And do you not observe how the "time to keep" follows the "time to lose?" This, then, is the order of the Spirit's teachings in the heart. He begins with a sinner's conscience, and he communicates certain things, such as a conviction of sin, a knowledge of God's holy law, cries and sighs after mercy; and in due time he gives him a knowledge of Jesus, evidences and testimonies of interest in him, love visits, smiles, and manifestations. All these a living soul gets. But then the "time to lose" comes, when he loses all his own righteousness, his own holiness, his own strength; his own wisdom, his own comeliness. But he does not lose any one thing which God has put into his heart. As, therefore, there is "a time to get" what God gives, and "a time to lose" what God takes away, so there is "a time to keep" what the Lord himself is pleased to bestow upon the soul.

But *what* is it that we are "to keep?" In our early days we amass a great deal of what we fancy to be religion; and when the "time to lose" comes, it seems pretty well all lost. Have not some of you had such storms to blow down upon you, as though they would sweep out of your heart everything that you hoped God had put there? And have you not had such seasons of darkness come upon you, that you could not see any one mark of divine teaching, or any one feature of Christ's image? That was "a time to lose." But if God has done anything for your soul, has communicated any real blessing to your heart, or spoken one soft word to your conscience, that is to be kept. We are not to part with any one thing God is pleased to do for our souls. We are not to cast away one grain of the treasure that God has lodged in earthen vessels. We are not to throw to the moles and to the bats any one thing, however feeble it may appear, that comes from God; for having come from him, it is a good and perfect gift.

The blessed Spirit works upon the heart; but our most holy and religious flesh will work with the blessed Spirit. In early days are we not very ignorant, and often mistake the letter for the spirit, and the form for the power? But when the Lord begins to put the soul into the furnace, and permits it to be riddled in Satan's sieve, the effect is to burn up, or sift away every thing that is of the creature and of the flesh. But mark, that which God himself has done for the soul, it leaves untouched. There is, therefore, "a time to keep." Satan does not care how much you keep of the flesh but he will try hard to baffle you out of everything that God has done for your soul. If he see you heaping up chaff, he will encourage you to heap up more; but if he see you storing up a few grains of solid wheat, he will try, by a blast of his mouth, or a whirl of his sieve, to blow those few grains out of your hand. If he see you very self-wise, self-righteous, or self-confident, he will encourage you in all that; but if he see you doubting, fearing, desponding, tried, and exercised, he will endeavour, in another form, to persuade you that you have never received anything from God, and that all your religion is but a mass of hypocrisy. When, therefore, the blessed Spirit has told us there is "a time to

get," and also "a time to lose," in order to shew that we do not lose any one thing which he has communicated, he adds, there is "a time to keep."

But *what* have we to *keep*? Everything that God has done for the soul, especially everything that we can look upon as a real blessing. For instance: have you ever had any deliverance? Has the Lord ever proclaimed liberty to your soul? Has he ever applied a promise to your heart? Has he ever dropped a word softly and sweetly into your conscience? Has he ever answered your prayers? Has he ever made darkness light before you, and crooked things straight? Has he ever revealed himself to you? Has he ever raised up in your heart faith in his blessed self? Has he ever sprinkled your conscience with atoning blood? Has he ever discovered to you his glorious righteousness and assured you, you are personally interested in it? Has he ever shed abroad any measure of his love in your heart, and made himself very near, very dear, and very precious to your soul?

Now these things Satan will be perpetually trying to baffle your soul out of. He will keep whispering, 'It was all delusion and fleshly excitement; it was not real; it did not come from God; it did not come in *this* way, it did not come in *that* way. How do you know,' he will say (for he can reason very ably; he is a thorough master of rhetoric) 'that it was from God? Those broken feelings you once had—those tears that rolled down your cheeks—that melting of heart under a sense of the Lord's presence—that whisper which came into your conscience—that word which dropped into your soul—that deliverance out of trial—that snare so powerfully broken—that temptation out of which you were brought—how do you know' (Satan can plead with all the art and craft of a counsellor) 'it came from God?' And the poor soul very often in these seasons of darkness, temptation, and perplexity, cannot answer, 'Yes it was God.' As the church of old said, "We see not our signs;" so he cannot see that *this* was of God, or *that* was of God. He can see it in others; he can see the image of Jesus in the children of God: but he cannot see the work of God upon himself.

But the Holy Spirit says, there is "*a time* to keep." And when is this *time*? Why, the very time that Satan is trying to baffle you out of it; when he says, 'Give it all up; cast aside your profession; go into the world; never come before God's face any more, lest he strike you dead for presumption; never go to hear an experimental minister again, lest he unmask you as an hypocrite; never read the writings of gracious men again, lest you only add to your condemnation.' When Satan is dealing out his rhetoric and infernal oratory, that is the very "time to keep." What! will you part with your blessings, with your evidences, with your manifestations, with your sweet discoveries, with your love visits, with the Lord's smiles, with anything that you believe, in your right mind, God has done for your soul? There is "*a time* to keep;" and it is in temptation, in trial, in difficulty that this time is. It is like a man going into the city with a large sum of money about him—how he keeps his hand upon it, lest sharp fingers should pilfer his treasure! So with the children of God. If the Lord bestow a favour, how careful the soul is lest that footpad Satan should rob it of its heavenly treasure! When the blessed Spirit shines upon the soul, brightens its evidences, shows it that *this* or *that* word came from the Lord—that *this* was a token for good—that *this* deliverance was an answer to prayer—that the Lord appeared for us *here*, and appeared for us *there*—when the blessed Spirit is thus pleased to lift up a standard when Satan comes in like a flood—then it is "*a time* to keep." And, depend upon it, we shall want to keep all we have got. The Lord will ever make us feel poor and needy, and will bring us into such spots and places as to make us value the least blessing; he will make us prize the feeblest evidence, and cleave to the scantiest testimony. But are there not some bright spots that you can now and then look back upon? some "Ebenezers?" some "hill Mizars?" Can you look back upon the time when the Lord first blessed your soul? Can you put your hand upon the season when there was first a discovery of Jesus? when you first heard the word with power? when your heart was first melted with sensations of mercy and love? Now, these are to be diligently kept, highly to be prized, deeply to be stored up in your heart. These are the jewels that Bunyan speaks of in the 'Pilgrim;' the roll in the bosom, the

mark on the forehead. By these the soul will be recognised when it stands before the "great white throne;" and therefore, they are to be kept, not to be parted with, whatever Satan may urge, whatever reason may argue, whatever the flesh may say, whatever the wickedness and infidelity of our hearts may plead. Every thing from the Lord is to be kept, and highly prized, because it springs from the mercy and goodness of God.

IV.—But as there is "a time to keep," so there is also "*a time to cast away.*" What do we cast away? That which in time past, perhaps, we hoarded as a great treasure, prized very highly, and set an amazing value upon. As we keep everything that comes from God, so we cast away everything that does not bear his stamp upon it. Everything that does not come with divine savour and unction into the heart; everything that wears upon its face the suspicious tint of nature, and does not bear the stamp of grace, is to be "cast away." God puts his mark upon genuine silver only; the plated goods never wear the stamp of heaven. Just as in nature we cast away whatsoever is refuse and vile; as we sweep the dust and rubbish out of our house, and the filth and dirt into the streets; so when the Lord is pleased to shine into a man's soul, and shows him what he has done and is doing for him, he casts away as dust and rubbish all that does not bear God's mark, and is not stamped from heaven's own mint. For instance,

1. We "cast away" *presumption*. There was a time when, perhaps, some of you mistook presumption for faith; but when the Lord shewed you what a horrible thing presumption was, and made you see and feel the difference between presumption and faith, then the closer did you clasp living faith to your bosom, and the more you cast presumption away.

2. There was a time, perhaps, when you were satisfied with a *notional acquaintance with the gospel*; and because you were a sound Calvinist, you thought you were a sound Christian. But you have been taught, some of you, by painful exercises and soul perplexities, the distinction between the letter and the spirit, the

form and the power: and you "cast away"—not the doctrines; no; they are to be highly prized, for they are the very sum and substance of gospel truth; but you "cast away" a natural knowledge of them, a notional acquaintance with them, as a thing quite distinct from the application of truth with divine power to your heart.

3. You "cast away" also *fleshly excitement* in religion. Fleshly excitement is the all in all of most professors of religion. A few natural tears trickling down the cheeks; a few carnal passions wrought upon by the eloquence of the preacher; a few movings and meltings of natural affection under a pathetic discourse; a calm, softened feeling produced by a well-sung hymn or a swelling organ; a thrill of rapture from listening to a description of the joys of heaven; a hearing others talk of their assurance till by imitation they are persuaded of their own—this carnal excitement passes for religion with hundreds and thousands. But *you* who are better taught "cast it away;" *you* are afraid of this fleshly excitement; you are afraid to mistake the natural tear trickling down the cheek for the godly sorrow that the blessed Spirit raises up; you are afraid to mistake the mere raising up of the natural spirits for the liftings up of the light of God's countenance. Therefore *you* "cast away" as dangerous and delusive all mere fleshly excitement.

4. And you cast "away" also *all dependence on the creature*; all confidence in self, all looking to man, all resting upon an arm of flesh. You have been so wounded and pierced by resting on an arm of flesh, that you cast it away, as you would a reed that had run into your hand and pierced you, or as Paul shook off the viper into the fire.

5. You "cast away" too your own *wisdom*, for it has proved to be folly. You "cast away" your own *strength*, for you know it to be utter weakness. You "cast away" *making resolutions*, for you know you cannot keep them. You "cast away" *making promises*, for you know you cannot fulfil them. You "cast away" *creature faith* because you know it cannot stand your soul in the day of

wrath. Your desire to "cast away" *pride*; to "cast away" *self-seeking*; yea, to "cast away" everything that wears the appearance of godliness, and yet does not bear the stamp and mark of God upon it. You "cast away" an *empty profession*, and a name to live while dead, and being settled upon your lees. In one word, you "cast away" with contempt and shame, everything that the blessed Spirit has discovered to you to spring from the creature, and to be the mere product of nature and the flesh.

But there is "a *time* to cast away"—such as a time of *sickness*, when death is in sight, and when the heart sinks and quakes before eternity; a time of *temptation*, when the heart wants something to bear it up amid the storm; a time of trial, when we want God himself to be the strength of our heart here, and our portion for ever.

Thus, as the Lord leads his people, he carries on in them two apparently opposite, yet blessedly reconcilable operations. The Spirit keeps stripping and clothing, wounding and healing, making poor and making rich, bringing low and raising up. Sometimes he gives, and sometimes he takes away; sometimes makes Jesus precious, sometimes makes self hateful; sometimes gives true signs, sometimes takes away false tokens; some times bestows real testimonies, sometimes takes away false evidences; sometimes gives spiritual faith, sometimes takes away natural faith; sometimes gives true confidence, sometimes takes away vain confidence; sometimes gives true love, sometimes takes away the mere excitement of the flesh and of the creature. And yet, all for one end—to render Jesus precious, and make the soul meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. He deals with the soul in grace, as the clever sculptor deals with the marble block. He chips out a piece *here*, and makes prominent a piece *there*; and at last brings out the beautiful figure of man. So the blessed Spirit—that true sculptor, who engraves Christ's image in the heart—sometimes gives and sometimes takes; sometimes pares *here*, sometimes puts on *there*; till at last he brings forth the image of Christ in the soul, and forms him in the heart, "the hope of glory."

Now, this religion with two sides to it, only the family of God are acquainted with. As to those who know nothing of divine teaching—with them it is all getting, getting, getting. But what does it end in? When God manifests his displeasure, it is all blown away in a moment. They are storing their granaries with chaff, heaping up treasures of dross, filling their bottles with smoke, and making ropes of sand. All, all that is so laboriously got, and so highly prized, one breath from the Lord will one day disperse to the four winds of heaven. But the Lord's people have a religion which has two sides to it. All their religion consists in what the blessed Spirit is pleased himself to communicate to them. What he teaches they know; what he gives, they possess; what he inspires, they feel; and what he breathes into their heart, they enjoy. His work is, to keep stripping them of self, and manifesting to them a precious Jesus, and their interest in him. And thus, under the Spirit's teaching, they grow weaker, and yet stronger; they get worse in self, and more sensibly complete in Christ; they grow down in humility, and upward into faith. Thus, by the Spirit's blessed work upon their souls, they lose all that stands in nature, and they get all that stands in the Spirit. So that, the Lord's people all experimentally prove the truth of these words, "There is a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away."

And what have *you* got? How many years have you made a profession? Ten, twenty, thirty years? What have you got during all this time? Anything worth keeping? Any religion that will stand the storm? Any faith that will abide the trying hour? Depend upon it, if you have got anything that will stand the storm, that will endure in the trying hour, it is what the Spirit has been pleased to lodge in your heart. And, depend upon it, if ever we have got anything from God, we have lost as well as got; there has been "a time to lose" as well as "a time to get." And if we have anything that we keep, and sometimes can bless God for, and look upon with sweetness as an Ebenezer—if there is anything that really we feel, in dark trying seasons, worth keeping, something that God himself has done for our souls—depend upon

it, we shall have to "cast away" every thing else. The Lord will never suffer us to keep the flesh, and keep the Spirit; to keep his testimonies, and to keep our own; to keep true confidence, and to keep false confidence; to keep the favour of God, and to keep the favour of man. He will never let us keep in the one hand a spiritual religion, and in another a fleshly religion. He will never let us keep in one hand Christ's righteousness, and in the other our fleshly holiness. We shall not have two chambers in our heart, and fill one with Christ's riches, and the other with creature riches. We shall never have self to bow down to, idolize, and worship in one niche, and the Lord of life and glory to worship in another. The same bounteous hand that gives, strips and spoils; the same kind Benefactor that puts it into the heart to keep what God has committed there, enables us, yea, "casts away" *for* us, "casts away" *in* us, what does not bear God's stamp, and his heavenly mark. And O, when we come to look at things in this light, how little we have that really seems got from God! how little we have that seems really worth keeping! If you "cast away" all that you have learnt from men; all your dry, notional knowledge; all your self-righteousness and fleshly holiness; when you "cast it all away" as the mariners on board Paul's ship cast the wheat into the sea, and leave nothing behind but what God has done for you—a word here, and a smile there; a promise now, and a whisper then—how little there is! How many things will there be worth keeping when we lie upon a death-bed, are made honest before God, and eternity stares us in the face? When fears, and doubts, and trials, and temptations have blown away all fleshly confidence and all creature religion, how many testimonies will then be left in our soul to go into eternity with? How many answers to prayer? How many applications of the blood of Jesus? How many sweet manifestations of his presence? How many visits from his gracious self? How many words dropped with his own power into the heart? One, two, three, four, five, or ten? If we have one, it will save us; but one will not satisfy. Like Gideon, we must have token upon token, sign upon sign: one will not satisfy; evidence upon evidence, testimony upon testimony, whisper upon whisper, smile upon smile, answer upon answer. We never can have too much; yet how little it is

when all is summed up!

Now, when your religion is held up in these balances; when all is pared away except God's teaching and God's revealing—how little, O how little remains! When weighed up in these strict, unerring "balances of the sanctuary" how scanty a shred is left! And yet that little will save. And sure I am, the man whose heart is made honest before God, never wants to have any religion but what God teaches; he never wants to lean upon anything but what God does for him. No; he cannot go into eternity except with what the Lord has been pleased to work in his heart with power.

As the Lord, then, carries on from time to time his gracious work in the soul, and brings these times and seasons over our head and into our heart, we shall find and prove to the very letter the words of the text, there is "a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away." The Lord favour us with many such times.

THE GIFT OF REDEMPTION AND THE GRACE OF ADOPTION

Preached on Lord's Day Morning, December 6th, 1846, at Oakham

"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Galatians 4:4, 5

There is a striking resemblance, what is called an analogy, between the two dispensations and the different experiences of God's people. I will endeavour to explain my meaning more clearly and distinctly. The old dispensation, that is, the dispensation given by Moses, was to a certain extent a carnal one. Christ had not then appeared, and was therefore foreshadowed by sacrifices, types, rites, and ceremonies, which were to a certain extent, carnal. In consequence, those who were under this Old Testament dispensation partook, in a measure, of its spirit. They breathed a legal spirit because they were under a legal dispensation. And this you will find very much running through the experience of the Old Testament saints. But when, in God's own appointed time, Christ came into the world, He brought in a new dispensation—what is called in Scripture "a new covenant." This new dispensation, or covenant, is entirely of a spiritual nature; there is nothing in it legal, but it is altogether heavenly and divine. If you will read carefully the Epistles to the Hebrews and to the Galatians, you will see how the Apostle treats this subject, and how he shows the distinction between the old dispensation or covenant, with its legal rites and ceremonies, and the new dispensation or covenant, which is of grace and grace alone. In the Epistle to the Galatians, the Apostle speaks very particularly of the distinction between these two dispensations. For instance, in the chapter before us he says, "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world" (Gal. 4:3). The Apostle is here speaking of the

dispensation; he is not speaking so much of the experience of God's people, though, as I have observed, there is a striking analogy between the two. But he is not speaking strictly of the experience of God's people so much as of the dispensation—the Old Testament dispensation under which the ancient fathers lived. Speaking, therefore, of them, and including himself amongst them—for he was born under that dispensation—he says, "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world." By "the elements of the world," he means the law; not merely the moral law, but the whole dispensation given at Mount Sinai, including what is commonly called the ceremonial as well as the moral law. This he calls "the elements of the world." It is called elements, or rudiments, because it was, as it were, the primary instruction which God bestowed upon the Church. Just as a child learns the elements or rudiments before it proceeds further, so God saw fit to deal with His people. He put them under an elementary or rudimental dispensation before He introduced His gospel. The Apostle calls that old dispensation the elements of *the world*, because, to a certain extent, there were worldly things connected with it. Thus we find him speaking to the Hebrews, "Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and *a worldly sanctuary*," by which he means, not worldly in our usual sense of the term, but a worldly sanctuary as distinct from that spiritual sanctuary which God built and not man. Thus, by "a worldly sanctuary," he intends that ancient tabernacle which the hands of man erected, which the eyes of the world could see, as contradistinguished from that spiritual sanctuary, the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is at the right hand of God, invisible to the human eye. It is for these reasons that he calls the Old Testament dispensation, "the elements of the world," and says of those who are under it that they were "in bondage," and because the gospel had not then appeared in all its glorious fulness, and liberty had not been proclaimed to captives through the atonement of Jesus Christ. To this points Isaiah (61:1, 2), which the Lord Himself read in the synagogue at Nazareth, and told the people, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). "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." "The acceptable year of the Lord," was that year when the Lord came into the world, and that year will last until Christ comes a second time without sin unto salvation. Therefore the Apostle, speaking of "the acceptable year" (2 Cor. 6:2), says, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." The acceptable year, then, extends through the whole dispensation till closed by the appearing a second time of the Son of God. These preliminary observations may cast some light upon the words of our text: "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

Three things seem to strike my mind as especially connected with and flowing out of our text.

I. The sending forth of God's dear Son.

II. What God's dear Son did when He was thus sent forth.

III. The effects and blessed fruits that spring out of God's sending forth His dear Son.

But the first word that will demand some little explanation is the expression which stands upon the very threshold of our subject: "*When the fulness of the time was come.*" What is meant by this expression? "The fulness of the time" seems to signify the full completion and entire accomplishment of *that* time which had been designed in God's own mind from all eternity. *Why* the Lord fixed upon a certain season for Christ to appear, and *why* that season was so late in the world's history, we know not. It is hid in God's eternal mind, and is a part of His infinite and inscrutable wisdom. But *this* we know, that it was just such a season as God saw most suitable for that glorious event to be fulfilled in. It is

therefore called, "the fulness of the time"—the time that God designed being then fully accomplished. And indeed, even with our limited views, with our imperfect knowledge of that season, we may see that there were some striking instances of God's wisdom displayed in it. *First*, when Christ came the world was at peace. Almost the only time for many, many years, was there then a general peace throughout the world. *Secondly*, through the providence of God, all nations had been subdued under one yoke; and thus became, more or less, one people. And *thirdly*, in God's providence, one language—the Greek tongue—was then spoken universally. So that, were there no other reasons, these three seem sufficient to show that this was a suitable time for the Son of God to appear, for His gospel to run and be glorified, and His salvation to be made known to the ends of the earth. In this fulness of time, the predictions concerning the Messiah were to be accomplished, and the sacrifices were to be fulfilled in that one sacrifice—the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world.

When the fulness of the time, then, was come, *God sent forth His Son*. What a clear, what a striking, what an unanswerable demonstration this is of two grand points! First, of the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Is not the Son the image of the Father? Has not the Son the nature of the Father? So the Lord Jesus Christ is declared in God's Word to be "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person." The very expression, then, "*His Son*," is an unanswerable demonstration of the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Could a man be God's Son? could an angel be God's Son? Could the highest seraph or brightest archangel be God's Son? Nothing short of Deity could be the Son of Deity. But it also proves secondly, and to my mind this is a very important point, that the Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ is one by nature, and not only by office. "He sent forth His Son." Then He was His Son before He sent Him forth. Is not this plain to a demonstration? Say that an earthly father has a son living with him. He sends this son to execute some commission, or upon some errand. Does his doing that errand, or executing that commission, make him a son? Why, he was a son before, and because he is a son, the father has that confidence in him,

and that affection towards him, that he sends him to transact that business, which the father, for various reasons, might be unable or unwilling to do himself. Thus the very expression, "God sent forth His Son," plainly proves that the Lord Jesus Christ is one with the Father and blessed Spirit in the glorious Godhead, and shows also that He is not, as many say, a Son merely by office, but a Son also by nature, "God's only begotten Son," "the Son of the Father in truth and love." If it were not so, we lose all the beauty of this declaration in Scripture, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." How this touches every feeling of a father's heart! But if the Lord Jesus Christ be not a Son by nature, and only a Son by office, the force and beauty of that text are destroyed. Say that I consented to be called your son, and you consented to call yourself my father. Would that make you my father, or would that make me your son? But when that relationship already exists, in itself it is a relationship peculiar and indissoluble, and therefore, in the case of God's dear Son, invested with everything beautiful, blessed and glorious.

But again, God sent forth His Son. Did the Lord Jesus Christ, then, come *unwillingly*? No. What read we in the records of God's inspired Word? "Then said I, Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). Or, as it is in the psalm whence the Apostle quotes, "Mine ears hast Thou opened" (Ps. 40:6). There seems something very sweet in the expression. Do you recollect what we read in the Old Testament, that if a servant had become attached to his master and his master's house, that when the year of jubilee came, if he still loved his master, and consented for ever to be his servant, his master was to bring him to the door, and bore his ear through with an awl, that was to be a testimony that he should ever be his servant. The Lord Jesus Christ therefore, in allusion to this, said, "Mine ears hast Thou opened," or "digged," as it is in the margin, that is, Thou hast made Me Thy servant for ever. "Behold, My servant, whom I have chosen" (Matt. 12:18). "Behold Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth" (Isa. 42:1). And thus He is not only God's Son, but God's Servant, by virtue of a

special contract of the eternal covenant ordered in all things and sure. He therefore came willingly because "the law of God was in His heart," though He came to be a servant, to be sold at a servant's price, and to die a servant's death. God therefore sent forth His Son, parted with Him, though He lay in His bosom from all eternity, the Object of His eternal delight.

But the Holy Ghost by the pen of Paul tells us *in what way* this dear Son of God came. Oh, what wondrous depths of eternal wisdom have we here set forth! "*Made of a woman.*" It was necessary that the Lord Jesus Christ in being made the Surety of His Church and people, should be a partaker of their nature. The Apostle Paul points this out very clearly, where he draws the distinction between angelic and human nature. "For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). Had it been God's purpose to redeem devils, Christ would have taken an angelic nature. It was not God's purpose so to do. But it was God's purpose to redeem man, fallen man; it therefore was needful for the Lord Jesus Christ to take human nature, that in that nature He might be a Substitute and Surety for man. Thus we read in the second chapter of Hebrews (v. 11), "Both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one," that is, of one nature. The Lord Jesus Christ is "He that sanctifieth" the people by His blood and grace. And "they who are sanctified" are the elect of God. He is, therefore, not ashamed to call them brethren.

Again, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same, that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." He is therefore declared to have taken upon Him the seed of Abraham, that is, flesh and blood of Abraham, from whom Mary sprang. But it might be said, "Would not that involve original sin? Was not our nature tainted by the Fall? Had not the sin of Adam entered into it and defiled it? How then could the Lord Jesus Christ take that nature without taking, at the same time, its taint and corruption?" Here we see the wonderful wisdom of God; how He interposed in a supernatural, miraculous

way to bring it about that though the Lord Jesus took upon Him the seed of Abraham, He should take it without taint, spot, or defilement. He was made of a woman, it is true, and of a sinful woman; for if He had not been made of a woman, He could not have had the actual flesh and blood of the children. But He was not made of a man and a woman, as we were made. This mystery we find unveiled in the gospel of Luke. The angel Gabriel comes to the Virgin Mary, and tells her, "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name Jesus." Mary puts this modest inquiry, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:34, 35). Here is the mystery explained. And what reason we have to bless the Holy Spirit for preserving on record the speech of the angel to the Virgin Mary, showing us the supernatural generation of the Lord Jesus Christ by the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost in her womb. Observe the expression, "holy thing." The human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a person. It is a holy *thing*; a spotless human nature, which in the moment of its conception was taken into indissoluble union with the divine nature of the Son of God, so as to make Him Immanuel, God with us. Thus, though He was "made of a woman," there was no taint of sin in Him, for He was holy, harmless, separate from sinners and undefiled, and made higher than the heavens. The lamb that was slain, morning and evening, was to be without blemish, and the Paschal lamb was to be without spot, each prefiguring that the Lamb of God was to be without spot or blemish, taint or defilement. If he were not so, He could not have been a sacrifice for sin. We are defiled, polluted, stained within and without by sin and crime; we cannot therefore appear before God in our own righteousness. But the Lord Jesus came down from heaven to be our Surety and Substitute. If He, then, had had a polluted nature, God could no more accept Him than us, for He cannot look upon sin. Here is a double mystery. If the Lord Jesus Christ had not a perfect human nature, He could not have been accepted as a sacrifice. If He had not partaken of the flesh and blood of the

children, He could not have been a sacrifice for them. So that we have to admire, in a twofold way, the wisdom and mercy of God in providing such a sacrifice. This is the Lamb which God Himself has provided for a burnt-offering, the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world.

But He was also "*made under the law.*" What depths of wisdom do we also see in that! Where were the children? Where was His beloved Hephzibah? Was she not under the law? Yes. But oh! what a state she was in as being under the law! Cursed and condemned by it; every thought of her heart, word of her lips, action of her hands, under the curse unceasingly and perpetually. But see here the wisdom of God. He *sends* forth His Son. Do we not see the voluntary act of this on the part of God? Did man want it? Did man beg God for it? Did His beloved Hephzibah, cast and condemned as she was, even dream of it? She was too deeply sunk, too awfully fallen, to think of such a remedy as that; she was too deeply buried in the world, too blind and ignorant, too bent upon backsliding, too contented with her lost condition, even to feel her ruined state. But if she had felt her dreadful condition, could she ever have ventured to make such a petition—that God should send His dear Son to die for her? If such a thought could have glanced across her mind, would she have had the presumption to breathe it forth? But moved by a regard to His own eternal glory, and moved by love and pity to the Church so deeply fallen, He sends forth His Son. Made of a woman, He is made under the law, and thus comes into the place and stead of the Church for whom He died. Being made under the law, He falls under the curse of the law, as we read, "He was made a curse for us." By His obedience to the law He worked out a perfect righteousness, and at last closes a life of perfect obedience by dying under its curse. He was under the law from the first moment that He was conceived till the last moment when He cried, "It is finished!" He was under the law in life. He was under the law in death. There was not a single point or part of His life upon earth when He was not under the law, either doing what the law demanded, or suffering what the law required.

II. This leads us to the second point, which is to show *why* God sent forth His Son into the world; *why* He was made of a woman, and made under the law, viz., *to redeem them that were under the law*. This describes God's family. They, as sinners, are under the law. And oh! what it is to be under the law! Must not the law condemn every one under it? Look at this point, first, naturally. Here is a man who has committed some crime—robbery, murder, or some other evil deed, for which he is amenable to the laws of the land. He is arrested, tried, and found guilty. Is he not "under the law" when the jury re-enter the court, and their foreman pronounces him guilty? Is he not "under the law" when the judge passes sentence? In every court of justice, is not the judge seated upon a high raised tribunal, and is not the prisoner placed at the bar in a lower spot to show that he is under the law, which law issues from the mouth of the judge, who is the interpreter and expounder of the laws of the land? So it is spiritually. If you and I had never come into this world tainted with Adam's sin, if we had never sinned in thought, in word, in action, the law could not touch us. The law against murder cannot touch me if I have murdered no man. But if I were to murder, or rob, the law would lay hold of me immediately. If you have never sinned, you are free from the law; but if you have committed even one sin, and that in heart only, you are under the law, and the law can take you by the throat, and say, "Pay me that thou owest!" It will not do for a murderer to say, "I have only murdered once," or for a robber to say, "I have only robbed once." Hast thou murdered at all? Hast thou robbed at all? If thou hast done it but once, the law of the country lays hold of thee by the throat. So with the law of God. Have you committed one sin, given one adulterous look, said one wicked word, or done one sinful action—and who has not committed millions of such sins? Then are you cursed by the law, and by it condemned. The law takes you by the throat and says, "Pay me that thou owest! and if thou do not pay me, to hell thou must go, until thou hast paid the uttermost farthing."

The Lord Jesus Christ saw His bride in this pitiable condition, and the bowels of His compassion were moved for her. He therefore came down into this lower world to save her from this curse, and

was made under the law to redeem them that were under the law. But what is it to redeem? To redeem signifies to purchase from death or imprisonment. It is always used in this sense in the Old Testament. For instance, every firstborn male was to be "redeemed." How? By a price set upon it. So the firstling of an animal, if unclean, was to be redeemed at a certain price; if clean, was to be sacrificed. So if a house had gone into captivity, in other words, had become mortgaged or sold away from its original possession, it might be redeemed. All these expressions point out that redeem meant purchase out of death or imprisonment. It is summed up in the words of the Apostle, "Ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20). Thus the Lord Jesus Christ came to redeem them that were under the law by paying a price for them. "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18, 19). By this they were completely redeemed; the captives fully set free, for their price was virtually and actually paid to God. Look at the worth and value of the offering. It was not an offering made by man, but by God-Man. All the dignity, therefore, all the virtue and validity of the Godhead were stamped upon that redemption act. Thus by His own precious blood the Lord Jesus Christ redeemed them that were under the law.

But this precious redemption can only be experimentally entered into by those who know what it is to have been under the law. Those only can really value such a redemption as this who have been, or are under the law, in bondage through it, condemned by it, and fearing lest its sentence should burst forth on their heads and hurl them to a deserved hell. Others may receive the doctrine, but these only can receive the power of this precious truth as the Lord is pleased to open up the way of salvation through a Saviour's blood, and apply it warm to the heart. Oh! the value of an interest in Christ; for if not redeemed from under the law by the blood and obedience of God's dear Son, under that law they must live, under that law they must die, and by that law

they must be eternally cursed.

III. And this leads us to our last point, which was to show some of the *benefits* and *blessings* which spring out of this glorious work of redemption, "*that we might receive the adoption of sons.*"

There was a bar that previously stood in the way. God, so to speak, was willing to receive us as sinners, but there was a barrier in the path to prevent it. I will endeavour to illustrate this by a figure. Suppose that you were childless, and wished to adopt a child to bear your name, and to succeed to your property. Having looked round, at last you fix your eye on a child you think will do for the purpose. Now, nobody can dictate to you what child you intend to adopt. It is an act of perfectly free choice on your part, whether you choose this one or that, and at last you fix on one. But just as you are going to adopt that child into your family by some formal act, someone says to you, "That child has an incurable disease, he comes from parents tainted with scrofula;" or, "His father and mother are loose, vile characters, and all their children have turned out such thieves and rogues, I would not have you take that child into your family. If you do, you will certainly repent it." "Well," you would say, "until I can find some cure or remedy, I cannot adopt that child." Take this spiritually. Here is the Lord God Almighty looking down from heaven intending to adopt a certain number of men and women to be His children. But there is a bar in the way. The law comes in and says, "No, no. It cannot be. They cannot be adopted. God is holy; they are unholy; God is pure; they are impure. The law demands perfect obedience, and they are breakers of it in every point, and at every moment. Their father Adam was diseased from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, and all his sons and daughters are as diseased as he. They cannot, therefore, be taken into the family of a holy God. The holy angels would be ashamed to have them taken into co-sonship with them; those holy beings who never sinned nor fell would blush to have foul diseased sinners with them in heaven." The bar, then, must be removed. Now see how it is removed. "God sent forth

His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, *that we might receive the adoption of sons.*" Whilst the law stood in the way cursing and condemning, there was no receiving the adoption of sons, because the law forbade it. When Adam was turned out of Eden, if he wished to return he could not, for there was a flaming sword turning every way at the gates of Paradise. So the flaming sword of divine justice would shut a sinner out unless it were sheathed. But how? O wonderful way! It was sheathed in the body of Jesus Christ. That flaming sword which turned every way to guard the tree of life, being sheathed in the heart and bowels of the Redeemer, was removed, so that the way to the tree of life was opened. Yes, a new and living way was made through the flesh of God's dear Son. Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ having redeemed them that were under the law, there was a way laid open for them to receive the adoption of sons. The Lord Jesus Christ having redeemed His people by His own blood, has removed the bar, and opened a channel for the Spirit of God to flow into their souls, and make manifest to them that they are God's adopted sons. Therefore the Apostle adds, "Because ye are sons (that is, adopted into God's family), God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father." We receive the adoption of sons when God is pleased to send forth His Spirit into the heart, and never fully know it till that spirit of adoption comes, though sons before. I will endeavour to explain this by a figure. When a child is able to say "Father," is that the first time it is a child? "No," say you, "surely not, it is a child long before it can claim that tender relationship." Or take another case, which is more strictly to the point. Suppose that, as I before intimated, you have adopted a child from infancy. It may be a long time before this child can call you father, and even some time before it feels privileged to call you so, though you have adopted it. Still from the moment of adoption, from the time you first took the child into your house, laid it in the cradle, gave it a name, and called it yours, it was your child. But it might be long before it could say father, or know you as such. So spiritually; the moment the Spirit of God quickens a soul into spiritual life, and begins that good work, which He will never leave unfinished, it is a son,

because adopted into the family. Therefore the Apostle adds, "*Because ye are sons*, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts." But it is only when they know and feel they are sons that they can cry "Abba, Father."

It is, then, necessary first to fall under the law; its bondage, condemnation, and sentence bringing the soul in guilty before God. But when the Lord is pleased to open up some sweet views of Jesus and His glorious gospel, to shed abroad His love in the heart, to reveal Christ to the soul and make Him experimentally known, then His living child receives the adoption of a son, and becomes adopted experimentally into God's ransomed family, the Spirit bearing witness with his spirit that he is a child of God, an heir of God, a joint-heir with Christ.

But whence do all these blessings flow? The Holy Ghost by the pen of Paul puts them on a right foundation. Does the Apostle say, "Because ye have been so virtuous, so pious, so charitable, so obedient, and so excellent in all your conduct, therefore God has given you the adoption of sons"? And yet is not that doctrine openly or tacitly proclaimed from a thousand pulpits? Is not this the usual strain, though sometimes cautiously and delicately wrapped up? If you will be obedient, if you will serve God, if you will be religious, then He will adopt you into His family. But does the Apostle Paul use such language? See on what a different foundation he puts the adoption of children: "When the fulness of time was come." Man could not delay it, man could not hasten it; no man asked Him, no man dared to dream of such a thing. "He sent forth His Son." And what reception did His Son meet with? Was not the sword of Herod drawn against Him almost as soon as He lay in His cradle-manger? Was He not hated and despised through life, and at last did not His blood-thirsty enemies in fulfilling God's Word, nail Him to the accursed tree? As the Lord spoke in the parable, when the lord of the vineyard sent his son, this was the language of the vine-dressers, "This is the heir, let us kill him," and they cast him out of the vineyard, and put him to death. But God, unmoved by human entreaties, and undeterred by human wickedness, for His own name's sake, and

the salvation of His Church and people, "sent forth His Son to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Not because we are holy, religious, and pious, but because God hath sent forth His dear Son we receive the adoption. There it all rests. Christ is the fountain whence the streams of grace flow, and from no other source can they or do they ever flow into a sinner's heart. Have you not found it so by experience? What have all your good deeds produced? Did they ever bring you near to God? When the Lord was first pleased to open your eyes, and you began to work hard at the mill for life, did it not rather increase your burden, because you began to find sin was mixed with all you did? But when the Lord was pleased to open your eyes, and show you a precious Saviour at God's right hand, to reveal Him in your heart, and cause His blessed gospel to make sweet music in your ears, when He was pleased to raise up faith in your soul, whereby this blessed Jesus was looked up to, and received into your heart as the very Christ of God, did not this give you some springing of hope and love upward, some spirituality of mind, some heavenly breathings of affection into His bosom, some liberty from the curse of the law, some deliverance from guilt and misery? If ever your soul and mine have been revived out of darkness and bondage, it has been by the opening up of this way of salvation through Jesus Christ. Our own doings, if rested in, only set us farther from God. But the moment we look to Him, and Him alone, there is an opening up of the truth of God to the soul; the new and living way through the flesh of Jesus spangles before the eyes, and the soul finds access to God through the Lord Jesus Christ under the teaching of the blessed Comforter. We shall never have any filial feeling towards Him in any other way, or from any other source.

It is by believing the testimony that God has given of His dear Son, that we truly live and love. "He that liveth and believeth on Me shall never die." "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:11, 12). By receiving this testimony, or record (the word is the same), we become manifested as children of God. We shall

never get any better any other way; we shall only get worse. We shall never be able to overcome sin, and live a life of faith and prayer, except as the Lord is pleased to open up the blessedness of the gospel. All right motives, all right feelings, all right endeavours, all right works, all right words, only proceed from a knowledge of the glorious gospel. The reception of the gospel into our hearts always gives a measure of peace and joy in believing. But, poor dark creatures that we are, we often get so blinded by the smoke of Sinai, and we turn our eyes away from the clear light of the gospel, and so look at Moses' angry face, as to lose sight of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And dark we ever shall be, whilst we continue within the sound of the thunders and within sight of the flames of that burning mount. But when we can enter experimentally into these words, "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest...But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and unto an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the Firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:18-24)—then we begin to enter into the gospel feast, and enjoy a measure of peace and joy in believing. O see what an encouragement this is for poor burdened sinners who are condemned by the law! God hath sent His dear Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. Are you under the law? Do you feel to be there? Does the law condemn you? Is sin your plague? Are you trembling at the wrath to come? God hath sent forth His Son to redeem such as you from under the law, that you might receive the adoption of sons. When you are enabled to believe in Jesus Christ to the salvation of your soul, every blessed feeling will be raised up in your heart. The Lord will send forth the Spirit of His Son with power into your soul, enabling you to cry, "Abba, Father!" He will own the divine relationship of His own creating and bestowing, His Spirit will bear witness with your spirit that

you are a child of God, and you will be sealed an heir with God, a joint-heir with Christ; and all this flowing out of, and to the praise of, that superabounding grace which, as where sin hath abounded, doth much more abound, to the glory of God, and the salvation of His people.

GIFTS FOR THE REBELLIOUS

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road. London, on Lord's Day Morning, August 18, 1844

"Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men: yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." Psalm 68:18

The doctrines of grace are of no benefit to us, as individuals, without an experience of grace; nor, on the other hand, can we have any true saving experience unconnected with the doctrines of grace. The two are so closely united, that they never can be dissociated in the hearts of God's people. The doctrines of grace are the bones of the Bible, and the bones also of all spiritual experience. And just as our bodily frames, without those inward joints and levers which we call bones, would be but a mass of useless and immovable flesh; so all experience, as what is called such, unconnected with and dissociated from the doctrines of grace, would be but a useless mass of corruption. But, on the other hand, how useless would be the bones in our body, without the brain, heart, lungs, muscles, nerves, and all the wonderful apparatus of our natural frame! What an unsightly object a skeleton is, though every bone be in its place! It is only fit for a museum, to lecture hospital students upon.

But when those bones are clothed with muscles and sinews; when that amazing apparatus of internal life and sensation, action and motion, when eye and ear, touch and taste, and all that curiously-wrought frame which we possess, are added to the bony skeleton, then the union of the two forms a living man, who breathes, moves, and acts, by virtue of that natural life, which God has breathed into his nostrils. Now, so it is spiritually. To have nothing beyond a few doctrines in the judgment is to be like a skeleton in a glass case at Guy's Hospital. There is in it no eye, though there be the vacant orbit; no ear to hear, though there be the bony apparatus; no inward heart to beat, no heaving lungs to

breathe, no subtle nerves to run through every part, and communicate sensation to all. Thus a man may have the complete scheme of the doctrines in his head. yea, not a bone out of its place, and yet be so lifeless, dead, and dry, as to be fit only to be hung up in a museum. Ministers who preach what is called "experimental truth" are often misunderstood and misrepresented, as if they secretly slighted the doctrines of grace, because they warn their hearers against merely receiving them in the judgment, and because the main drift of their preaching turns upon the teachings of God in the soul. Many who are ignorant of this heavenly teaching, misunderstand and speak against them, because they are not perpetually holding up the dry skeleton, and shewing how every bone fits in its place: and because they dwell more upon the eye, the heart, the lungs, and the internal movements and sensations of spiritual life, as wrought by the hand of the Holy Ghost. I have thought, therefore, that a few words to clear up this misunderstanding would not be out of place, and might serve as an introduction to lead us to the text, in which we have a grand cardinal, fundamental doctrine set forth, and a blessed experience springing out of it.

That cardinal doctrine, that fundamental point, is, the **ascension of Jesus**. "Thou hast ascended on high." This fundamental point, the ascension of the Lord of life and glory to be a risen Mediator at the right hand of the Father, is here clearly stated; and yet, not drily as a mere abstract truth; for the benefits and blessings which spring out of it, are declared in connection with it; and thus it becomes clothed with the experience of these blessings in the hearts of God's people.

With God's blessing, then, we will look at the text as it lies before us. And as there are several clauses in it, we will endeavour, if God enable us, to travel through them one by one, and trace them out in an experimental manner. There are in it five distinct clauses—"Thou has ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also; that the Lord God might dwell among them."

I.—The first point spoken of in the text is, **the ascending on high of Jesus.**

As the soul is led and taught by the Spirit, it follows the Lord through all the various acts and sufferings of his life. The first spot to which the Holy Ghost takes the poor sinner is **the cross of Jesus.** That is the first real saving view we get of the Lord of life and glory—the Holy Ghost taking the poor guilty sinner, laden with the weight of a thousand sins, to the foot of the cross, and opening his eyes to see the Son of God bleeding there as a propitiation for sin. To be brought there by the power of the Holy Ghost, and receive that blessed mystery of the bleeding, suffering, and agonizing Son of God into our hearts and consciences, is the first blessed discovery that God the Spirit favours us with.

But we pass on from that to see Jesus **sleeping in the sepulchre;** for we have to die ourselves, and we want to see the Forerunner who has entered into the grave for us. We want to feel that we can lie down in the grave, and see that narrow bed in which our body will one day be stretched, in a measure perfumed by Jesus having lain there before us. And when we have travelled from the cross to the sepulchre, we then go a step further—to **the resurrection** of the Lord of life and glory. On the third day, we view him by faith springing out of the sepulchre in which he lay entombed, rising up in glory and power for our justification.

And thus we see in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus the hope of the soul for a blessed immortality. But we do not tarry there; as the Lord the Spirit gives us eyes to see, and moves our heart to feel, we travel one step further—that is, to **the ascension** of the Lord of life and glory; not tarrying on earth (**for he tarried not there**), but mounting up to see him sitting at the right hand of the Father, as the Mediator between God and Man, as the divine Intercessor, as the glorious Head of grace, as communicating out of his own fulness gifts and graces unto poor and needy souls, who are living in daily and hourly bankruptcy. These want to

receive perpetual supplies of life, light, and grace out of his fulness, to keep them in the way wherein the Lord has set their feet.

So that the ascension of the Lord Jesus up on high, and his sitting at the right hand of God, when received into the conscience under the power of the Spirit, is not a dry doctrine, not a dead bone of a withered skeleton; but is so connected with all the feelings of our heart, with all our misery and ruin, with all our wretchedness, with all our guilt, with all our daily wants, with all our hourly necessities, that, when led by the Spirit's teaching to look at this Mediator at the right hand of the Father, it becomes a truth full of blessed sweetness and power to the heaven-taught soul.

By what steps do we usually embrace the truth as it is in Jesus? First of all, for the most part, we receive it **as a doctrine**; the judgment being more or less informed, the eyes of the understanding being enlightened to see it in the word. The doctrine for some time may be floating in our mind: but after a time, as the Lord leads us more into a knowledge of our own hearts, and into a deeper feeling of our necessities, he lets down the truth from our head into the heart, and it then becomes **a truth**. It is very sweet to have a doctrine turned into a truth. But after a time, we want something more than a truth: we want it **as a blessing**. When we are brought into pressing straits and severe trials, we need the doctrines, which we first received into our minds as truths, now to be blessed by a divine application to our souls. Thus, what we first knew in our judgments as **a doctrine**, is afterwards received in our conscience as **a truth**, and then is applied to our very heart of hearts as **a blessing**; and so we find God's word, and eat it, to the joy and rejoicing of our souls.

Thus it is with respect to Christ's ascension. We receive it first as **a doctrine**, as a great and glorious part of the scheme of salvation; then we begin to see, as we are led more and more into a knowledge of it, what a wonderful **truth** it is, to have a Mediator at the right hand of God; to have an Intercessor

pleading, by the efficacy of his atoning blood and justifying righteousness, for poor, needy, guilty souls. This draws out the faith, hope, and love of the heart to this ascended and interceding Mediator; and then, as the Lord the Spirit reveals the virtue and efficacy of this glorious Mediator in the guilty conscience, the truth becomes a rich, unctuous, and savoury **blessing.**

So that far from experience casting out the doctrines of grace, it only leads the soul into a vital acquaintance with them; and we might as well think of saving our lives by drawing the bones out of our body, as of blessing our souls by casting out the doctrines of grace: yea, we daily feel more deeply the need of the doctrines being brought into our heart by divine power; we feel them more to be the stay and support of our soul, as the arm I am now raising is stayed and supported by the bones which God has placed there.

"Thou hast ascended on high." When sin, shame, confusion, darkness, and all the wretched workings of a depraved nature stand up like so many barriers betwixt our guilty souls and God, and the reality of there being a risen Mediator at the right hand of God the Father drops with a measure of divine power into the heart, then what a blessing the doctrine becomes, that there is such a Mediator, through whom guilty, bankrupt souls can find access to, and acceptance with that God whom they have been taught to fear!

II.—**"Thou hast led captivity captive."** The Holy Ghost here gives us, if I may use the expression, a glimpse of the triumphant procession of Jesus. Though hid from mortal eye, there was a triumphant procession, in which Jesus returned to glory; and to this we have allusions in scripture. For instance, we read there was a chant, which sounded through heaven, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in" (Ps. 24:7). So Paul speaks, "Having spoiled principalities and powers, he **made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it**" (Col. 2:15). The apostle is here alluding to a custom in ancient times of giving a

conquering general a public triumph when he returned home. On these occasions they were always attended with a long procession of prisoners; and they used to reserve the conquered kings and princes to grace their triumph, considering that the higher the rank of their captives, the greater was the glory of the conqueror. The apostle, then, alluding to this, represents Jesus as "making a shew of them openly," that is, exposed to public view (**as the conquerors at Rome**), "the principalities and powers" whom he had spoiled, "triumphing over them," and dragging them as captives at his chariot wheels. The same idea is contained in the text, "Thou hast led captivity captive."

By "**captivity**," we are to understand those who exercised tyranny over others during the time they were allowed to reign. So that when Christ led captivity captive, he led bound in chains and fetters those who had kept in bondage and hard imprisonment, such as he came to redeem.

Let us, then, take a glimpse of some of those whom the Lord triumphant led captive. For instance,

1. There is **the law**. And does not the law bring bondage into every soul that knows its spirituality? We know not the purity and spirituality of God's law in the conscience, till we are brought into bondage by it. For this is the grand mark of the law, that "it gendereth" (**or begetteth**) **to bondage** (Gal. 4:24). Now that it "gendereth," or "begetteth," shews that there is a vital power in it; that it is not a dead letter: for a dead letter gendereth not. There must be life in the parent, in order to give life to the offspring. So when the law gendereth to bondage, it as a living principle produces guilt and fear in the conscience, and thus casts the soul into bonds and imprisonment.

Some of the Lord's people are not able clearly to trace out in their soul's experience whether they have passed through this work of the law upon their conscience. They cannot perhaps just put their finger upon the precise time, nor discern precisely its operation upon their soul; they cannot draw out an experience such as they

read in books, and hear others of God's people unfold. This tries and exercises their minds, whether they have known anything of the law as working wrath in them; for they feel that the Law must be known in its spirituality and power as well as the Gospel.

The word of God gives us several tests as to the operation of the law upon a man's heart. **One** I have mentioned—that it "gendereth to bondage;" **another** is, that "it worketh wrath" (Rom. 4:15); **a third**, that "by it is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20).

Cannot you trace out these effects upon **your** soul? Have you never felt guilt and bondage before God; so that you have been shut up in a dark prison, out of which you could not come forth into the liberty of the gospel; so shut up and imprisoned, that nothing but the Lord's own word sealed upon your conscience could set you free? Here is a mark that points out one of the Lord's prisoners, "a prisoner of hope;" that he will not let himself be delivered, if I may use the expression, by false keys; he will not suffer any but the Lord himself to deliver his soul; and all other deliverers he looks upon as forgers that come to his prison cell with pick-locks. He knows that if not delivered by the Lord he will have, like a prisoner escaped and caught, to go back again—and have heavier chains put on him—to be put into a closer and darker cell than the one out of which he had fled. Such a soul has known something of the bondage of the law in his conscience. We read, that the children of Israel in Egypt "sighed and groaned by reason of the bondage." Again, "Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee: according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die" (Ps. 79:11). Thus the quickened soul groans before God under guilt, bondage, hardness of heart, fears of death, and a thousand tormenting doubts how the scene will end. These things imprison the soul as in bonds and fetters of iron. And he that has known these bonds and fetters knows something of the spiritual application of the law to his conscience.

Now from this captivity none could ever be delivered except Jesus had risen up on high. The broken law never can pronounce a gaol delivery; therefore not a single prisoner could ever have come out of the condemned cell, but all must have remained in a state of bondage and wrath for ever, had not the Son of God obeyed its demands and suffered its penalties, and thus brought in an everlasting righteousness.

2. Again. **Death!** O what a captivity does the fear of death at times exercise over the tender consciences of God's people! There are some professors who affect to live always above the fears of death. But it is to be feared that in most cases this confidence rather resembles the hardihood of many a felon who has to swing before the doors of Newgate, than the sweet peace, which the Lord at times gives to his tried people. This boasting confidence does not arise from any divine testimony dropped into their consciences by the power of God; that is another matter. It is in many a hardened recklessness, resting on the letter of truth, the fruit of ignorance and carnal insensibility, not the living assurance of faith; and thus, though it takes another form, springs from the same root as the vain-confidence of the felon. The Lord's people, who have been brought solemnly to feel what eternity is, what a holy and just God they have do with, and that they have deserved a thousand hells, often painfully know, especially if their tabernacles be weak, what it is to sink very low under fears of death. When all is dark within and gloomy without: when they see not their signs; when there is no sweet testimony of interest in the blood and love of the Lamb: when unbelief and infidelity seem to carry all before them: when their families and circumstances all arise before their eyes: and Satan sets in like a flood to overwhelm them with a thousand terrors—in these seasons, Death, cruel Death exercises a sad captivity over them.

Now the Lord of life and glory has "led captivity captive." He "hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). To accomplish this, the Son of God came into the world, as we read, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself

likewise took part of the same: that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil: and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14, 15). The scriptures, therefore, do not speak of God's people dying; they call it "falling asleep." Thus it is written of Stephen, though he expired battered and crushed with stones, that "he fell asleep" (Acts 7:60).

So the apostle exhorts the Thessalonians, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope: for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (1 Thess. 4:13, 14). Jesus, the Forerunner, has passed through the portals of the grave. He has perfumed that narrow bed by his sacred body lying in it; and has risen out of it "because that it was not possible that he should be holden of it." "The sting of death is sin;" He has put away sin, and thus extracted the sting. "The strength of sin is the law;" He has fulfilled the law, and thus destroyed its curse. Thus, through the resurrection and ascension of the Lord of life and glory, the ransomed can sing this song when the Holy Ghost leads them into the experience of it. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

3. **Sin**, inward sin, the lusts of our depraved nature, the corruptions of our carnal mind, and all the oozings forth of that vile puddle, of that internal sewer (**for no London sewer ever carried into the Thames filth to be compared with that which chokes up at times our hearts**) bring sad bondage into the conscience of those who fear God. Some people think very lightly of sin. But I will tell you the character of those who think so. We have it pointed out to a Tee in the Book of Proverbs, "Such is the way of an adulterous woman: she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness" (Prov. 30:20). That is just the character of some persons in a profession of religion. They think lightly of sin: they will do the most

inconsistent things, break through every precept and every check of conscience, and plunge recklessly and heedlessly into the worst of transgressions: and then feel no concern. They feel no godly sorrow; there is no rolling upon their beds at night, no great drops of tears gushing down their cheeks, no sobs as though their very hearts would break. O no; they say, "we are in the covenant; sin cannot damn us; sin cannot harm us: therefore why should we be troubled about it?"

But the Lord's people, those really taught by God's Spirit, have their consciences made tender; and these know what captivity sin exercises over them, and what trouble it causes them. Our lot, if we are God's people, is to have trials and troubles; and some have trials enough to make them sigh and groan sometimes nearly all the day long. Our poor tottering tabernacles, providential trials, family afflictions, unkind friends, slanderous and cruel enemies, the accusations of Satan, together with the gloom of our minds and the sinkings of our hearts, all form an accumulated weight of affliction. But none of these trials bring into such bondage, or lie so heavy on the mind, as the painful feelings produced in the conscience by the daily and hourly workings of sin in the carnal heart. Our roving eye, our filthy imagination, our depraved nature, our backsliding, adulterous, idolatrous heart, is a greater burden to our souls than all our other troubles and trials put together.

Supported by the Lord, we can bear afflictions; but our depraved heart, in its rebelliousness, filth, and infidelity, robs the conscience of peace, because it fights against the Father, rejects the Son, and grieves the Spirit: and thus causes a Three-One Jehovah to hide his face and testify his displeasure. But the Lord has led this captivity captive. Sin shall not condemn us, if we have an interest in the Son of God. He has "made an end of sin." O that faith could follow him in this! "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1). "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). What a glorious path for faith to mount up to

her ascended Lord! When faith is in living exercise, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus is no dry doctrine, no mere bone in the skeleton: but, clothed with experience, becomes a holy feast to the soul full of marrow and fatness.

If we could but view by faith the Lord of life and glory ascending on high as the risen Mediator, as the great High Priest over the house of God, leading captivity captive;—dragging as his vanquished prisoners **the law** that curses and condemns—**death** which has filled us with so many fears—and **sin** which has caused us so often to sigh and groan—if, I say, we could but take a faith's view of the ascended Mediator, and see him lead captive those enemies of our souls, it would be no dry doctrine, but would drop into our hearts as a shower, and fall like dew and rain on the parched soil.

III.—"**Thou hast received gifts for men.**" What men? **All** men? Why, if that were the case, they would all have it—would they not? Suppose a person were to lodge in a banker's hand a sum of money for **all** the children of one family; and the banker were not to let the eldest or the youngest have one penny of it—should we call that banker an honest man? Would not honesty consist in this, to give every penny of that which was entrusted to his charge to the persons over whom he was made trustee, and for whose advantage he received it? To say then, that **all** men are interested in the gifts of God, would be to make the Lord Jesus Christ a dishonest Mediator at the right hand of the Father. He would have received gifts for all, and yet does not give them to all; has received grace for all, and does not bestow grace upon all; has received eternal life for all, and does not give eternal life to all; has received pardon for all, and does not make known pardon to all! Surely this doctrine would make the blessed Lord of life and glory at the right hand of the Father to be dishonest and unfaithful to his trust. I could not venture to use a word that would be applicable to him, supposing such a doctrine could be substantiated: I would not give utterance to it, even in thought. If he is, as we know he is (**blessed be his Name!**), "full of grace and truth," would he not give to the last mite everything put in

his hands? Would not his loving heart and sympathising bosom deal out every grace and gift stored up in his fulness? And will one intended recipient be omitted? Will one person be passed by for whom mercy was designed?

When then it is said, he "received gifts for men," it is put generally for some men. It does not say, '**all** men.' There is a sweet ambiguity to my mind in the words "received gifts **for men,**" because it is **as men** that we receive them. The Holy Ghost does not expressly state whether some, few, or many are intended. It is literally, "**for man,**" for a fallen child of Adam, for ruined man; that we, feeling our need, our frailty and weakness, our sinfulness and helplessness, might come to Jesus as the fallen children of a fallen parent to obtain pardon and peace.

But what has he received? **Gifts.** These are freely bestowed by the Father; lodged in him as the all-sufficient Mediator; and communicated out of his fulness to the sheep of his fold. But of what use are gifts except to those who need them? You know, if a person does not want anything, a gift is an insult. You would not venture to offer a sixpence to a nobleman rolling by in his carriage. It would be an insult; not a gift. But a poor starving beggar would receive with gratitude what the wealthy nobleman would throw away with contempt. Is not this the case spiritually? If I want nothing; if I am sufficient in myself for everything; if I am strong, holy, righteous, wise, going to heaven easily and comfortably—what do I want of the Lord's gifts or graces? What do I want of divine communications to my heart and soul?

And is it not true literally and naturally, as I am sure it is spiritually and supernaturally, that the more deeply we are sunk in poverty, the more the gift is needed, and the more the gift is valued? The preciousness of the gift rises just in proportion to the want of the person to whom it is given. Look at it spiritually. When my eyes stand out with fatness, and I have more than my natural heart can wish: when I have as much religion as I can hold, and tower to heaven in vain-confidence (**though, through mercy, God never lets me get there**), yet supposing I could

get there, what should I need of the gifts dropping down into my heart from the fulness of the Son of God? What need of light, life, grace, and mercy—what need of the divine presence -what need of any one heavenly communication? But the more deeply I sink into soul poverty and soul wretchedness: and the more I feel of my thorough ruin and insolvency—do I not want all the more, and prize all the more, the gifts of grace which are treasured up in the fulness of Christ to supply that necessity?

Now the Lord God Almighty foreseeing the destitution of his people, and foreseeing the depths of ruin and misery into which they would sink; foreseeing the fall of our first parents and all its dreadful consequences, appointed this Mediator, and lodged in him, in his divine fulness, all spiritual gifts, graces, and supplies for the wants of his people. Therefore, we read, "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). It is out of his fulness that everything is received to save, bless, and comfort the soul.

But what are those "gifts?" Time will scarcely allow me to go through them all; yet I cannot pass by the words without specifying a few.

1. The gift of faith, for we read expressly, "it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). This is the grand master-grace of the soul; it is the grand wheel, which moves every other wheel in the heart; it is the eye, the ear, the hand of the new man of grace. Only so far as we have faith, and the Lord draws out this faith in exercise, have we any true spiritual feeling. But what makes me prize the gift of faith? It is knowing so much and so painfully the inbeing and inworking of unbelief. Is not this the case naturally? What makes me prize health? It is having a poor weakly tabernacle. What makes me prize rest? Fatigue. What makes me prize ease? It is pain. What makes me prize food? It is hunger. What makes me prize the cup of cold water? It is thirst. By these feelings, I not only know the reality by the want of it, but also enjoy the blessing when communicated.

It is just so spiritually, as naturally. What can I know of faith, except I am exercised (**and exercised I am more or less daily**) by the workings of unbelief, infidelity, questionings of the reasoning mind, and all the spawn of an unbelieving heart? As the soul is tossed up and down (**and often it is tossed up and down on this sea of unbelief**) it learns to prize the harbour of faith. And when the Lord mercifully communicates a little faith to the soul, and faith begins to realize, feel, experience, and feed upon the truth as it is in Jesus, then we know what faith is by the possession of it. We want two things to teach us the enjoyment of things. We want hunger to teach us what an appetite for the loaf is: and we want the loaf to teach us the sweetness of bread, we want fatigue to teach us the sweetness of laying down our bodies on a soft bed: and we want the soft bed to teach us how sweet rest is. We want pain and sickness to teach us the want of health: and we want health to teach us the enjoyment of health. And so spiritually. These two feelings are so united and locked into each other; the one is such a wondrous mortice, and the other such a wondrous tenon; they so fit into, confirm, and strengthen each other, that neither can be spared.

What a mercy it is that the Lord has the gift of faith to bestow! Here are poor souls toiling, troubling, labouring, groaning, sighing, oppressed with unbelief, that great giant in the heart, who has slain his thousands and tens of thousands. How our souls sometimes sink down under this wretched unbelief! But how we prize the faith all the more when it comes! How all the sinkings make the risings higher—and all the sadness makes the change more blessed! As the tossings to and fro of the sailor upon the sea, with all the perils and sufferings of the voyage, make the calm harbour so pleasant; so all the tossing up and down of unbelief endears the holy calm of living faith to the soul.

2. But the Lord has the gift of **hope** also to bestow. What a blessed grace that of hope is! Men despise hope in our day. They are like the nobleman, who would throw the sixpence in your face; nothing will do for him under a thousand pounds, or a large estate. Many who profess religion are like this nobleman, who perhaps has all his estates mortgaged, and is really not worth a

penny: but he cannot descend from the heights of his grandeur to own himself an insolvent. So many of these high and lofty professors despise a good hope through grace, and nothing will do for them but assurance; though when we come to the Spirit's work upon the conscience, they have never felt the inward witness of the Holy Ghost that they are the children of God. The Lord's people prize everything that God communicates with power and sweetness to the souls. I have often been glad to feel the springings up of a gospel hope, in the absence of clearer testimonies.

How the scriptures speak of "a good hope through grace:" and call it "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil!" What a blessed grace must that be which thus enters into the very presence of Christ! How too, the word of God speaks of it as the twin sister with faith and love (1 Cor. 13:13); and declares, that it "maketh not ashamed," because it springs out of the "love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost." (Rom. 5:5.)

Now we learn what "a good hope through grace" is, by being tossed up and down on the waves of despondency, and almost at times sinking into despair. Evidences so darkened, the heart so shut up, the mind so bewildered, sin so present, the Lord so absent, a nature so carnal, sensual, idolatrous, and adulterous—no wonder that amidst so many evils felt or feared, the soul should at times sink into despondency. But at such seasons the blessedness of "a good hope through grace" is found; and when this anchor is cast into and enters within the veil, taking hold of the blood and righteousness of the great High Priest, how strongly and securely it holds the ship, so that it shall not be utterly overwhelmed in the billows of despair!

3. **Love**, too, is another gift, which the risen Mediator has received, that he may freely communicate it out of his fulness to his people. And we must be brought to feel that it is **a gift**. Could we produce or keep it alive in our own hearts, we should burn incense to our own skill or our own care. But when we often feel

as hard as the very pavement on which we tread; and when we can no more create one feeling of love towards Jesus, his people, his cause, or his truth, than we can touch with our finger the comet in the sky; nay, what is worse, when we feel not merely the want of love, but enmity, we are convinced by painful experience, that the least feeling of love is the gift of the Lord.

Some perhaps will scarcely believe that a child of God can feel enmity against Christ: but his carnal mind is unmitigated enmity against him. And O, what a cutting feeling it is for a follower of the Lamb to have a principle in him which hates Christ—hates, bitterly hates his Person, hates his holiness and purity: which could join in the cry. "Crucify him, crucify him," and push and strike him with the Roman soldiers and the Jewish rabble. Unless painful experience convinced us that there was such a dreadful principle within, we could not believe that there was this devilish enmity in our heart against him whom our souls desire to love and adore. But what should we know of the pure and precious gift of love if we were not thus experimentally convinced that we could not create it? And when given, must it not be tried? It is the trial of love that makes it manifest.

How often it is so with the mother of a family. She has, perhaps, a number of children, five or six, and she does not know which she loves most. But perhaps the Lord lays his afflicting hand on one of them, and the child is likely to die. How soon the mother begins to feel the yearnings of love toward her sick child! She did not feel this while the child was playing about; but directly the Lord lays his hand upon it, and sickness comes, then what love the mother has—love which she never knew before! So with our partners in life: how many hours may pass away without our particularly thinking upon them, while there is nothing to call forth our love; and perhaps, the husband and wife **(I do not speak here experimentally)** may have been jangling and wrangling, instead of being mutually kind and affectionate. But if the Lord lays his hand of affliction upon one of them, how soon all these things are dispersed, like the clouds before the rays of the sun this morning!—how soon love and tenderness flow in, and all unkind feelings are forgotten! So with the soul that feels enmity,

coldness, deadness, hardness, carnality, perverseness, and aversion to everything holy and heavenly.

These exercises try love. How many poor children of God are obliged to drag as it were their bodies to chapel! How often have I come into the pulpit with a thousand rebellious feelings, and wished I was anything but a preacher! But when we begin to feel a little life in our soul, and the heart is melted and softened by the goodness of the Lord, we sing a different note, and say. "How good it is to be here! O wretch, wretch, to have such an aversion to those things which my inmost soul desires to love! What a vile creature was I to loathe and be weary of the Lord, and of these heavenly realities in which I know all my happiness really to consist!" But what know we about love, if we have not all this enmity, carnality, and coldness to try it? When we have been exercised with all these wretched feelings, and the Lord begins to drop into our hearts a little mercy and grace, and to draw forth our affections unto him, we then begin to feel what a sweet thing love is.

Love is the sweetest balm man can taste in this life. It is so naturally. There is a sweetness in love. When we love our wives, our children, our friends, there is a sweetness and tenderness in the very feeling, that is—as moralists say of virtue—its own reward. Coldness, dislike, envy, prejudice, jealousy, suspicion, peevishness, quarrelling—these sparks of hell burn and torture every spot on which they fall. And so, if ever there is a hell in a man's bosom, it is when full of hatred against God and his people. But if ever we feel a foretaste of heaven, it is when the Lord kindles some meltings of love, some drawings of affection toward Jesus and to them that are his. Then enmity and prejudice flee away; and we feel as if we could take all the people of God into our bosom, and say, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

And so with every other grace, such as filial fear, meekness, humility, godly sorrow, contrition, self-abasement, patience, prayerfulness, watchfulness, heavenly-mindedness, and every

other fruit of the Spirit: they are all gifts which Jesus has received as the risen and ascended Mediator, and which he has to bestow upon those who feel their need of them.

IV.—But we cannot pass over the next clause of the text, "**even for the rebellious also.**" Blessed be God for these words! My friends, what would become of your souls and of mine, if God's gifts and graces were for the pious, religious, holy and consistent? My soul could have no part nor lot in that matter, I am sure. But "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:16). We cannot erect a ladder of piety, and clamber up into the presence of God by becoming, by our own strength, wisdom, and righteousness, what is called decidedly religious and serious. Before we can rise up, we must fall low. We must sink down into a sense of our own ruin and helplessness, feel our thorough want of everything good and Godlike, have the secrets of the charnel-house we carry about with us opened up to our view: and then, when sunk to the lowest, be lifted by the Lord himself up out of this abyss of ruin. O that just suits the poor, guilty, filthy wretch, who has nothing but rags and ruin to call his own, and at the same time it enhances the glory of the Mediator, and puts the crown upon his revered brow!

"**For the rebellious.**" What a painful thing it is to be rebellious! Would to God I were never so! I would be submissive; I would be patient; I would be meek; I would be gentle; but to be rebellious—there is hardly any feeling worse than rebellion to a man whose conscience is made tender in God's fear. To have rebellion against a holy and wise God; rebellion against his dealings with us in providence; against his teachings in grace; because we have not more of the light of his countenance: because we have not more and clearer testimonies and manifestations! We know in our judgment that God cannot err in any of his dealings, and yet to find at times such awful rebellion against God—O how painful it is! The least trifle can work up rebellion. It does not want a storm or a gale to lift up its proud waves. The slightest breath, the faintest breeze that blows, will at

times stir up the billows of the rebellious heart, and make it swell with tumultuous heavings. Nay, the heart at times, like the sea in an earthquake, will work itself up into rebellion, without the least breeze to ruffle it.

Even when all things are smooth in providence, and the Lord is showering down his temporal mercies, rebellion will arise. As the very warmth of the sun which ripens the fruits of the soil makes the beer ferment and turn sour in the cask, so the sun of providence often sets rebellion at work. "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked." Now, this is what makes it so grievous. What a trying thing it is to you parents, when you have done all you can to feed, clothe, and educate your child, and been uniformly kind and affectionate towards him. to find that this perverse offspring will do nothing else but fume and sulk, and plague you with his rebellion continually. This is just a picture, an outline, of what our hearts are by nature: perpetually fuming, sulking, fretting, and rebelling against the Lord: though perhaps they have been cut down by guilt about it, and have fallen down bleeding before God under a sense of vileness and horrible baseness.

But what a mercy it is to the poor souls that groan and grieve under a rebellious heart, that this ascended Mediator has received gifts for them! It is not your patience, meekness, and good temper, nor your gentle and quiet disposition, that bring down grace into your hearts; but God the Father has lodged all the graces and gifts of the Spirit in his dear Son, and they are given to you because you have an interest in his blood and righteousness. The Lord teaches us this. If we were always patient, meek, holy, submissive, never harassed by the Devil, and never felt the workings of corruption, we should begin to think we had some power to please God in ourselves, and should slight and neglect a precious Saviour. As Bunyan said of himself, before the Lord shewed him what he was, "I thought I pleased God as well as any man in England." But when taught by painful experience what a depraved nature and rebellious heart we carry in our bosom, when the Lord lets down a little mercy and grace

into our soul, we then know the blessed quarter whence it comes, and learn to abhor ourselves and bless his holy name.

V.—But after all, the chief beauty of the text, the grand mystery of it, is contained in the last clause, which time will not allow me to unfold, even if I had the ability, for it is the crowning point: **"That the Lord God might dwell among them"**—that the Lord God might have a temple in which he will dwell, a sanctuary to fill with his glory, a people to shew forth his praise, a heart in which he himself might live and lodge, and, if I might use the expression, find himself a home. What a mystery is couched in that language of Isaiah, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, **with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.**" (Isai. 57:15.)

O what a mystery that God should have two dwelling-places! The "heaven of heavens," that "cannot contain him," and the humble, broken, and contrite heart! But in order that the Lord of heaven might have a place in which he could live and lodge, God gives to his people gifts and graces: for he cannot come and dwell in the carnal mind, in our rebellious nature, in a heart full of enmity and wickedness: he therefore makes a lodging-place for himself, a pavilion in which the King of Glory dwells, the curtains of which are like the curtains of Solomon. His abode is that holy, divine nature, which is communicated at regeneration—"the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Thus Christ dwells in the heart by faith (Eph. 3:17); and is in his people, "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). And this made Paul say, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). This is the object of God's dealings—that the Lord God might dwell in his people; that there might be a union betwixt the church and her covenant Head: "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one" (John 17:23). This is the grand sum of all God's dealings, the unfolding of the grand enigma, the solution of the incomprehensible mystery, "God

manifest in the flesh"—that the Lord God might dwell in his people; "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (2 Cor. 6:16) and thus glorify himself by filling their hearts with his grace and glory, as Solomon's temple was of old, and that they might enjoy him, and be with him when time shall be no more. This is the reason why he received gifts for the rebellious; this is the grand key to all the Lord's dealings with the soul, and all his mysterious leadings in providence—that the Lord God might dwell in the hearts of his people here, and be eternally glorified in them in a brighter and a better world.

And to what conclusion does this lead us? To this—that only so far as we have received gifts into our heart and conscience out of the fulness of the Mediator, only so far does the Lord God dwell in us, and only so far have we any evidence we are among his people. Therefore we must take the two things in connection. Want will not do alone—riches will not do alone; unbelief will not do alone—faith in the doctrines will not do alone. But when riches meet want, pleasure meets pain, food meets hunger, water meets thirst, balmy blood meets a guilty conscience, and the robe of righteousness meets the naked soul—then the soul is humbled and God glorified. And this is the grand end of all God's dealings and all God's dispensations, that the Lord God might dwell in his people. It will be the glory and bliss of heaven: and eternity itself will never fathom that mystery: for till we have the line of God to measure it, we never can have a true, right, and perfect conception of it.

THE GLORY OF ZION HER SURE DEFENCE

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham on Tuesday Evening, September 30th, 1845

"And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain" Isa.4:5, 6

This chapter is closely connected with the preceding one. Indeed, the second, third, and fourth chapters of this prophecy may be said to form one series. The last verse of the third chapter reads thus: "And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground." In these words the blessed Spirit describes the desolation that was to fall upon Jerusalem. Continuing the same subject, the first verse of the fourth chapter proceeds to relate the consequences of that desolation, "And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach." This striking prediction dwells upon a remarkable result and feature of the general desolation that should take place. The men should be so fearfully slaughtered in war that seven women should take hold of one man who had escaped the general carnage, and seize him for a husband, that they might remove from themselves that reproach so dreaded by Jewish women of having neither spouse nor offspring. They would be willing to eat their own bread and wear their own apparel if they were merely allowed to take his name to avoid this reproach. There the chapter should have ended, for though the words which follow are connected with the desolation predicted, yet they open a new feature of the subject by declaring promises of mercy to the remnant which escapes the threatened judgments.

"In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel." A remnant is here spoken of as having escaped in this day of desolation. To this escaped remnant it is promised that "the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely." By "the branch of the LORD," I understand the divine nature of the Lord Jesus Christ; and by "the fruit of the earth," his human nature, his divine nature is beautiful and glorious to this remnant according to the election of grace, which has escaped the general overthrow. "And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem:" that is, whose name is in the book of life, and who has the life of God in his soul; "when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion," (by washing them in the fountain once opened for sin and uncleanness), "and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning." Then he adds the gracious promise contained in the text, "And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain."

The desolation has taken place literally, and I see no reason why we may not expect a restoration to take place literally also. But that interpretation I shall not now insist upon. There is another interpretation, one of a spiritual and experimental nature, applicable to the regenerated family of God, which I shall chiefly dwell upon; and as, viewed in this light, we may take the promise in the text to refer spiritually to the household of faith, so we may take also the desolation as equally spiritually verified in their experience. In other words, that there must be a desolation in them as well as, and prior to, a manifestation. When the Lord creates upon mount Zion a cloud and smoke by day, and the

shining of a flaming fire by night, it is, or following upon that day when "she being desolate shall sit upon the ground."

In looking at these words we may consider,

I. The promise itself.

II. The result and effect which flow from the fulfilment of the promise.

I. *The promise itself.* "And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night." You will observe the Lord here speaks of mount Zion. Mount Zion typifies the gospel and the blessings connected with it; as we find the apostle speaking in Heb.12:22, where, contrasting the law with the gospel, he says, "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels." When a believer is brought from mount Sinai with all its curses to mount Zion with all its blessings, then indeed he comes to Jesus as the Mediator of the new covenant, "and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." When he is come to mount Zion, there he wishes ever to abide; and not only so, but there he wishes to assemble with the saints who meet together in the name and fear of the Lord.

The Lord, therefore, has given a promise that he will "create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night." This has no doubt a reference to the pillar of the cloud, of which we read for the first time in Exodus 13:21,22. "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people." This was the manifestation of the presence of the Lord. It was a cloud to show that the Lord was invisible; as he said to Moses, "There

shall no man see me, and live" (Ex.33:20). It was in the form of a pillar, to show the certainty and security of God's favour to his people. It was on high, to show that it was from heaven, and was the guide for the people of God, pointing to heaven as their eternal resting-place. It was the open manifestation to the Children of Israel of the presence of God in their midst, the glorious effulgence of the Three-One God. To it, therefore, the eyes of Israel looked night and day. At its command they moved forward, and at its command they remained in their place.

We find also when the tabernacle was set up, that the cloud covered the tent of the congregation: "Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Ex.40:34,35). When Solomon afterwards built the temple, the same cloud came also, and filled it with the glorious presence of the Lord. "And it came to pass when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD" (I Kings 8:10,11).

This pillar, then, of the cloud spoken of in the text, the "cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night;" sets forth the manifest presence of God, his appearance unto, his dwelling among, the children of men. Now the Lord in old time, under the first covenant, restricted the pillar of the cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, to one spot. It rested on the tabernacle, and on that only. But in gospel times, according to the promise in the text, this pillar of the cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, is not restricted to one spot, but is upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon all her assemblies. Now this is fulfilled when the presence of the Lord is felt in the soul; when his favour surrounds his people as with a cloud; when the manifestation of his mercy and grace is enjoyed; when his glory shines forth in the face of Jesus Christ; when his love is shed abroad in the heart. Then the Lord creates upon such a

dwelling place of mount Zion a cloud and smoke by day.

There is, doubtless, some further spiritual meaning in its being the same pillar which by day appears as a cloud and smoke, and by night as the shining of a flaming fire. Now this may point typically to the different states and conditions of God's living family. When they are travelling by night, they want something clear and conspicuous to direct their steps. Were it merely a cloud and smoke, it would not be seen; but when it takes the form of a flaming fire, it becomes a beacon light to guide their feet. The Lord's people are often in these paths of darkness, and then they want something to direct their path; they cannot listen to every voice, they want the Lord to speak to them; they want a special manifestation of his favour, and the shedding abroad of his dying love. Where these things are not given, all with them is darkness, their evidences, their testimonies, and their expectations (when this darkness besets the soul) are all beclouded. They cannot see their way, and often can scarcely believe they are children of God at all. What they want to see is the shining of a flaming fire, to have some clear testimonies, some bright manifestations, that they are the Lord's people.

Now these are given in Christ. Did not the Shechinah and the pillar of the cloud and smoke rest upon the tabernacle? What was the tabernacle but a type of the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ? This was "the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." (Heb.8:2) Christ's body was the temple which was destroyed, and raised up again in three days: "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jno.2:19). God has sent his only begotten Son; for in him it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell, that the glory of God should shine forth in his face. The Shechinah and the cloud of divine glory rest upon him. In darkness, then, and distress of soul, when all is gloom and midnight, if we get a view of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, if we see there is a Mediator betwixt our guilty souls and God, there is strength to look to him, and a putting forth of that secret power in the heart whereby we are drawn with the cords of love and the bands of a

man. Then there is the shining of a flaming fire by night. There is then an object for faith to fix its eyes on, Christ; and his grace and glory concentrate the affections of the soul. When we can see, by the eye of faith, the glory of God shining in the face of the divine Mediator, however dark our path may be in providence or in grace, then the shining of the flaming fire by night rests upon our dwelling place. The dwelling place is, no doubt, the believer's heart; for every believer is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and Christ dwells in his heart by faith. Therefore, the Lord creates upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, in every one who is a temple of the Holy Ghost, in every one in whom he works to will and to do of his own good pleasure, this cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night, in favouring at times the ransomed soul with his gracious presence.

The promise is made also to "her assemblies." When the saints meet together in the name of the Lord, when they come up to the house of prayer, when they assemble themselves that they may hear the Word read and preached, and unite in lifting up their hearts to God, his presence is promised. The Lord will create, there is no power in man to create it; it is a divine creation flowing out of divine operation, the Lord will create by his mighty power, by a miracle of grace, through his matchless mercy, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night upon the assemblies of mount Zion. And do not the Lord's people sometimes find it so? Do not they experience the manifestation of the cloud and smoke by day, in a sense of the presence of the Lord? Do they not find, too, the shining of a flaming fire by night in the presence of the Lord more or less bedewing their souls, and resting upon their hearts? Now, wherever the Lord has blessed a soul under the Word, wherever anyone has felt the presence of God in meeting together with his people, wherever in Zion's assemblies the Lord has touched the heart with his Spirit, and given a sense of his goodness and love, he has been fulfilling this promise, that he would "create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night."

II. But we pass on to consider *what is the fruit, result, and effect of the fulfilment of this promise*. The first is this, "Upon all the glory shall be a *defence*."

The glory here signifies the same thing as the cloud and smoke by day. Thus we read, "The priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God" (2 Chron.5:14). The cloud was the way in which God in early days manifested his glory; it was a visible representation of his glorious presence. Now, "upon all the glory" (margin, *above* all the glory) "shall be a defence. And," it is added, "there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain." We gather from this that though the Lord brings his people to mount Zion, though he favours them alone and in the company of his people with his presence, yet they are not secure from enemies. They want "a defence;" and this the Lord has promised to give. If he has brought us to mount Zion, it has not delivered us, in our feelings and in our experience, from our enemies. We shall probably have more temptations after we have come to mount Zion than before we were brought there; we shall have a deeper discovery of our fallen nature; we shall have more gins and traps laid for our feet by the enemy of souls; we shall have heavier, sharper, more cutting trials; we shall have more powerful external enemies, and be compassed with greater difficulties than before.

If, then, the Lord has brought us to mount Zion, so far from being delivered from all our enemies, he will make us feel more and more that we need him for "a defence" and refuge, as well as to be the strength of our hearts and our portion for ever. A defence he provides. He has not brought his people to Zion to leave them exposed to the attacks of their enemies; for the Lord is not only "a Sun," to give them light, but he is "a Shield," to defend and protect them on every side. He is a defence from the law, which curses and condemns; a defence from the fiery darts of the wicked one; a defence from the persecuting world, and from professors having the form of godliness, but denying the power.

They cannot, they do not defend themselves; for they are weak and helpless, and exposed to every dart of the enemy. But when they are brought to mount Zion, and see and feel the cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night, resting upon their souls, upon all this glory there is a defence, something to ward off the fiery darts, something to protect them that they may find security and shelter.

But there is another fruit: "And there shall be a *tabernacle* for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain." Can this Tabernacle be anything less than the Lord of life and glory who tabernacled here below in our nature? When he brings his people to mount Zion, there is not merely a discovery of his presence; there is a sight also, by living faith, of his Person as the Son of God. There is a sight of his glory, "(the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." He then becomes a Protection, a Covert, a Shelter to all that put their trust under the shadow of his wings.

This Tabernacle seems for two purposes.

1. It is a *shadow in the daytime from the heat*; and, 2. *A place of refuge and covert from storm and from rain.*

1. The heat in those countries is dreaded as much as, if not more than the storm and rain, and protection from it is as carefully sought. Numerous references are made in the Scriptures to the heat of the climate. Take any one, "Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes" (Gen.31:40). The Lord of life and glory is therefore spoken of here as being a Tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat of the sun. Sun in Scripture not only means the Sun of Righteousness, but also the burning sun of temptation. "Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me" (Song of Sol.1:6). The bride speaks here, in a figure, of the sun of temptation, which had made her black. So when we read here of "the heat," it alludes no doubt to

the sun of temptation, which beats with its burning beams upon the soul. From this we want a shelter. When temptation beats upon a man, must it not dry him up (just as the sun burns up the ground), unless he get a shelter from it? Temptation will make him like the parched heath in the wilderness, and drain away all his strength, unless he obtain some shadow and protection. This shelter is the Lord of life and glory. Does not the lust of the flesh continually work? From painful experience I am sure it does. But whence are we to obtain a shadow from these temptations? Left to them, we must utterly fall. But the Lord often nips them in the bud, and stops them in their first birth, just as I might put my foot upon a lighted match before it burnt any farther. One infidel thought might otherwise make us avowed infidels. One blasphemous imagination would make us break out into the unpardonable sin. One worldly desire would make us do things that the world itself would be ashamed of. In fact, just as if a spark falling out upon gunpowder would immediately explode a whole magazine, or a lucifer match would set on fire a whole stack of corn, the year's produce of many acres, so one vile temptation in our carnal mind might produce a total conflagration of body and soul. Those who know what temptation is, know their thorough helplessness, apart from grace, to stand against it in any measure; and unless this temptation be subdued and restrained, it must altogether carry their souls captive, and drown them in destruction and perdition.

How, then, is a child of God to escape from them and their filth, guilt, and power in his conscience? He has but one way: " a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat." That is, to hide himself in Christ; to seek refuge beneath the shadow of his wings; to wash in the fountain once opened for sin and uncleanness; to take shelter under the glorious righteousness which is unto all and upon all them that believe. A child of God, when he feels temptations working in his heart, is taught by the Spirit to flee to the Lord, as a child flees to his mother's bosom when affrighted. He flees to the mercy of God to cover and pardon them, and to the power of the Lord to subdue and restrain them. Thus the Lord of life and glory is a "tabernacle for a

shadow in the daytime from the heat."

2. But besides the heat, there are "storm and rain." This storm and rain will one day come upon a guilty world. It was set forth in a strong figure by the deluge which overflowed the first world, and by the torrents of fire and brimstone which came down on guilty Sodom. It will burst out one day in such a way that the deluge and the destruction of Sodom will be but feeble figures of it.

Now where shall a convinced soul find a covert from this storm and rain? Have we not deserved God's wrath without measure? Do we differ from thousands and millions in hell? Are we a whit better than those who are now weltering in the burning wrath of God? Are we one whit better than those who are banished for ever from his presence? In thought, word, and action we are as bad as many there, nay, worse. There are many in hell who have not done things that we have done, said what we have said, and thought what we have thought. How, then, are we to escape the damnation of hell? There is only one place of refuge, but one covert, and that is the Lord of life and glory. His Person, his blood, his righteousness, his grace, and his love. For God has set him forth "to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." (Rom.3:25) God has appointed him to be a place of refuge, a protection, and a security from storm and rain.

But besides the *future* storm and *future* rain which will one day burst upon the world, there is also from time to time a present storm in the soul. What are the flashes of a guilty conscience? What is the feeling of conviction under sin? What is any manifestation of the wrath of God against the wanderings of our backsliding hearts? Are not they like drops of the thunder storm? Are not these the manifestations of that anger which will one day burst forth? Now the Lord gives us to feel the storm and the rain; he allows these drops of the coming thunder storm to drop upon the heads of his people. He works by our doubts, fears, exercises, and perplexities. He gives us to feel his wrath against sin, that he may beat down self-righteousness, that he may completely strip

away everything in the creature, and bring us wholly and solely to trust in himself. We find this set forth in Isaiah 28:17, "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place." The prophet is here speaking of God's people. The hail sweeping away the refuge of lies is the manifestation of God's wrath against sin, which beats them out of their false refuges. They cannot stand against the hail of divine wrath in their consciences, for they are left exposed and without shelter, until they are driven to find refuge in Christ. Thus it is a mercy to have felt the wrath of God, convictions of sin, doubts, fears, terrors, and alarms, that we by these things may flee from the wrath to come, and find in the Lord of life and glory a place of refuge and a covert from the storm and rain.

You see how these promises are made to those that are come to mount Zion, who have really embraced the gospel, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them, who know Jesus Christ and the power of his resurrection, who have a work of grace on the conscience, who know the truth by the manifestation of it through the power of the Spirit, and by these teachings are brought to mount Zion. And when they come here, they never wish to leave it again, they never wish to set foot again on the barren, desolate mountain of Sinai. Therefore the Lord gives them a dwelling place, he sets them down in the gospel, he gives them a heart to receive it in love, he communicates a power to the soul whereby it looks to Christ and obtains a dwelling place on mount Zion. He gives it this "cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night." He favours it at times with his sensible presence, and even in darkness there is the shining of a flaming fire, the eyes of the soul being directed to the Lord, even from the ends of the earth. They find too a defence in all this glory; and not only so, but in him a sure shelter. "The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." (Prov.18:10) They find the Lord of life and glory to be a shadow from the heat, so that when temptation comes they are enabled at times to flee to him. When storm and rain beat upon their heads, they flee unto him for a

place of refuge and a covert. All these things the Lord fulfils in the case of every *The Glory of Zion Her Sure Defence* ransomed and regenerated soul. Now who here can say that indeed he has been brought to mount Zion, and has felt the sweetness and power of the gospel? Who here can say, "Here will I dwell, for I desire it. This is my dwelling place, where I wish to live and die?" Who here has found the presence of the Lord and the dew of his favour resting on his spirit? Who has seen the glory of God to be a defence, so that when temptations, trials, afflictions, and sorrows came upon him, he has not looked to Assyria, not gone down to Egypt for help, but has leaned wholly and solely upon the Lord, in whom it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell? Who here has known something of the storm of hail and rain beating him out of lying refuges to flee unto Jesus with sighs, cries, desires, pantings, and groanings that he would be a place of refuge and a covert for his soul? God does not give blessings singly. He hath blessed his people with "all spiritual blessings in Christ." (Eph.1:3) If he has brought a soul to seek his face, to turn to mount Zion, and to look unto Jesus from the ends of the earth, he will fulfil every longing desire of that soul, and make it a manifest and happy partaker of his grace here and his glory hereafter.

GOD THE GREAT TEACHER AND LEADER OF HIS PEOPLE

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, Tuesday April 18th, 1864

"Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day" Psa.25:4, 5

There is one feature in true religion perhaps not much insisted upon, but not the less real and genuine; which is this, that all true religion brings the soul into vital and immediate contact with God. False religion on the other hand only sets the soul at a distance from him. We see this peculiar feature of vital godliness very much developed in the Psalms, and in other parts of Holy Scripture, where the saints of God breathe forth their desires after the Lord. The desire of their souls to get near to God, to have special dealings with the Majesty on high, to receive mercy from his gracious hands, to be blessed with manifestations of his favour, watered with the dew of his grace, and nourished as with marrow and fatness by the smiles of his countenance, shines forth very conspicuously in the Word of truth. How all these breathings after God, which you see so clearly traced out in the Psalms and other devotional parts of God's Word, establish the truth of what I was just saying, that true religion, vital godliness, bring the soul into close and personal contact with God! In opposition to this, there is no mark stamped upon false religion more evidently and plainly than this, that it sets up a false god, an idol god; not perhaps a wood or stone representation, but a god adapted to the carnal mind, and suitable to the natural heart, in a word, such a god as we see in all ages blind, fallen man has worshipped. Thus were you to analyse and examine all false religion, whatever its name or nature, you would find this feature of death stamped upon it, that it sets up a false god for the true God, a false faith for true faith, and a false righteousness for true righteousness; and thus worships an imaginary, an idol god, instead of the true and living God, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now we may be well assured, that nothing short of the

work and teaching of God in the heart can ever pull down this false god and set up in its place "the only true God, and Jesus Christ" whom he hath sent (John 17:3).

See in the words before us how the Psalmist breathes forth his soul unto God; how he draws near to the throne of the Majesty on high, and finding some access of soul to the ear of him who bows down and listens to the cry of the destitute, cries out in the simplicity of his heart, as though he could not live unless he received an answer to his petition, "Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day." In looking at these words I shall, with God's blessing, endeavour,

I. First, to trace out the *breathings of the longing soul* vented forth in the words, "Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me."

II. Secondly, the *source* of these heart breathings, inward desires and spiritual longings. "For thou art the God of my salvation."

III. And, thirdly, how David was found in a *posture*, wherein these blessings were to be communicated to his soul.

I. The very circumstance of the Psalmist breathing out these words from the bottom of his heart, shews that he was well convinced in his own mind of the utter inability of man, except by divine teaching, to find out the ways of God, or to receive them with that approbation and acquiescence, whereby alone we can enter into their beauty and blessedness. For certainly had there been any innate power or wisdom whereby he could have brought this knowledge into his own soul, it would have been at best but hypocrisy to ask God to do it for him. But he was well convinced, from deep and painful experience, that the ways of God, as the Scripture speaks, are out of sight. "Thy way," he says elsewhere, "is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known" (Psa.77:19). Well did he know and feel that there was a veil of ignorance and blindness spread over his eyes by nature, which concealed

the heavenly ways from his view. He felt therefore, that it was only as God was pleased to shew him those ways, that he had any power to see or receive them as the ways of God, any inward approbation of their blessedness, or any bowing down and resignation unto them, when they crossed his own natural thoughts and inclinations.

1. The ways of God then are, first, ways of *infinite wisdom*. Indeed, they can be no other. How do we judge of the wisdom of man? By the words he speaks, but more especially by the actions he performs. The ways of God, therefore, must be ways of infinite wisdom, because he is the infinitely wise God. But his wisdom is diametrically opposite to our own. We read therefore, that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God," (1 Cor.3:19) and we read also that the wisdom of God is foolishness with the world. But though upon these ways the marks of infinite wisdom are stamped, yet the wisdom is such that they are out of the sight of man, until they are brought down into the scope of his spiritual vision, and the wisdom stamped upon and running through them is made known to his soul by divine teaching. In order to understand the wisdom of God's ways, we must ourselves be made a partaker of divine wisdom; as the apostle speaks, "But we have the mind of Christ." (1 Cor.2:16) Only, therefore, as we have the mind of Christ, and possess a measure of the wisdom from above, can we enter into the wisdom of the ways of God.

Now look at the wisdom of the way of salvation. What a wise way it is! How stamped with the marks of infinite wisdom it is, that not a single attribute of God's justice should be tarnished, and yet that sinful man be saved; that justice should not suffer nor be diminished, and yet mercy have her full sway. But in order to enter into the wisdom of God in the way of salvation, we must have a measure of heavenly wisdom let down into our soul, so that we may see this wisdom of God in a mystery as it were with the eyes of God.

2. But God's ways also are ways of *infinite mercy*. Of course, when I speak of the ways of God, I mean the ways of God towards his people. But this mercy, as stamped upon all the ways of God, is not for the most part evident in them until we

come to see these ways laid open to our view, as full of mercy to us.

The way in which the Lord is now leading you may be a way most trying and painful to your mind, so that at times you may see in this way neither wisdom nor mercy. It may be so hidden out of your sight, or so contradictory to your own judgment and feelings, and to the desires of your own heart, that in the darkness of your mind you may do nothing but rebel against it. But the Lord's ways, nevertheless, are those of infinite wisdom. When you are led to see the ways of God in his past dealings with you, can you not look back and see that those very ways, which at the time seemed anything but those of wisdom and mercy, were still really full of both? The very ways which seemed at the time so confused, that it appeared impossible for the hand of God to be in them, we can now see bear the clearest and plainest marks of the broad fingers of deity. Thus may we not hope for the future, that as the ways of God as regards the past were stamped with wisdom and mercy, so the present and the future will also be clearly stamped with marks of the same?

3. But again, the ways of God are ways of *faithfulness*. He is a God that cannot lie; he is faithful to his Word; faithful to his covenant; and faithful to his promise. This covenant faithfulness is a most blessed attribute of the Lord. Oh, what a strong refuge for the soul, amidst all the fluctuations of time, all the changeability of daily circumstances, and all the wanderings of an unstable heart, to feel that God is unchanging and unchangeable, and that with him there is neither variableness nor shadow of turning.

4. But again, these ways, though they bear these blessed marks upon them, yet are for the most part *out of sight*. They are so elevated above the reach of human understanding, and are so peculiarly the ways of God himself, that, except to the believing eye, they are lost as it were in the heights of heaven.

Now it was this circumstance above all others which made the Psalmist breathe forth that sincere and simple desire, "Shew me thy ways, O LORD," as though he should say, "Lord, make

these ways that have been so trying, so painful, and so perplexing, plain and clear to my soul. Let me have some bright and decisive evidence that these ways are indeed ways of wisdom, mercy, and faithfulness. Oh! let me feel that though these ways may be so painful for my feet to walk in, so contradictory to my reasoning mind, and so completely out of the sight of my speculating eye, yet let me so see them by the eye of faith, that I may feel a solemn acquiescence in, and holy approbation of them." To have these desires in the soul is certainly beyond all the power of the creature; it is a religion completely out of the sight of the carnal mind, and out of the grasp of anyone but those in whose heart the Spirit of God is at work.

ii. "*Teach me thy paths.*" The path is in some measure different from the way, narrower, more intricate apparently more confined. Compare for instance the highway with a path across the fields; the one is broad, and the other narrow. Thus the Psalmist would seemingly make a distinction between the ways of the Lord and the paths of the Lord; the ways of the Lord being the ways of God's dealings with us, those, so to speak, broader ways in which he himself walks; but the paths being those narrower and more intricate channels in which he leads his people. If this view be not fanciful, the ways would be those of wisdom, mercy, and faithfulness in which God moves; and paths, the paths of personal Christian experience, in which the children of God walk. God's movements are ways because they are expansive and extensive; worthy of the broad movements of an infinite Being; but the paths wherein a child of God walks are narrow, because he himself is a creature with a narrow foot to walk in them.

But you will perhaps catch my meaning better if I open the subject more fully. Thus we read, "There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen;" (Job 28:7) and again, "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." (Prov.4:18) This path then is a path in which none walk but those who are taught, specially taught of God.

1. We may safely lay down, that to walk in *faith*, as Enoch

walked with God, is a path in which God leads the soul to walk. So again, we may say, that to walk in a sweet and blessed *hope* of interest in Christ gladdening and cheering the soul onward, is a path in which a godly soul walks. And again, where there is love felt in the soul towards the Lord Jesus Christ, we may say that to walk in *love* is a path of life in which the redeemed walk. Here then, we see at once that the path of *faith, hope, and love*, is the path in which the redeemed walk.

2. Again, it is a path of *self-denial*, for if a man do not take up his cross and deny himself, he cannot be, according to the Lord's own declaration, a disciple of Jesus Christ. He must walk, therefore, in a path of self-denial, in order to be made and manifested a true and accepted follower of the Lamb.

3. Again, it is a path of *tribulation*; for we read that it is through much tribulation we are to enter the kingdom. If we have no tribulation, we certainly lack one scriptural evidence of those who enter the kingdom of God.

4. It is a path also of *temptation*; for the Lord's people for the most part are a tempted, exercised and plagued people.

5. It is also a path of *much opposition*, for the world hates vital godliness; and what is worse, our carnal mind hates it too. We could do with the enmity of the world without, if we had not the enmity of the carnal mind within. A few words from without do not much hurt us; words from within cut deeply. One traitor in the garrison can do more harm than a host of foes.

6. Again, it is a path of *prayer*, for the Lord leads his people into those supplications and desires after himself which specially mark the out-pouring of the Spirit.

7. It is also a path of *watchfulness*, for unless we watch continually, we shall soon be entangled in some snare of Satan.

8. It is a path also of *meditation*; for we have to meditate on God's dealings with the soul, both in providence and, in grace, as well as on his blessed Word of Truth.

9. And it is a path of *communion with God*, for in this lies the main secret of vital godliness, the true mark of heart-felt religion.

Now, though really the path is but one, yet speaking, according to our feelings, the varied tenor of our minds, our diversified experience, and the dealings of God with, us, they become paths.

The soul then, feeling its ignorance and inability to understand and realise these paths as suitable and blessed, puts up, if not the words, at least the substance of them, "Teach *me* thy paths." To lie with a broken heart and contrite spirit at the footstool of mercy, beseeching God to teach us, is indeed a blessed spot to be in. It is the evidence of such a childlike spirit; and shows such simplicity, reality and genuineness, that it bears stamped upon it the indubitable marks of true discipleship. Whenever we see such a coming out of self, such a renunciation of our own wisdom, strength, and righteousness, such a putting aside of all creature religion, and such a real spirit of humility before God, we must receive it as something beyond and above nature. Nothing but the power of God seems able to bring a soul so completely out of the shell and crust of self-righteousness, and so to lay open its spiritual nakedness before him. Naturally there is something very sweet in seeing a docile, teachable disposition. And on the other hand, few things are more offensive than the pride of ignorance; the abominable conceit of people who think they know everything, when really they know nothing, but are too proud to be taught. The only road to knowledge is to possess a docile, teachable, inquiring spirit, a willingness to learn, springing out of consciousness of ignorance. This spirit is what we see sometimes in children, nor is there a more pleasant sight for parent or instructor than to see a child docile, earnestly seeking information, and glad to receive instruction. If anything can open the mouth to teach, it is from seeing such a heart to learn. But to see a man shut up in ignorance, proudly stalking in pride and self-conceit as though he were a philosopher of the highest grade; there is a something so repulsive in such a miserable being, that it shuts up all disposition to have any communication with such a lump of

pride and arrogance. So in grace, where there is a humble, quiet, docile spirit, it seems to draw forth out of the Lord's heart and mouth these secrets of heavenly wisdom which he hides from others; as he spake in the days of his flesh, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." (Matt.11:25) The babes are those who are docile, teachable and childlike, and to whom as such God reveals the treasures of his heavenly wisdom.

Now, till you are brought to this spot, you are still a stranger to heavenly wisdom, you know not that secret of the Lord which is with them that fear him, but are foolishly puffed up with your own attainments. Though perhaps you may not see it, it is a most certain truth that the pride of self-knowledge only sets you far from God, for we read that, "he beholdeth the proud afar off." (Psa.138:6) And what pride is greater than the pride of knowledge? For, as the Apostle speaks, "Knowledge puffeth up." (1 Cor.8:1)

How contrary to this is the breathing of the Psalmist, "Teach me thy paths." What confessions of ignorance are lodged in that prayer! How it says, "Lord, I am unable to see the path; show it me; when I see it I am unable to walk in it; I know if I trust to my own wisdom I am a fool. What I want then is for thee to teach me thy paths, I shall then see them, know them and walk in them with holy freedom and divine comfort."

iii. But there is another petition breathed forth in the same spirit, "*Lead me in thy truth.*" There is something not only very precious in God's truth, but something very ennobling in it. It is indeed that revelation which bears stamped upon it the highest marks of divine wisdom. Yet how few there are, speaking comparatively, who seem to have any taste of God's truth, or even the faintest desire after it. What lies, errors, and delusions can people gladly take up with in the solemn matters of eternity, deceiving and being deceived. Nay, I believe there is no error or heresy which the devil could invent which he will not find hundreds ready to believe and greedily propagate. The human mind, which seems barred to truth, lies open like an unwall'd city to the incursions of every error.

But when God by his blessed Spirit anoints the eyes of his people with his divine eyesalve, and opens them to see his truth, what light and life accompany the revelation of that truth to the soul. One of the first marks of grace, one of the first evidences of the work of God in the soul is, in my judgment, a taste for truth, a yearning and bending forward of the soul after the pure Word of God. A man may be in much darkness of mind as regards doctrine, may sit under legal ministers and be in great confusion of soul as regards his own state and standing, and yet with all that may have a true spiritual yearning after truth, and a great dissatisfaction with error. When, then, he is brought under the sound of truth, and feels a measure of its power, he immediately lays hold of it as something suitable to his state. It is food for which he has a spiritual appetite, and the voice of God so speaks in it that it seems to communicate to his heart sensations before unknown. The Lord sometimes works very strongly in this way. A person may have been in the habit of hearing error for years. Again and again has he quarrelled with it from an inward distaste of it, and yet almost dreaded to leave it lest by so doing he should take a wrong step. But let this man be brought in the providence of God under the sound of truth, or placed in a situation where he has to associate with those who love the truth, and at once he embraces it. In this way, or sometimes by reading books written by men of truth, a light is cast into his soul by which he sees the truth; and the error, which before he could not see, becomes distasteful to his soul. He has been all along under a measure of divine teaching without knowing it, but now he embraces the truth as not only suitable to his wants, and what his heart really desires to feed upon, but as something glorifying to God. I know this from experience, because when the Lord was pleased to lay eternal things with weight and power on my conscience, there was almost from the very first a bending towards God's truth, and a desire to know it and enjoy it. A soul may be for months and years entangled in a great deal of error and confusion, and yet there may be at the bottom a bending and yearning after the truth of God. It is something like a plant growing in a dark cellar. If there be but a narrow slit in the wall you will find the plant will bend towards the light, or like a tree on the top of a wall, which

(at least so I have read) will drop a root all down the wall till it reaches the ground and fastens itself in the fertile soil. Yet the plant is still in the dark, damp cellar, and the tree on the top of the dry wall.

So, wherever God has planted life in the soul, there will be a bending towards the light, though that light come in but through a chink. This in due time will lead to greater discoveries of truth, which will bring the soul into the King's palace. It will then not be a stranger walking about outside the grounds and peeping through the park palings, but like a child at home sporting in the garden and walking in and out of the rooms at pleasure.

But what makes us desire for God to lead us into his truth? Because we feel so unable to get into it of ourselves. We may see it and believe it, but we want to get into it so as to feel the blessed realisation of it in our own soul. And this God alone can do for us. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." (Rom.8:14) The Spirit of God is promised to guide the church of God into all truth, and as they are thus guided and led into it they enter into its beauty and blessedness.

iv. *"And teach me."* In the same spirit of childlike simplicity the Psalmist wanted God to be his teacher, for indeed "none teacheth like him," (cf. Job 32:22) and his teachings are "to profit." (Isa.48:17) All other teaching leaves us where it found us. I dare say from hearing me so often you have gained some instruction, some knowledge of doctrine or experience whereby your judgment has been informed.

But all this you may have gained and yet not have been taught of God. You may have gathered information or instruction from my lips, and become established in a sound creed, and yet not have been led into the truth of God by the Holy Spirit, nor been taught by him who is the only wise Teacher. All teaching of man, severed from the teaching of God, is profitless and valueless. It gives no faith or repentance, does not make sin hateful or Christ precious. It leaves us just where it found us, carnal, worldly, proud, covetous, self-righteous, in all our sin, filth, and guilt, being destitute of that operation of God in the

soul whereby we are renewed in the spirit of our mind. But God's teachings are, as the prophet speaks, "to profit." (Isa.48:17) They humble, soften, melt, comfort, bless and save. To sum up all in one word, they do the soul eternal and immortal good.

II. But I pass on to consider our second point, the source of these heart-breathings and spiritual longings. "*For thou art the God of my salvation.*" David felt that all his salvation was in God, from God, and out of God. And as the Lord had taken care of his salvation, which was the grand point, he would with this salvation, give him everything which was for his good and God's glory. As the apostle divinely argues, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom.8:32). He that hath given the greater, will he deny the less? If he has given salvation, will he not also give those things which accompany salvation? This living faith emboldened the Psalmist to ask the Lord to bestow upon him those favours which are comprehended in and flow out of salvation. Having already given him salvation, would he not supply him with further blessings by showing him his ways, leading him into his paths, and communicating special teachings from his own most blessed mouth?

Now, there is nothing which so emboldens a soul to plead with God as an assurance of his favour and mercy. It is so naturally. If we have no proof that a person has any regard for us, or any good feeling towards us, our mouth is closed to ask of him any favour. But if we have reason to believe that he is favourably disposed towards us it emboldens us to make our wishes known to him. So in divine things. As long as we are in unbelief, or doubt and fear whether the Lord has any purposes of mercy towards us, it shuts the mouth, there is no liberty to be free with his gracious Majesty, no power to ask him to communicate any blessing. But on the other hand, if he be pleased to raise up in the soul any testimony of interest in his salvation, it emboldens it to ask of him other blessings, and in a godly sense to make free with his divine Majesty. Nay, the more he gives the more it emboldens the soul to ask for more still. Does not he himself say, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will

fill it?" (Psa.81:10) Thus, the more evidence of interest the soul has in God's great salvation, the more can it ask of the Lord for blessing after blessing, as feeling a holy freedom in asking him to make them known. This to some may seem presumptuous, but the Lord is not angry when holy freedom is made use of in a child-like spirit. He is not offended, but is rather pleased at seeing his child coming unto him and pleading with him for those favours which he is so ready to bestow. You who are parents do not like to see your little ones putting their pinafores over their faces that you may not see them, or creeping away and trying to get out of sight when you come indoors. It would show there was something wrong in you or them. But to see them come forward with their faces full of joy and their eyes beaming with affection, does it not show at once that the parent loves the children, and the children the parent? Many a labouring man, when he comes home tired, feels the first beam of pleasure through the day when his little ones creep on his knee, or his wife greets him with a fond smile. It is thus that affection is mutually manifested. So in grace; if we feel a love to the Lord we can go to him and tell him our wants, get, so to speak, upon his knee and lean the head upon his bosom. When the soul is so privileged, there is an opening up of the heart whereby it can say, "Thou art the God of my salvation," which brings us to our third and last point.

III. The waiting posture of the soul. "*On thee do I wait all the day.*" These are great words to use. In what a spiritual state must David have been so as to be able to say that all day long he could and did wait upon God. Yet with a certain limitation there is in every child of God something of this spirit. It is true that he may not be always waiting on God in prayer, supplication, and meditation, in fact, it would be impossible. How are the things of time and sense to be attended to, all the daily vocations of life to be performed if a man is to be on his knees or reading the Bible all the day long? Yet without *God the Great Teacher and Leader of His People* this there may still be a waiting on God, a watching his hand, a sense of his absence, a wishing for his presence, a looking up unto him, and the movements of divine fear towards him; all which may be going on in the soul, independent of falling on our knees, reading the Scriptures, or express acts of devotion. In this

limited sense, the more spiritually-minded a man is the more will he wait on the Lord all the day. Without a measure of this watching the Lord's hand, and seeking his face, spiritual blessings are not usually obtained.

But most probably David's soul at this time was passing through peculiar trials and temptations, which placed him and kept him on his watch-tower, and being pressed down with these troubles he was continually looking out for the Lord's appearing. This, in fact, is the main benefit of trials, that they make the soul wait upon the Lord, quickening its diligence, stirring up its desires, and making it more earnest after divine manifestations.

Such then was the experience of David, and it will be our mercy if we find a measure of it in our heart.

God and the Word of His Grace the Church's Only Safeguard

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Tuesday Evening, Oct. 4, 1864

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Acts 20:32

In the commencement of my discourse this morning, I mentioned the number of years during which I have laboured in this place; and now with the same intention and in the same spirit, not, I hope to exalt myself, but to magnify the goodness and grace of the Lord, I shall name the two texts from which I preached the first time that I opened my mouth in this pulpit. On Lord's day, July 3, 1836, which was the first time that I preached here, my morning text, if I mistake not, was Jeremiah 15, part of the 19th verse: "If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth." In that sermon, if my memory serve, I pointed out that there were precious characters and vile characters, precious doctrines and vile doctrines, precious experience and vile experience, precious practice and vile practice; that the servant of the Lord was to take forth the one from the other, they being so mixed and confused together that if he did not separate them, and show clearly and experimentally the eternal distinction between them, he could not and would not be God's mouth. Was not that a discriminating ministry? In the afternoon, if I remember right, I spoke from John 1:13: "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." In that sermon I endeavoured to show the distinction between the heavenly birth and its earthly counterfeits, pointing out the grand distinction between being born of God and being born of blood, of the will of the flesh, and of the will of man.

Was not that a discriminating ministry? And as I began with a discriminating ministry, so I desire to end with a discriminating

ministry; for I never wish to preach any other but a searching, separating, discriminating gospel. How far the Lord may have led me more deeply into his blessed truth; how far he may have taken the veil more off my heart and shown me more of myself; how far I may have dropped some sharp and cutting expressions which I used in those days, and which might not have savoured altogether of the spirit of the gospel, I must leave others to judge who in these matters can discern more clearly than myself both what I have been and what I am. But it is a mercy, for which I desire to be thankful, to have been preserved during so many years, as I hope the Lord has preserved me, from any other ministry or from preaching any other gospel than that which I began with in the fear and grace of God.

But to turn from myself to a much worthier subject. When I compare myself with the great apostle of the Gentiles, I seem scarcely worthy of the name of a minister at all. When I see his ardent zeal for the glory of God, his burning love for the souls of God's people, his godly, self-denying, and holy life, the power which rested upon, and the blessing which attended his ministry, I seem, in comparing myself with this eminent saint and servant of the Most High, to shrink into nothing, either as a saint or as a servant of God.

But as we can only minister according to the ability which God giveth, I shall this afternoon, with his help and blessing, take up for our consideration a portion of the farewell address which this man of God uttered to the elders of the Church at Ephesus, whom he had requested to meet him at Miletus, from which it was distant about forty or fifty miles, that he might give them a parting word of warning, instruction, and admonition.

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

Let us then without further preface, as we are also about to part, seek, as the Lord may enable, to penetrate into the mind and

meaning of the Holy Ghost as speaking here by the mouth of Paul: and in so doing I shall endeavour,

I.—*First*, to show what seems to be intended by the expression, "*I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace.*"

II.—*Secondly*, what this word of God's grace is *able to do, to build up the saints of God, and to give them an inheritance.*

III.—*Thirdly*, the *character and description* of that favoured people for whom this inheritance is reserved, and amongst whom we must be found if we are to enter into the joy of the Lord, "*them which are sanctified.*"

I.—Nothing can exceed the affectionate, tender, and paternal spirit which breathes forth in the words of the apostle, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God."

i. There were indeed deep and important reasons why he should entrust them to his gracious care and charge. His discerning, prophetic eye saw that great perils from without and from within awaited the Church at Ephesus. Observe how clearly he penetrated into the dark veil of futurity as regards perils from without: "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." It is as though his prophetic ear could hear the howling of the wolves already around the fold. Whilst he was there, as through the grace of God their guard and shepherd, the wolves kept a respectful distance. They were afraid of meeting a blow from the shepherd's crook; they therefore howled round the fold waiting for an opportunity when the shepherd was gone to burst in. These were external perils. But he saw something looming in the dim future which much more alarmed his prophetic spirit and much more painfully grieved his tender mind. There were perils within as well as perils without. "*Also of your own selves*"—that was the cutting stroke—"also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." No doubt, as well knowing from a personal intercourse of three years all the

members of the Ephesian Church, he already foresaw who they were amongst them who would be the first to arise to speak these perverse things. His discerning eye already read their hearts teeming with all that pride and self-exaltation, that stubborn, obstinate spirit, which though repressed had never been really subdued; and he clearly foresaw that the secret plans and schemes which were already working in their minds would soon burst out into words and actions. Seeing, therefore, the perils without and within which beleaguered and threatened the Church of God at Ephesus, he warns the elders in this parting address, giving them the tenderest instruction, and laying before them what he had been to them, and what he desired them to be to the Church of God over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers.

But well knowing that after all he had said or could say perils and dangers would arise which no wisdom could foresee, and no contrivance or skill in him or them could defeat, he then took the Church up, as it were, in the arms of his faith, and laid it in the lap of God in the tender, affectionate words of the text, "I commend you to God." Perhaps a simple figure or two may help us to explain and illustrate the meaning of the apostle in using such language. A father is about to send his son, an inexperienced youth, to a foreign land where he will be surrounded with every temptation fraught with peril to body and soul. Knowing then beforehand the dangers which await his beloved son on every side, and having resident in that country a friend whom he has long known, one of tried integrity and attached to the family with strong affection, he writes to him, and informing him of all the circumstances of the case, he puts his son under his charge, commending him to his care and trust. This gives his mind some relief, for he feels that having secured for his son a second father in whom he can fully trust, he has done all that he can do to secure the young man's benefit and protection. Now, the more he can rely upon the kindness and care of his friend to be his son's protector and guardian, the more he can part from him with a good hope for his future welfare. This is "commending," or, as we now say, recommending. But take

another simple figure to illustrate the expression of the apostle, "I commend you to God." View a father upon his death-bed, surrounded by his weeping wife and children, and picture to yourself some friend, some bosom friend, one of long and tried integrity, standing also by the bed-side, witnessing the afflicting scene and sympathising deeply with it. Now may we not represent to ourselves the dying man lifting himself up in his bed and thus speaking, "Dear friend, I am about to leave you and those who are still more near and dear to me; we have always been knit together in the bonds of strong affection: do think of my dear wife and children when I am gone; I put them into your care. I have made you my executor and the dear children's guardian and trustee. Fulfil that office to them with the same affection and integrity which you have ever shown to me, and I shall feel to die more comfortably in the firm conviction that they will be under your watchful eye." These are simple figures, but they may help to illustrate the meaning of the apostle, "I commend you to God." Is it not as if he would put them under the immediate eye of God, entrust them to his unceasing, ever-watchful care; and, as far as his prayers and desires could accomplish it, lay them in the very bosom of the Almighty?

ii. But in thus committing them to God, he had doubtless a gracious, believing, and comprehensive view in his soul of the character and perfections of this great and glorious God to whose care he thus warmly and prayerfully commended them. Let us seek then with our weak and imperfect views, as compared with his, to realise in some measure the character of God as exercising such a watchful care over his people.

1. He would have a view, for instance, of his *Almighty power*—that he held the winds in his fists; that all things were under his sovereign control; that not a circumstance could transpire which was not under his divine management, and that all things in heaven and earth were subject to his eternal will. Whatever foes then from without or from within were arrayed against his Church at Ephesus, not a hair of their head could fall to the ground except by his sovereign permission. He would see then how futile

all the efforts of men or devils would be to overthrow the church there so long as it was the purpose of the Almighty to hold it up. With what confidence, therefore, could he put them into the arms of so Almighty a Friend and such a Sovereign Disposer of all events and circumstances!

2. He would also look up to this great and glorious God as *everywhere present*. He would feel how "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth" (Zech. 4:10); how they "are in every place" (Prov. 15:3); and how especially "his eyes are ever upon the righteous and his ears open to their cry." (Psalm 34:15.) In this confidence he could, so to speak, place them under the eyes of him who "keepeth Israel, and who shall neither slumber nor sleep." (Psalm 121:4.)

3. He could also look up and view him as a God of *infinite wisdom*; not only possessed of Almighty power to guard and guide, shield and protect the Church at Ephesus with an outstretched arm and an ever-watchful eye, but as "the only wise God," containing in the depths of his eternal mind that boundless store of unspeakable wisdom whereby he could not only foresee every event, but could make all things work together for their spiritual good; who could pull the teeth out of the wolves already howling round the fold, and turn to nought the counsels of the false professors among them, who of their own selves would arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

4. He would also view him not only in his abstract perfections as possessed of omnipotent power, universal presence, and infinite wisdom, but more especially as *the God of all grace*. This he would be encouraged to do by recalling to memory the great things which the God of all grace had done for his soul in calling him by his grace when a bloodthirsty persecutor, in revealing his dear Son in him, in shedding abroad his love in his heart, in bestowing upon him the spirit of adoption to cry Abba, Father, and in sending him to preach the gospel to poor, lost, perishing sinners. In the confidence, therefore, that the God of all grace

would or could be all to them that he had been personally and experimentally to himself, he could lay them at the footstool of mercy, and deposit them in the arms of that most merciful and gracious Lord who had given him testimony upon testimony that he was his heavenly Father and eternal friend.

5. But in the same confidence he could commend the Ephesian elders to God as the *God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ*. This is what we may call his peculiar New Testament or new Covenant title. Under the old dispensation he was "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," "the Lord God of Israel;" but under the new dispensation he comes nearer to us as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ;" and because he is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ he is Father also of those who believe in Christ; as our gracious Lord said to his disciples before his ascension: "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." This made the apostle Peter say, "Blessed be the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1:3.) And this it was which brought from Paul's pen the words, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3.) As then "the God of all grace" is "the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ," all his grace and glorious perfections shine forth in the Person of his dear Son. His love, his mercy, his goodness, and every perfection of the divine nature we see revealed and brought to light in the person of the God-Man. Thus having a view of God, not in abstract Deity, not as manifesting himself in a broken law, not as revealing himself on Sinai's blazing top as a consuming fire; but in the mild beams of gospel grace, in the love and blood of his dear Son, we may wonder, admire, and adore. Blessed and favoured with a view of these things far beyond our dim conceptions, the apostle could commend his beloved friends at Ephesus to this God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and feel that whether he were present with them or absent from them they were equally safe and secure in the hands of his and their God and Father.

iii. But he commends them also to *the word of his grace*.

1. God works by his word of truth upon the hearts and consciences of his people, and this word the apostle calls here "the word of his grace," because it is only *in and by his word* that the grace of God is either revealed or communicated to the soul. It is desirable to be clear upon this point, that we know nothing of God out of and apart from his word. Sometimes we seem as if we would almost try to realise in our mind thoughts of God and to represent him to our imagination in his abstract Being as filling all time and all space, seeking in fact to accomplish an impossibility to the finite mind of man, as Zophar well declares: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." (Job 11:7, 8, 9.) But all these vain thoughts, for "vain man would be wise though man be born like a wild ass's colt" (Job 11:12)—all these vain thoughts fall back upon ourselves, and we find that immediately we get out of the domain of God's word, directly we seek to realise the existence of an internal, infinite, incomprehensible Being by the efforts of our own reasoning mind we are lost in confusion. We are like Noah's dove, when first let loose from the ark. Wherever she looked she could see nothing behind or before her but a wide waste of waters on which she could not rest the sole of her foot. She therefore flew back to the ark, and in that alone she found rest when Noah pulled her in. So we, when we have taken our wild, wandering imaginations into these excursions of thought, and feel ourselves utterly lost in the incomprehensibility of the divine Essence, are glad to come back and lodge our wearied, puzzled mind upon God's word, and especially upon "the word of his grace;" for in that and in that alone can we find all the satisfaction we ever can have, not only as regards the very Being of God and the perfections of the Almighty, but what is beyond the reach of sense, reason, or imagination, what he is as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Again, sometimes we are exercised not so much about the Being and perfections of God as we are on account of *our sins and transgressions* against and before him. We have views in our soul of his purity, holiness, and terrible majesty. We see him as a consuming fire, and our hearts sink at the very thought, crying out, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Isai. 33:14.) We are lost, as it were, in the blaze of Mount Sinai, or else are wrapped up in clouds of confusion through the smoke which ever darkens that fiery mount. Here then we need the word of God's grace to give us some relief from all this fear, bondage, darkness, and confusion. When, therefore, we come in faith to the word of his grace, or, to speak more correctly, when the word of his grace begins to open itself up by the teaching and testimony of the blessed Spirit to our understanding, to our conscience, to our heart, and to our affections, and we can feelingly and experimentally believe what God has spoken there of himself as the God of all grace, the very God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, as abundant in goodness and truth, then and only then do we find some satisfaction of soul, and then and only then some rest for our wandering feet. Never seek to be wise above what is written. Never seek to know more than God has revealed in the word of his grace; for in that he has lodged all that instruction, all that heavenly wisdom, and all that revelation of his mind and will, and of his mercy and love in the face of his dear Son, which can be known or enjoyed in this life. But rather seek for the word of his grace to be opened to your understanding, to be revealed to your heart, to be applied to your conscience, and to come with warmth, life, and feeling into your affections; and then indeed you will find it is the word of his grace from the grace it manifests, unfolds, and communicates to your soul.

3. Again, in the word of his grace are *exceedingly great and precious promises* which seem to shine like so many stars in the midnight sky, studding chapter after chapter with their bright effulgence. It is upon these promises that the covenant of grace is established, as the apostle speaks: "But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also is he the mediator

of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises." (Heb. 8:6.) All these promises are in "Christ Jesus," as we read, "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." (2 Cor. 1:20.) By the belief of these promises and by receiving their rich contents into the soul we become, as Peter speaks, "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4), that is, through the grace communicated by them there is a being renewed in the spirit of our mind, and a putting on of the new man which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness. In commending, then, the Ephesian elders to the word of God's grace, the apostle would commend them to a realisation by faith of the promises contained in that word. These promises are all based upon the faithfulness of God. And what firmer support can there be than the faithfulness of him who cannot lie, and who has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee?"

4. Nor does the word of his grace shine forth less conspicuously in the innumerable *invitations* which are addressed to the poor and the needy, the weary and the heavy laden, the hungry and the thirsty, and to God's afflicted and exercised family generally. How suitable are these invitations to the characters to whom they are addressed; and as they believe and receive them, grace is communicated by them. Thus into whatever trouble or difficulty the Ephesian elders might fall, they still might find some invitation in the word of God's grace suitable to their case, which the Lord might bless to their souls.

5. The word of his grace contains also *admonitions and warnings* to hold us back when we would otherwise stumble into some error or fall into some trap of the devil. These admonitions and solemn warnings are as necessary to our guidance in the strait and narrow path as the promises or invitations. Does not the apostle say in this very chapter, "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears?" (Acts 20:31.) Thus we find this man of God could warn and admonish as well as instruct and comfort.

6. The word of his grace also contains what I might almost call a standing code of *holy precepts* intended to regulate our conduct in our families, in the world, and in the Church of God. And not only so, but to reprove and rebuke us when we go astray, and, as applied by the blessed Spirit, to bring penitence, grief, and sorrow into our heart when we have departed from them, and to lead us to honest confession of our sin and shame. In this way, therefore, the precepts of the gospel are often made use of for severe rebukes as well as godly instruction.

Thus in whatever light we view "the word of God's grace" we shall find it holding forth precious truths, sweet promises, kind invitations, solemn warnings, holy precepts, and keen rebukes, and all in infinite wisdom adapted to our state and condition, as surrounded by a host of perils and temptations, and yet upheld by the mighty power of God.

7. But when the apostle speaks of commending them to the word of his grace, it is not, if I may use the expression, to the dead word but to *the living word*, not to the letter but to the spirit, for it is this which especially makes it the word of God's grace. It was therefore in the prayerful hope and expectation that they might feel the power of that word upon their hearts—sometimes in the public ministry, as not forsaking the assembling of themselves together, but to come at every opportunity under the sound of a preached gospel, that the word of his grace in the mouth of his servants might be made a blessing to their soul. In private also he would recommend a frequent and diligent reading and studying of the oracles of God, that the word of his grace through secret meditation might open up to them continual sources of strength and consolation.

8. He would also commend them to the word of God's grace that it might come into their heart at unexpected moments, in dark and trying seasons, under the pressure of heavy weights and burdens, and thus be a word from the Lord, lifting up the standard of the Spirit when the enemy came in like a flood.

And do we need the word of this grace less than the church at Ephesus? Have we no similar perils? Have you as a Church no similar dangers? Are there no wolves howling round this little fold? May not even of your own selves men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them? And who and what will be your only safeguard but God and the word of his grace, to which, brethren, in the spirit of the apostle I desire now to commend you?

II.—I pass on to show what the word of God's grace *is able to do*; for that was the reason why the apostle commended it to the elders of the Church at Ephesus, and by them the church itself.

There were two things which the apostle speaks of as lying within the power of the word of God's grace. These two things I shall consider separately.

i. First, it was *able to build them up*. The work of grace had been begun upon their soul. They were men of God to whom the apostle spake, and as elders of the Church at Ephesus, we may well suppose that they were the most eminent saints and the best taught members of the church. It may be perhaps somewhat difficult to ascertain exactly what position these elders occupied; but it would certainly seem that they had both power to teach and to rule the Church. They therefore corresponded in some measure to pastors in our day; and yet it would appear that every elder did not necessarily teach; for the apostle says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." (1 Tim. 5:17.) We see from this place that all the elders ruled, but that only some of them laboured in the word and doctrine, or, as the word means, teaching. They were men, therefore, for the most part eminent for their faith and their godly life. "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God." (Heb. 13:7.) To them especially Jesus Christ was everything, for "the end of their conversation," the whole subject of their life and walk was "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and

to-day and for ever." They were therefore highly favoured, well taught men of God, empowered by their office not only to rule the Church as overseers or bishops, the word being the same, but to instruct it from the word of God's grace. But they, as well as we, needed to be built up. The foundation had been well and deeply laid in their heart, for, as I have quoted, it was "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" "and other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 3:11.) But there was a superstructure to be reared up on this foundation, and that not of "wood, hay, and stubble," but of "gold, silver, and precious stones." This superstructure the word of God's grace was able to raise up. So it is with some, if not many of you. God, I trust, has begun his work of grace upon your heart; he has laid there the foundation stone, which is Jesus Christ; upon him the superstructure is to be raised; and this superstructure may either be wood, hay, stubble, which will most certainly be burnt up and consumed, for the fire is to try every man's work of what sort it is; or gold, silver, and precious stones, which will stand the conflagration and prove a worthy superstructure for so precious a foundation.

Now nothing but the word of God's grace, in its purity and power, in its application to the soul by the hand of the Spirit, is able to build up this gold, silver, and precious stones on the foundation. I hope that instrumentally I may have been made the means of laying this foundation in some of your hearts. At least I have tried to do so; and I believe I can call you all to witness that I have never laid in this place any other foundation but Christ in his Person and work, blood and righteousness. Now, the mere doctrines of men, the vain imaginations of these erroneous teachers who would arise and speak perverse things to draw away disciples after them, would build upon Christ, the foundation, the wood, the hay, and the stubble of Pharisaic self-righteousness or else of doctrinal error. But the word of his grace, in its purity and power, in its life and influence, in its spirit and truth, would, the apostle knew, build them up by bringing gold and silver and precious stones, and laying them upon Christ the only foundation. So it may be, so let it be with you. I hold up

before you the book of God, and I commend you to this word of his grace as able to build you up on this foundation already laid.

1. But *how* does it build up? It is "the word of his grace," and therefore every stone which is put upon the foundation is a stone of grace, or else there would be an incompatibility, a discrepancy between the foundation and the superstructure. Thus every word of his grace as applied to the heart by the power of God brings with it a precious stone. Every promise applied to the soul with a divine unction; every truth commended to the enlightened understanding and embraced by faith; every precept discovered to the heart as binding upon the conscience, and as such to be listened to, obeyed, and walked in; every secret admonition, every solemn warning, every painful rebuke, yea, everything connected with grace, which the Holy Spirit is pleased to apply to the heart with his own divine power, may be called a precious stone, a stone of grace. It is in this way that the word of God's grace builds up the Church on her most holy faith by laying on the foundation these stones of grace.

2. But as the foundation is to be laid in grace and the top stone to be crowned with grace, so every part of the structure must also be in grace from first to last, or there would be a sad rent in the building, a sad discrepancy between the foundation and the stones built upon it. The Lord promises to his Church, "I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones." (Isa. 54:11, 12.) There we see how that every part of the building, even the windows, the gates, and the borders are as much made of precious stones as the very foundation which is laid with sapphires. But these precious stones must all be stones of grace, in order to harmonise with foundation and top stone. A church, therefore, as well as an individual is built up by the word of God's grace, communicating to it, and inlaying upon it, and in it, every sacred truth, every comforting promise, every solemn admonition, every holy precept, and every needful rebuke. And as all these savour of Christ and spring out of his grace, there is a

divine and heavenly harmony between the work of Christ upon the cross and the grace of Christ upon the soul; and similarly there is a gracious harmony in the teaching and testimony of the blessed Spirit throughout the whole of his divine operations and influences. This is beautifully unfolded in the words of the apostle, "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." (Ephes. 2:21, 22.)

But you will observe that the apostle does not say that the word of God's grace will necessarily do this either for a church or an individual, but that *it is able to do it*. He therefore commends them to the word of God's grace as possessing a power, through the application of the Spirit, without positively declaring or prophesying that it would do so in their particular instance.

ii. But what else was the word of God's grace, to which the apostle commended them, able to do? *To give them an inheritance.*

1. The word "inheritance," as doubtless you well know, means two things; 1, the right and title possessed by the heir; and 2, the property or land itself. Thus Abraham had a right and title to the promised land, and his seed possessed it. Now the kingdom of God, both as a kingdom of grace and as a kingdom of glory, is the inheritance of God's people, both by right and possession. The blessed, therefore, are invited in the great day to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. (Matt. 25:34.) Of this inheritance Peter speaks as "incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." This then is the inheritance which the word of God's grace is able to give unto the saints in present title and future possession. Not but what this inheritance was given to them in Christ before the foundation of the world. As the apostle intimates, "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." (Ephes. 1:11.) But

though this inheritance is given and secured in Christ, yet there is a necessity to be made meet for it, according to these words: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." (Col. 1:12.) There is, therefore, what the apostle calls a being "sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise which is the earnest of our inheritance." (Ephes. 1:13, 14.) As then the word of God's grace bestows this earnest, and communicates this meetness, it gives the saints of God this inheritance in experimental possession, in divine realisation, in spiritual foretaste. The fullness of the inheritance is above, but its earnest is below. The saints are called by the apostle "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17); for God is to them spiritually and eternally what he was typically and mystically to the tribe of Levi. Levi had no inheritance among the other tribes: God was his inheritance. "But unto the tribe of Levi Moses gave not any inheritance: the Lord God of Israel was their inheritance, as he said unto them." (Joshua 13:33.) And so the true Levites, the spiritual priesthood, have God for their inheritance. All the grace and all the glory, all the perfections, all the love, and all the bliss and blessedness of God; in a word, everything which God is or has as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, is theirs. As the apostle says "All are yours, for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." (1 Cor. 3:22, 23.) Thus we may almost say, that as when God could swear by no greater he swore by himself, so because he could give his saints nothing greater, he gave them himself.

But you will want to know *how* and what connection there is between the word of God's grace and the kingdom of God's glory. It is because the word of his grace puts them into experimental possession of the kingdom of heaven here and hereafter. Thus we read in the words of our blessed Lord that this is life eternal, that his saints might know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. (John 17:3.) When then the word of God's grace brings into the heart a *knowledge* of the only true God and of Jesus Christ, it brings with it that eternal life which is the saint's inheritance. So, again, when the word of his grace brings into the soul the *love of God*, it puts it into possession of this inheritance,

for God is love. In a similar manner, when the word of his grace brings into the soul the *presence* of God, it gives it a foretaste of this inheritance; for what is heaven but the eternal fulness of the glorious presence of God? Yea, what is heaven begun but the presence of God felt in the soul on earth? Nor is a sense of the *goodness* of God, which leads to repentance, which melts the heart under a sense of our base requitals of that goodness, less a part of this inheritance. So that as the word of God's grace comes into the heart, it not only builds up the saint on Christ the foundation, but by communicating a spiritual, experimental knowledge of God, with a sense of his goodness, mercy, and love, power, and presence, it puts him into a present possession of it.

2. But besides this, as I have already hinted, it produces a *meetness* for it. The heir has to be educated for the inheritance as well as the inheritance to be reserved for the heir. Ploughboys are not noblemen, either by birth or education. A peer's son has an education given him befitting the son of a peer, that he may be qualified to take the place which his rank assigns him; that when his father is removed he may sustain in a becoming manner the honours and dignity of the peerage. So the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, earth's true and only peerage, nay more, princes and princesses of the royal blood, need an education upon earth to fit and qualify them for their eternal inheritance. How can they be presented at court? how can they be "set among princes and made to inherit the throne of glory" (1 Sam. 2:8), unless fitted and qualified for a state of such royal dignity? This training, then, or education is commenced here below by the power of the word of God's grace upon their heart through the teaching of the Spirit and the revelation of Christ.

III.—But this brings me to our last point, the *nature of this meetness* for the inheritance. The happy number, the favoured few, for whom this inheritance is reserved, are described in the text by that most expressive word "the *sanctified*," or, to quote the apostle's language more fully, "an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

i. As this is the grand point, the distinguishing feature of the partakers of this eternal inheritance, let us seek to enter into the spiritual meaning of the expression. God's people are sanctified in various ways and at various times.

1. First, they were sanctified by the *original purpose and decree of God*, whereby they were separated in his eternal mind from all other men. Of this sanctification Jude speaks, "To them that are sanctified by God the Father." (Jude 1.) This is the foundation and the fountain of all their sanctification. But we must bear in mind that they were only thus sanctified as they were sanctified in Christ, their Covenant Head, for they were "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as they were chosen in him before the foundation of the world that they should be holy and without blame before God in love." (Ephesians 1:3, 4.) They were therefore thus set apart from all others that they might be members of Christ's mystical body, a chosen and holy bride for the King's Son.

2. But the bride fell, and foully fell, for she was in the loins of Adam when he sank under the weight of the fall, and so she fell in him. But she did not fall out of the heart or arms of her heavenly Father, but was still the Church of Christ, though in ruins; still Christ's bride, though involved in the guilt and pollution of the Adam fall. This made necessary a second sanctification—one that should take place in time as the other had taken place in eternity. She had to be sanctified *by the blood* of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son: "therefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate." (Heb. 13:12.) The blood of Christ sanctified the Church, for he washed her from all her sins in his own blood. In his precious body as it hung upon the cross there was a fountain opened for all sin and all uncleanness, which will make the Church for ever sing "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood." (Rev. 1:5.) Thus they were sanctified by the blood of the Lamb, washed from all their filth and guilt, and presented spotless before the throne of the Most High.

3. But there is a third sanctification, which is the washing of regeneration, under the sanctifying operation, *power*, and *influence* of God the Holy Ghost, which is a *personal, spiritual, experimental sanctification*. This consists in the communication of a principle of holiness and the possession of a sinless, spotless nature which cannot sin, because it is born of God. This is lodged in the heart by the almighty power of the divine Quickener of souls, and is the saint's best treasure. It is of this sanctification that the apostle speaks: "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:11.) Thus we see that there is a sanctification by the Father, by the Son, and by the Holy Ghost; and we may say briefly of it that the people of God are sanctified in Christ, by Christ, and for Christ; in Christ by original decree and the will of God (1 Cor. 1:2; Heb. 10:10); by Christ when he sanctified them by his precious blood; and for Christ when the Holy Ghost gives them a meetness for heaven, that Jesus "might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5:27.)

4. But there is also a sanctification flowing out of this as made manifest in *a man's life and conduct*. For there is a holiness without which no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14), which is to be "followed after" and to be made manifest to others; and this sanctification does not consist only in the communication of holy feelings, spiritual desires, gracious thoughts, and heavenly affections, with that spirituality of mind which is life and peace, in all which the very element of internal holiness consists; but in the production also of the fruits of the Spirit, in a conduct and conversation becoming holiness, and in a godly, self-denying life as weaned and separated from the world, and as manifesting the power of God's grace in daily acts.

These, then, are "the sanctified" for whom the inheritance is reserved,—sanctified by the original decree of God, sanctified by the blood of Christ, sanctified by the work of the holy Ghost upon their heart, and sanctified by a godly life. For these, then, and for

no others is there reserved in heaven an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. You must be a partaker of this sanctification to prove your title to, and give you a meetness for the heavenly inheritance.

Well, then, might the apostle say—and I treading in his steps with feeble feet would re-echo his words—as he took leave of the Church at Ephesus, as I am now taking leave of the Church at Oakham: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified." O what a mercy it will be for you and me to be ever under the watchful eye and be ever upheld by the omnipotent arms of the Lord God Almighty! O what a blessing it will be if you and I are favoured with the word of his grace, coming into our heart from his own lips with a divine power, and thus to be ever communicating his grace according to our several needs—grace for every burden we may have to carry, grace for every trial we may have to endure, grace for every affliction we may have to suffer, grace for every duty we may have to perform, grace to carry us through life, and grace to be with us in, and carry us safely through death itself!

Now the word of his grace is able to build you up. There is no lack there. There is a sufficiency in the truths of the promises of the gospel to instruct, in the invitations of the gospel to allure, in the promises of the gospel to comfort; in the precepts of the gospel to guide your conduct, in the admonitions of the gospel to check your wandering feet, and in the warnings and rebukes of the gospel to reprove your backslidings. And what but the word of his grace bound close to your heart, felt in your soul, applied to your conscience, and embraced by your affections, is able to build you up on your most holy faith, and to bring into personal enjoyment and living experience those divine sensations, heavenly feelings, sweet enjoyments, and spiritual consolations which are the earnest of that inheritance which awaits the sanctified beyond the grave? Again, therefore, and again, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, seeing it is able to communicate these rich and heavenly blessings to all the saints of God. If we live under

the eye of God and maintain a sense in our own bosom that that eye is upon us, we shall never want a Benefactor, a Counsellor, a Guide, a Guardian, or a Friend. And if the word of his grace from time to time, either in the public ministry or else in private, comes into our heart, unfolding its precious treasures there, we shall never lack a truth for our instruction, a promise for our comfort, a precept for our direction. I do not then commend you to earthly wisdom, human abilities, your own strength, care, or keeping. I know the inutility and futility of all these things. I desire for myself, I desire for you, to look beyond all these things of earth, in which there is no real or solid profit, and in simplicity and sincerity to commend you to God and to the word of his grace. I hope I may say that I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God as far as I am acquainted with it. And may I be able with the blessed apostle to declare that none of the things that I may have to encounter in body or soul move me, and above all to add, "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." The grace of God is sufficient for you, for me, and for all that believe in the name of our most blessed Lord; and though we shall have, and may and most certainly must expect, day by day, trials, temptations, and afflictions down to the very grave's mouth, yet we have a most gracious promise—and God of his infinite mercy fulfil it in your experience and in mine—"My grace is sufficient for thee."

And now, brethren, I bid you farewell. The God of all grace be with you and bless you most abundantly, that every prayer and petition which has been offered up in this place for you as a Church and People, and for myself and others, may be fulfilled richly in your heart's experience. I shall not be able, as I could wish, personally and individually to take my leave of you all; but thanking you for all the kindness, forbearance, affection, and liberality, which you have shown me for many, many years, I now in the name of the Lord bid you farewell.

GOD'S METHOD OF ANSWERING PRAYER

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday Evening, June 10th, 1841

"He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him; with long life will I satisfy him, and show him My salvation." Psalm 91:15, 16

It is thought by some, to be a great mark of spirituality of mind and a strong evidence of great attainments in the Divine life, to see Christ in every part of Scripture,—especially in the Psalms of David. Now there can be no doubt, that Christ is sweetly set forth in the Psalms; for we read, that He Himself speaks to His disciples of what was "written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning Him;" there can be no doubt, that much of the Psalms is taken up with descriptions of Him,—that His experience is very largely set forth in the Psalms, and that His glory and His grace are powerfully manifested therein. But it is a very doubtful point, whether it is a decisive evidence of great spirituality and an irrefragable proof of Divine teaching, to be able to see Him in the Psalms. For it comes to this question: whence is this sight derived? Is it not possible to see Him with the eye of speculation—with the eye of imagination? Is it not possible to see Him with the eyes of other men? Is it not possible, to be borne on the wings of fancy, and merely in a way of judgment, in a way of doctrinal speculation, in a way of mere exercise of our intellectual faculties, in a way of mere nature and the flesh, to see Christ in this passage and in that, quite independent of any Divine unction, whereby the eyes are anointed,—quite independent of any sweet manifestation of Christ to the soul by the Holy Ghost,—and quite independent of any spiritual humbling views of Him, as set forth in the Scriptures? Is not this possible? Aye, is it an uncommon occurrence? And therefore before we can positively and decisively say, that to see Christ in the Scriptures is a mark of spirituality of mind and a proof of great attainments in the Divine life, we must ask and

answer this question,—Whence does this sight come? What feeling does this sight produce? Who gave us these eyes, and whence is it that we have derived these views?

I believe, that if the soul is blessedly bedewed with the unction of the Holy Ghost, and in simplicity and godly sincerity, with a feeling heart, with brokenness, contrition, tenderness and humility, is led by the Holy Ghost into the Psalms, as setting forth Christ's sufferings, or Christ's experience, or Christ's grace, or Christ's glory, and feels a sweet melting down under that sight, and viewing Christ there set forth is led into any measure of spiritual communion with Him, so as to have some Divine acquaintance and some heavenly fellowship with Him, then we may have reason to believe, that to see Christ in the Psalms and to feel Christ in the Psalms, is of God. But if it is merely an exercise of fancy, merely the sharpening of one's wits, merely seeing Him with a kind of doctrinal speculation, leading to no fruits within and to no communion with Him as there set forth, but merely floating as a bare speculation in the mind, then of a certainty we may say, that it is very possible to have great and enlightened views of Christ as set forth in the Psalms and other parts of Scripture, and yet not to have received them with power from God Himself.

Now Satan can make use of truth in the Church of God to introduce his own errors, and often makes use of one truth to subvert another truth. Satan is a cunning artificer; he uses no rotten levers, when he wants to overthrow a building, but he will select the strongest and largest and most powerful he can possibly wield. And I have been astonished sometimes, to see how Satan, that crafty magician, that wonderful mechanic, can make use of the lever of one truth to overthrow another truth; how he can bring forward doctrine to upset experience, how he can bring forward doctrine to upset practice, and how he can employ one part of God's Word to upset another part of God's Word. That he does so use truth, is most clear. This very Psalm gives us a certain instance of it. When he would fain that the Lord should cast Himself down from a pinnacle of the temple, he

brings forward a passage from this Psalm; he makes use of Scripture, as a lever whereby to overthrow Scripture. "The devil said unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." Here was Satan making use of a most certain truth, to introduce (if he could do so) presumption into the mind of the blessed Saviour; employing Scripture to lead the blessed Mediator into an act of daring presumption.

But the point to which I was alluding is this; it is most certain, that Christ is much spoken of in the Psalms. Now this, which is certain truth, has got a footing in the Church of God; it has been set forth by able men and heaven-taught men, and is received as truth in the judgments of many people. And here comes the subtlety of this "old serpent." He says, "It is *Christ* in the Psalms." Any deep experience in the Psalmist is *Christ's* experience. "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy water-spouts,"—that is *Christ* speaking. "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon Me, so that I am not able to look up,"—that is the experience of *Christ*, when the sins of His elect family met upon His head. "Deliver Me from blood-guiltiness, O God,"—that is the experience of *Christ*, when He was suffering under the weight of sin imputed to Him. Now no doubt there is an experience of Christ set forth in these Psalms; but what is the object of this device of Satan? It is, by setting forth all this experience as belonging to Christ, secretly to cast out the experience as belonging to God's people; it is, by putting it all upon Christ and saying that the Psalms are full of the experience of Christ, not to exalt Christ, but to cast down obedience. The professed object is, to glorify the Son of God and set forth His sufferings; the secret object is to cast out this experience, as a needful thing to be undergone in the souls of God's people, and to blunt the edge of conviction in their consciences. When they read, for instance, in the Psalms, of a certain deep experience the psalmist passed through—"My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness"—conscience says, "Did *your* wounds ever stink, and were they corrupt, because of *your* foolishness?" "No." "Oh!" says

judgment, "but that is Christ." So—"Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow;" "Was that ever your prayer?" says conscience. "Was that ever your experience?" asks the inward monitor. "No." "But," says judgment, "that is all Christ." And so, by setting forth the experience in the Psalms as belonging to Christ, there is a secret blunting the edge of conviction in a man's own conscience, and casting out the experience of the saints as traced in the Word of God. And so we see what a crafty subtle serpent this is,—to come with such truths, with great and glorious views of the Son of God, and to make use of them as a lever to overthrow the experience of God's saints as here traced out.

Now I believe, in the Psalms, as written by the Spirit of God, we have three grand interpretations of them—three grand outlines of heavenly teaching. We have, first, the experience of the Psalmist himself. When he said, "My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness," it was the wounds of the psalmist; it was a personal matter, which was personally felt; it was an inward, individual experience, which was inwardly, individually known; he described with his pen what he felt in his heart,—that "*his* wounds stunk and were corrupt because of *his* foolishness." But there is another experience, which is the experience of Christ, under the hidings of God's countenance,—the experience of the Lord Jesus, when in our nature bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, and groaning forth the agonies of His soul under the sensations of Divine wrath which were manifest in His conscience: that is another great branch of experience set forth in the Psalms. And then there is a third, which is the experience of God's saints now; the experience which the Holy Ghost works in the hearts of God's people, which tallies and accurately measures with the experience of the psalmist, whoever he was,—sometimes David, sometimes Asaph, sometimes Ethan, sometimes Heman,—and accurately tallies also in measure with the experience of Christ there set forth. And thus we see what a wonderful book the Scriptures are: that they are not, as Peter says, "of private interpretation," to be limited to one interpretation, to be confined to one individual; but they are of public interpretation, of a public

nature, and common to the whole Church of God, as the Spirit of God leads the people of God into truth.

Now if we look at this Psalm, we have the strongest evidence that it speaks of Jesus. We know that it was quoted by Satan to the Lord of life and glory; and had it not referred to Him, Satan would have needed no other refutation.

This Psalm, like other Psalms, has in it the form of a dialogue; there seems to be two speakers introduced. Jehovah begins: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." This seems to be a sentence that comes from the mouth of Jehovah; it was a testimony, a word dropped into the soul of the psalmist from the mouth of God. The soul of the psalmist responds; there is a heavenly echo in his bosom to the voice that came from the mouth of God; sweet hope and blessed confidence are raised up by the application of these words to his heart; and he breaks forth—"I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in Him will I trust." And now the Lord takes up the word, and goes on to the end of the Psalm: "Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence; He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler," and so on. And if you bear this in mind, that very often in the Psalms there are what we may call dialogues between two persons,—the Lord speaking inwardly to the psalmist's soul, and the psalmist (David, or Asaph, or Ethan, or Heman,) speaking to the Lord,—if we bear in mind that many of these are heavenly dialogues, sweet and blessed colloquies, it will explain to us why the person is so often changed.

Now with respect to the words of the text, we find a promise given in them; or rather a declaration which is sealed with a promise. "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him; with long life will I satisfy him, and show him My salvation."

Who is "*he*?" Unless we can settle who "*he*" is, we shall be all abroad; we shall not be able to understand what the declaration is, or to whom the promise is made. And therefore before we can get into the text, we must endeavour to ascertain who the person is, to whom the declaration is made, and in whose heart the promise is sealed.

This "*he*" must be the same person, who is spoken of throughout the whole Psalm; and therefore the first verse will afford us a clue to the point. Generally speaking, through the Psalms and other parts of Scripture, there are clues, there are keys; and if we can only get the key in our hand, it will fit the wards of the lock; it will open up the Psalm. And therefore my chief desire, in reading a Psalm for my own instruction and comfort, or in preaching from it, is to get hold of the key. If I can get hold of the key, it seems to introduce me into the chambers; if I can get hold of the key, it seems to open all the recesses and lay bare all the treasures of heavenly truth contained in them.

This is the same person, that is spoken of in the first verse of the Psalm. And this is said of him: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Then every promise that is made in this Psalm, and every declaration that is given in the Psalm to a certain person, applies to that certain person spoken of in the first verse,—the character described by these words, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High." Then no man has any right to a single part of this Psalm, no man has any interest in a single promise given in this Psalm, no man has any Divine acquaintance with the blessed mysteries couched in the Psalm, whose name is not written in the first verse,—whose experience is not such as the Holy Ghost has there traced out.

And who is this man, and what is his experience? It is "he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High." What is "the secret place of the Most High?" It is the same spot of which David speaks in the seventy-third Psalm—"Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end." It is the spot, of

which the Lord speaks in Ezekiel—"I will be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come." Then this "secret place" is the secret bosom of God. It is an entrance by faith into Jehovah, by a spiritual manifestation of Him, leading us into spiritual acquaintance with Him. "The secret place of the Most High" is that solemn spot, where Jehovah meets with the sinner in Christ, and where He opens up to him the riches of His mercy, and leads him into His bosom, so as to read the secrets of His loving heart. It is called a "secret" place, as corresponding with those words—"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." It is called a "secret" place, as only known to the persons to whom it is especially communicated. It is called a "secret" place, because none can get into it, no, nor desire to get into it,—except the Lord Himself, with His own mysterious hand, opens up to them a part in it, sets them down in it, and sweetly blesses them in it. Then to be in "the secret place of the Most High," is to be brought into something like fellowship and acquaintance with God,—something like communion, spiritual worship, Divine intercourse; so as to know something of Him experimentally, and "run into" Him, as "a strong tower" and there feel solemn safety. The "secret place of the Most High," then, is not to be got at by nature and by reason: flesh never entered there. "Flesh and blood" cannot enter the kingdom of God above; and flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God below. "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth," said Jesus, "that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Therefore they are "hid from the wise and prudent." It is that "path, which no fowl knoweth, which the vulture's eye hath not seen." It is a secret hidden from all, except those to whom God Himself is pleased by His Spirit specially to reveal it. And when He reveals it, He draws the soul by the powerful attractions of love, "with cords of a man, with bands of love," by mysterious attractions, into that "secret place;" and then he begins to discover a little of those secrets which are stored up in the Son of God—a few of those secrets which are with those who fear God—a few of those secrets, the communication of which makes a man spiritually and eternally wise.

"He that *dwelleth* in the secret place of the Most High," is one who more or less, as the Spirit leads him into it, abides there. "Abide in Me, and I in you; if a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered." When a man once gets, therefore, by faith, into "the secret place of the Most High," he "abides" in it. Not as a matter of present experience, not that he can always feel sweet communion with God; but still it is his home. We all have our home, our fireside, the place where at night we lay our weary bodies down to rest; and it is our dwelling-place. We are not always there; we leave our homes in the morning to go about our business, and come back to our homes at night; but our affections are there, our heart is there, our property is there, and we look for evening time to go home and rest there. It is our dwelling place; and yet we are not always in it. So with this "secret place of the Most High;" it is the "dwelling" place of a Christian; it is the house, the home, where his affections are, where his treasure is, and to which his heart turns; but still he is not always there. He goes abroad and leaves often this sweet home. Yet it is his dwelling-place; because it is there, and there alone, he can solidly rest,—it is there, and there alone, he can lie down and feed and take pleasure.

Here is a soul, then, that is brought by faith, of the Spirit's operation, to know "the secret place of the Most High,"—that is to have some spiritual acquaintance with God in Christ, to enter by faith into the secrets which Jehovah reveals, and to feel that the manifestation of those secrets to his soul makes his heaven here below, and constitutes the real rest and satisfaction of his heart. And to this character all the promises in the Psalm are made; he is interested in every covenant promise, that is there uttered by the mouth of God Himself; and every one of those promises shall be fulfilled in him, and shall be fulfilled for him.

But the Lord has attached—I will not call it a condition, (it is a word I abhor), but a declaration; which declaration is linked on with the promise. The Lord has appointed a certain path, wherein the soul is to walk. The walking in that path is a necessary step,

to obtain the blessing that lies at the end of the path. It is no condition to be performed by the creature; it is nothing that springs out of, or depends upon, human will or human merit; but it hangs upon the Lord's appointment. God has connected certain promises with certain appointments; He has connected certain deliverances with certain trials; He has connected certain blessings with certain states and positions of soul. Therefore if we are to get at the blessing, we must get at it through God's appointment. If we are to reach the home, we must travel by that road which leads thereunto. "What God hath joined together let no man"—and no man ever can—"put asunder." Now the Lord has in the text declared a certain path; He has made a positive declaration; and to this positive appointment He has graciously annexed a certain promise. "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." Then the declaration is as certain as the promise; the one is as much of Divine decree as the other; and he that walks not in the one path, will not have the promise which is connected with that path. In this sense, and in this sense only, can we understand the conditions of Scripture—the *ifs*; God having linked things together, which are both of His sovereign decree, which are both of His eternal appointment, and which the Spirit graciously brings His people into, and blessedly works in their hearts and consciences. Thus it is no matter of free will, it is no matter of man's righteousness or man's wisdom, whether he shall "call upon God;" it is appointed he should call upon Him. God has said in positive terms—(and His "I will," and His "he shall," never can be broken)—"He *shall* call upon Me." It therefore does not rest with the creature, whether he will call upon Him or not; it is not a matter poised in the balances of the creature, whether he shall pray or not; God has not left it to man, whether he shall take up prayer or lay aside prayer; but He has made it a part of His own sovereign appointments, of His own eternal decrees, which can no more be frustrated, than salvation itself. Therefore this soul, that "dwells in the secret place of the Most High"—"he *shall* call upon God." It is not left to him, whether he will call or not; but it stands in a way of eternal decree, in a way of sovereign good pleasure. He must call upon God, because God says he shall.

But though this rests upon the basis of Divine sovereignty, God does not work it in the soul in that manner. He does not come in a dry doctrinal way into a man's conscience, and say—"I have appointed thee to pray, and therefore pray thou must; He does not come with an abstract truth, which is written in a man's judgment like a rule of arithmetic, for the man to set to work upon that abstract truth, as a child at school sets to work upon a sum. The Lord does not work in that manner; but He works by raising certain wants, by kindling certain desires, by bringing the soul into certain states, and by "pouring out the Spirit of grace and of supplications" upon it,—all which tend to that point, to which God is leading the soul, and all which spring out of God's sovereign eternal appointment.

"He shall call upon Me." When shall he call? Why, when the Lord pours out "the Spirit of grace and of supplications;" when the Lord lays wants upon his heart; when the Lord brings convictions into his conscience; when the Lord brings trouble into his soul; when the Lord draws forth that "Spirit of grace and of supplications" which He has poured out; when the Lord is graciously pleased to draw forth prayer into blessed exercise, and to enable the soul to pour out its desires and to offer up its fervent breathings at His feet, and to give them out as He gives them in. Thus to call upon the Lord, is no point of duty, to be attained as a duty; it is no point of legal constraint, which must be done because the Word of God speaks of it; but it is a feeling, an experience, an inward work, which springs from the Lord's hand, and which flows in the Lord's own Divine channel. Thus when the Lord is pleased to pour out this "Spirit of grace and of supplications," we must pray; but we do not pray *because* we must; we pray because we have no better occupation, we have no more earnest desire, we have no more powerful feeling, and we have no more invincible and irresistible constraint. The child of God in trouble *must* groan and sigh; he does not say, "Eight o'clock is come, twelve o'clock is come, six o'clock is come, now I will groan, now I will sigh a little, I will take out my Bible and begin to groan and to sigh;" that is nothing but the groan of the

hypocrite, it is nothing but the sigh of the deceived professor. The living child of God groans and sighs, because it is the expression of his wants,—because it is a language which carries forth the feelings of his heart, because groans and sighs are pressed out of him by the heavy weight upon him. A man lying in the street with a heavy weight upon him, will call for help; but he does not say, "It is *my duty* to cry to the passers-by for help,"—he cries for help because he wants to be delivered. A man with a broken leg does not say, "It is *my duty* to send for a surgeon;" he wants him to set the limb. And a man in a raging disease does not say, "It is *my duty* to send for a physician;" he *wants* him,—to heal his disease. So, when God the Holy Spirit works in a child of God, he prays, not out of a sense of duty, but out of a burdened heart. He prays, because he cannot but pray; he groans, because he must groan; he sighs, because he must sigh; having an inward weight, an inward burden, an inward experience, in which and through which he is compelled to call upon the Lord. And I never think anything of a man's religion, which did not begin in this way. If a man's religion (so called) began in any other way than by the Lord's bringing him to know himself as a sinner before Him, and except those convictions of sin were accompanied by "the Spirit of grace and of supplications," whereby he was enabled to pour out his soul into the bosom of God, and to sigh and cry and groan "being burdened," I never can believe that man's religion began by God's internal teaching. I know mine began so; and I have always stood firm upon that foundation, that a religion that does not begin with the sighs and groans and pourings out of the soul to God under the pourings in of the Spirit, is a religion that began in the flesh, and never sprung from the mighty operation of God in the soul.

"He shall call upon Me." What shall he call upon God for? "He shall call upon Me" for everything that he wants internally to feel. A child of God can call for nothing else. He cannot direct his prayers according to the rule of another's; he does not pick up a few pretty expressions from a gifted man in the table pew. He knows that he has to do with One that searches him through, that he stands before a God that will not be mocked and trifled with;

and when he comes before the Lord, he asks Him, with sighs and groans, for those blessings, and those blessings only, which his conscience tells him he wants, and which his soul is hungering and thirsting to enjoy, delivered into his heart from God Himself. He calls upon God for the pardon of his sins; he calls upon God for the revelation of Himself; he calls upon God for the manifestation of Christ; he calls upon God for the application of atoning blood; he calls upon God for the revelation of His eternal favour to his soul; he calls upon God, sweetly to bring him into an experimental knowledge of the Lord of life and glory; he calls upon God for every blessing that is set before his eyes, and for every blessing that is set before his heart, after which he longs and sighs and pants and groans with pantings and groanings unutterable.

Now the Lord says, "I will answer." "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." I will answer, just as much as he shall call; and he shall call, just as much as I shall answer. They are both linked together; and both stand on the same basis of sovereign appointment and eternal decree.

"I will answer him." What will He answer? Why, He will answer those prayers, which He Himself has indited. He will answer those wants, which He Himself has created. He will answer those hungerings, which He Himself has produced. He will answer those thirstings, which His own blessed Spirit has wrought powerfully in the soul.

He does not say *when*; He does not say *how*. He does not say it shall be the next hour, next week, next month, next year. He leaves that with Himself; He keeps that in His own hands. He binds Himself by a naked promise. But He does not tell us how He brings about that promise. *That* He keeps in His own bosom. And it is a mercy that He does. By keeping that in His own bosom He leaves to Himself a wonderful way, in which to work out the accomplishment of that promise. Keeping the manner and the time to Himself, He reserves to Himself different paths, in which He leads His children, merely tying Himself down with a naked

promise and not revealing in what way that promise shall be accomplished. It was so with Abraham; He gave him a naked promise, but the way in which it was to be accomplished He kept in His own breast. And so He has given a naked promise to every child of His, that "calls upon Him;" He says, "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;" He has tied Himself there, He has bound Himself by His Word, which can never be broken: but He has not said *how*, nor has He said *when*.

Now it is this *how* and *when*, that so try the child of God, who is calling upon the Lord and not receiving the answer that he desires to receive at His mouth. If he could only just know the time fixed, he could bear with all his trouble patiently; if he could only see the manner in which the blessing would come, he thinks he should find some relief from his trial of soul in calling upon God and finding the answer so long delayed. But the answer that God gives, He gives in His own time. And I believe, many of the children of God have had to cry to Him for days and weeks and months and years, and the answer has been delayed; and then, when expectation seemed to give up the ghost, when there seemed no longer any prospect that God would fulfil His promise, when the hopes of nature (like the body of Abraham) were "now dead," then when flesh failed, just in that hour the Lord fulfilled the promise and brought the answer into the soul.

But sometimes the Lord is pleased to answer our prayers more immediately; He brings us into those straits and troubles from which we cannot extricate ourselves, and then will answer our prayer and fulfil the promise. But perhaps it is in such a way as we least expect, and yet in such a way as most glorifies Him.

Now there is sometimes in men's minds a kind of confusion in this matter. They are in a certain path, from which they want to be extricated; they are under a trial, from which they want to be delivered; they call upon the Lord to deliver them, and they want some manifestation from Himself, some going forth of His hand, some Divine leading which they are to follow. But the Lord may be working in a very different way from what they think; and

they may really be inattentive to the internal voice of God in their conscience, because they are expecting the voice to come in some other part. It was just so with myself. When I was in the Establishment, burdened with all the things I had to go through, and troubled and distressed in my mind, I was calling upon the Lord to deliver me, to lead me out, to show me what to do, to make the path plain and clear. Now that was my sincere cry; but I expected some miraculous interposition, to hear some voice, to have some wonderful leading; and in waiting for that, I was waiting for what the Lord never meant to bestow. And I was brought at last to this internal conviction: suppose I were living in drunkenness, suppose I were living in adultery, suppose I were walking in known sin, should I want a voice from God to say to me, "Leave this drunkenness, come out from this adultery, give up this sin?" should I want some Divine manifestation to bring me out of a sin, when my conscience bore its solemn witness and I was miserable under the weight and burden of it? No; the very conviction is the answer of God to the prayer; the very burden which the Lord lays on us is meant to press us out of that in which we are walking. So I reasoned with myself: "If I am living in sin, if it be a sin to be where I am, if I must do things which my conscience tells me are sins, and by which my conscience is burdened as sins, the very conviction, the very distress, the very burden, is the answer. It is the voice of God in the conscience; not the voice of God in the air, not the appearance of God in the sky, but the voice of God in the conscience and the appearance of the frown of God in the heart." And on this simple conviction I was enabled to act, and never to this day have repented it. I have, therefore, been led to see by experience that we are often expecting wonderful answers, mysterious answers, and the Lord does not mean to give those answers.

The Lord, you see, reserves the way in which He shall give the answer. Are you in some temptation, passing through some exercise? "Oh!" say you, "I want the Lord to lead me out." Well, is the Lord bearing a solemn witness in your conscience? Is the Lord speaking in that secret court, and manifesting His frown in your soul? That is His answer, and He will not vouchsafe to give

you any other. It is to that the soul must look; and he that is enabled to hear this reproof in conscience, must take it as the answer of God to those prayers which he is putting up for deliverance from the temptation or the sin under which he is labouring.

So, again, the soul sometimes shall call upon the Lord to show it sweet manifestations of Christ, to lead it blessedly into Christ, to settle it down into liberty in Christ, to make Christ precious, and lead the soul into blessed communion with Him. Well, these sighs and groans and cries and desires and breathings of the soul come from God; they are His work in the Spirit, and the Lord says: "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." But how will He answer him? Why, by making his shackles heavier, making his fetters more grievous. As it was with the children of Israel in Egypt; they cried to the Lord for deliverance, they groaned and sighed, and their prayers reached the ear of the Lord and their cries moved His heart; but how did He answer? Their burdens were made heavier; they were to make bricks without straw; they were to be put further from deliverance; and every successive prayer seemed to make the king's heart harder, and deliverance more improbable. So perhaps with ourselves. We have been crying to the Lord for years to make Christ precious, to lead us into close communion with Him, to open up the secrets of His bosom, and bathe our souls in that love of His "which passeth knowledge," and we have found some access to a throne of grace in pouring out those desires. Now, the Lord answers them; but how does He answer them? By bringing us into those spots and those states of experience to which these ideas of Christ are alone applicable. Our feeling would be to loll upon our sofa or to lean in our armchair, and have Christ come into our hearts without any burdens or distresses or griefs or trials or temptations or powerful exercises; we want some sweet manifestation of Christ, but we want it to come through a channel which is not a channel of pain and suffering. Now the Lord says, "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;" "He shall see Christ, he shall have a sweet view of Christ, he shall have a blessed manifestation of Christ, he shall be led up into Christ;" but how? "By being placed by My hand in

those spots to which Christ alone is adapted, for which Christ alone is suitable, and from which Christ alone delivers." "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him."

Sometimes the soul will pray to have power, inward power, to lay hold of God's promises, and to feel the sweetness of God's promises within. We read the Scriptures, we see such and such promises made to the elect. "Oh!" say we to ourselves, "what know I of this promise? Surely I have not felt this promise; surely I have not tasted the sweetness of this promise; oh! that the Lord would lead me into it!" And the Lord says, "I will; 'He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;' you shall have the promise, aye, all the promise; you shall have the sweetness of it, the blessedness of it." But, mark, you must be in the path to which that promise is suitable, you must be in the trial to which that promise is adapted, you must be in the exercise out of which that promise delivers, you must be in the difficulty which that promise fits. You must have the mortise for the tenon to go into, you must have the emptiness to be filled out of Christ's fulness, you must have the beggary to be supplied with Christ's riches, you must have the bankruptcy to have a sweet and full discharge.

And the Lord, when He is going to fulfil the promise, does not show His hand and say: "Now I am leading you into the promise, now I am fulfilling to you the prayer; see how My arm is now bare, and how I am guiding and leading you into the promise, after which you have been praying." The Lord does not speak thus in conscience, but hides Himself and darkens the cloud in our souls; we get farther off from the promise than ever; get, as it were, miles and leagues away from the point we thought we were going to approach, like the mariner who is driven away by the winds; we are seeking to get into the promise, and we get blown aside by gusts and winds, further from the point at which we are aiming. But the Lord is all the while leading us into it, because He is bringing us down into the spot to which the promise applies. We say, "Lord, make me rich." He says, "I will, but thou must first be made poor." We say, "Lord, let me have a precious view of Christ." "I will, but you must first have a sight of

your own self." "Let me know the riches of Christ's blood." "I will, but you must first know the depth of your guilt." "Let me know what it is to stand complete in Christ's righteousness." "I will, but you must first sink down in self-loathing and self-abhorrence." So that the Lord takes His own path, and chooses His own way, to bring about His own purposes, in such a mysterious manner that reason is staggered, nature gives up the ghost, and all the powers of flesh and blood fail and get to their wits' end; and then the Lord brings about the fulfilment of that promise which we have been desiring to get into, and the enjoyment of which we have been longing richly to feel.

So then: "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." The Lord encourages His people to call upon Him for whatsoever they want. Not to go with lip-service, not to go with made-up tales; but the Lord encourages all His blood-bought family, whom He has quickened by His Spirit, to call upon Him for everything their souls long after; be it deliverance from trouble, be it sweet manifestations of mercy, be it blessed enjoyment of Christ, be it for a heart enlarged, be it for the liberty of the Gospel, be it to stand firm in Jesus, be it to be brought out of any temptation under which they are labouring. "Open thy mouth wide," says the Lord, "and I will fill it." Whatever thou askest, believing, thou shalt receive. "Pour out your heart before Me," says the Lord. Well, the soul is sometimes enabled to do so. Have not you and I, friends, been enabled to pour out our hearts at a throne of grace, and tell the Lord what we really wanted, what we really asked for, and tell Him that nothing but that which He alone could give would satisfy our souls? There have been such times of access to the God of grace. And afterwards perhaps we have forgotten the things we told Him of; we have been heedless of the prayers we laid at His feet; and though very earnest at the time in seeking after certain blessings, we left them at the Lord's feet and forgot them all. But the Lord does not forget them; they are treasured up in His heart and memory; and in His own time He brings them to light, and gives the fulfilment of them. But before He does it, He will bring us into the spot where we want them again; and then we have to tell Him again, and supplicate Him again, and

ask Him again, ashamed of ourselves perhaps that we should have asked the Lord for these blessings, and been as heedless of them as though we did not care to receive them at His hand; but still, under trouble, under soul necessity, under grief, we go and tell Him again. And then the Lord, in His own way and time, brings about that very thing we desired of Him. Perhaps it is some temptation under which we have been labouring for months, some grievous sin which is continually put by Satan before our eyes, and into which we are afraid we shall tumble headlong; some cursed bait which that arch-deceiver knows how to dress up in such pleasing colours that our wretched nature wants to grasp it, only it knows there is a hook concealed; some internal weight of guilt, on account of which the soul "groans, being burdened." Here is painful exercise, and the soul cries to the Lord to be delivered from it. "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." There is no use in going with it to man; there is no use in keeping it buried in our breasts. Sometimes we get a sullen fit, and will not tell the Lord any more—He has delayed the answer so long—like a sullen child that will not eat the very bread the parent lays down; but we must be brought out of this sulky fit. Whatever the Lord means to give He from time to time enlarges our hearts to ask, and keeps us waiting, pleading, sighing, suing, groaning and begging at His blessed feet for those things without which we must perish eternally, without which we cannot comfortably live, and without which we cannot happily die. And so it is no matter of choice, it is no matter left to the free will of man, whether he will pray or not; but it is so laid upon his heart, so pressed out of him by the heavy load upon him, that he is compelled, whether he will or not, to cry to the Lord for things he must have or die. And then, in His own time and in His own way, He brings everything to pass which the soul wants to have brought to pass; opens up ways, brings deliverances, lifts out of trials, removes burdens, makes a way in the deep, which no eye but His could see and no hand but His could open, leads the soul into it, brings the soul through it, and then hides all glory from the creature by making us fall down before His feet and ascribe glory and honour and power and thanksgiving and salvation unto God and the Lamb.

THE GOING FORTH OF THE LORD PREPARED AS THE MORNING

Preached on Lord's Day Afternoon, September 19th, 1841, at Allington, near Devizes

"Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." Hosea 6:3

Before I enter into the spiritual meaning of these words, it will be necessary to see the connection of the passage with what precedes it. There is no more fruitful parent of error than to take detached portions of God's Word, separated from their connection. Only so far as light is cast upon the Word of God by the blessed Spirit, and we in that light see its spiritual meaning, are we able to arrive at any right understanding of it; but that meaning will not be one distorted from the connection, nor one wrested from the place that it occupies, as a link torn from a complete chain, but will, for the most part, be in harmony with the context.

The words of the text are the language of Ephraim; but they are the language of Ephraim under particular circumstances, and as passing through a particular experience. They are not a promise thrown down for anybody to pick up; they are not words to be taken at random into everybody's lips. Nor are they a promise addressed generally to the Church of God; but they set forth an experience of a peculiar nature; and therefore only so far as we have some acquaintance with that experience are the words suitable to us.

We will, then, with God's blessing, look back a little at this and the preceding chapter (for they are both closely connected), and endeavour, with God's help, to trace out what was the experience of Ephraim *at the time* that he uttered these words; and then we shall perhaps more clearly see the difference between the

language of faith and the language of presumption.

1. In the twelfth verse of the preceding chapter, the Lord says: "Therefore will I be unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness." This casts a light on the dealings of God with Ephraim. Ephraim had wrapped himself up in a robe; he had covered himself with a garment, but not of God's Spirit. Now the Lord threatens that He "I will be unto Ephraim as a moth." That is, He will fret this garment; He will (to use a familiar expression) make holes in it; it shall not be a complete garment to cover him, but it shall be moth-eaten and rotten, so that, dropping to pieces bit by bit, it could neither cover his nakedness nor shield him from God's all-searching eye. We find the Psalmist, in Psalm 39:11, making use of the same figure, and a very striking one it is. "When Thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, Thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth:" or as it is in the old version, preserved in the Common Prayer Book, "like as it were a moth fretting a garment."

These words then show us just where Ephraim was in soul experience. Ephraim does not represent one destitute of spiritual light and life, but a quickened vessel of mercy, and yet one who, for want of the moth and the rottenness, was wrapping himself up in a garment, not of God's giving, nor of the Spirit's application, that is, not the glorious robe of Christ's imputed righteousness cast around him by the Spirit of God. Now I firmly believe that there are many persons who have the fear of God in their hearts who are wrapping themselves up in a covering which is not of God's Spirit, and therefore, as the prophet speaks, "add sin to sin" (Isa. 30:1). Not having been led into a deep acquaintance with the spirituality of God's law, not having had all their refuges of lies broken up, they wrap themselves up in a covering which is not of God's Spirit; and they fancy that this garment in which they are wrapped up is the robe of Christ's imputed righteousness, merely because they believe in *the doctrine* of Christ's righteousness. But that cutting expression, "a covering, but *not of My Spirit*," shows that there is something more to be known than *the bare doctrine* of Christ's

righteousness, and that the very doctrine itself becomes a lying refuge, when the mere letter of truth is sheltered in, and the Holy Ghost does not experimentally make it known to the soul.

The Lord, then, seeing precisely where Ephraim was, says, "I will be unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness." That is, just in the same way as when a man takes out of his chest or wardrobe a dress which he has laid up there perhaps for months, and when he holds this dress up to the light he finds that the moth has been there, has laid its eggs and fretted it, made holes in it, and absolutely spoiled it; so Ephraim, after having laid up his garment in his wardrobe, the Bible, and with great inward satisfaction having often looked upon it, when the hour of temptation and distress comes, and he would bring out this robe to wear, finds it all rent and torn, fretted and spoiled. The rents in Ephraim's covering were not seen until it was brought out to the light; but when beheld in the light of God's countenance, the moth-holes were visible, and it was found to be all dropping to pieces.

2. "And to the house of Judah as rottenness." That is, when Judah comes to put a strain upon the prop on which he leans, it breaks. That is the idea of rottenness. The old cable will do very well until there is a strain put upon it; but then, if it be rotten, it parts asunder, and the vessel falls upon the rocks. Thus the Lord says, "I will be to Judah *as* rottenness:" not "rottenness;" that cannot be, for that would imply corruption; but, "I will do the same thing spiritually that rottenness is naturally. I will make all his props to be to him as rotten; I will so spoil them in his experience, that, as Bildad speaks (Job 8:15), "he shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand; he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure."

3. But what is the effect of "the moth" and the "rottenness?" Will it at once cure Ephraim of his idolatries, and turn him to the stronghold as a prisoner of hope? No; not yet. "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound." Ephraim will not then turn to

the Lord. No; He is the last to whom he will go. He has a sickness, but the Assyrian shall be his physician; he sees his wound, but king Jareb shall be his surgeon: but it shall be all in vain, for the first cannot cure, and the second cannot heal.

And has not this been in a measure our case? When our false religion gave way, when the moth fretted our garments, and rottenness mouldered our props, was there not a secret leaning on an arm of flesh, a going to the Assyrian, a sending to king Jareb, a looking to the creature in some shape or another to bring ease and peace? But the wound could not be healed; there was no balm to be found from the creature; the moth had so fretted the garment that there was no patching it up again; the prop had become so rotten that it was no longer able to bear any weight.

4. But the Lord does not mean to leave Ephraim either to self-righteousness or to despair. He, therefore, says, "I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue him." Here the Lord speaks of Himself as being a lion unto Ephraim; that is, just as a lion rends a man to pieces, so will the Lord spiritually rend Ephraim. "I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them" (Hos. 13:8).

But what was this dealing with the Lord upon their souls for? Was it to destroy them? to rend them actually to pieces, so that none could deliver? This was not His object; it was to rend away everything that stood in the way of His grace, or that was substituted for His grace; to tear away false hopes, and rotten props, and creature expectations, so as to leave nothing, absolutely nothing, on which the creature could hang for support.

5. Now as long as the Lord is thus entering into controversy with Ephraim, there is in Ephraim's mind little else but murmuring, repining, fretting, rebellion, dissatisfaction, despondency, almost despair. And with all that, he cannot really pour out his soul

before God, nor can he find or feel any nearness of access to a throne of grace. But the Lord, secretly, in His own time and way, pours into Ephraim's soul the Spirit of grace and supplications; "He goes and returns to His place," until Ephraim is brought to his right mind; until rebellion is, in some measure, lulled in Ephraim's soul; until these waves are in some degree calmed, and he is brought to that spot spoken of in Lev. 26:41, "to accept of the punishment of his iniquity," to own that the Lord is righteous, and that He would be just if He sent him to hell.

6. Being thus divinely wrought upon, a blessed change takes place. Ephraim's heart now begins to work before the Lord; his bowels melt, his soul is softened, his spirit meekened. He is no longer struggling like a wild bull in a net; nor kicking like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; he is no longer full of inward rebellion; but by the secret work of God in his soul, he is humbled and quieted, so as to lie low at God's footstool. "He acknowledges his offence, and seeks His face." A change, which he could never have wrought himself, comes over him; and, under the meekening operations of the Holy Ghost in his soul, he is brought to repentance and confession. He draws near, therefore, with these words in his mouth: "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up."

7. But what language is this of Ephraim? Is it the language of creature-faith? Is it the language of daring presumption? Is it the language of free-will? No, none of these; it is the language of spiritual faith, the Lord having kindled in Ephraim's soul a measure of divine faith, whereby he is enabled to return. "Come," he says (as the prodigal said, "I will arise and go to my father"), "come, let us return." Here is his soul going out after the Lord; he is no longer labouring under rebellion and fretfulness; but a meekness and a quietness have been produced in his spirit. The Beloved has put in His hand by the hole of the door, and Ephraim's bowels are moved for Him (Song 5:4). The stony heart has become a heart of flesh; and his pride, stubbornness, and rebellion having all melted away, he cries, "Come, and let us

return to the Lord." It is with Ephraim now as it is with the Church as described Hosea 2:7, when she says with melting heart and weeping eyes, "I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now." In this language, then, of Ephraim we see the return of affection, living desires kindled, faith communicated and drawn into exercise, godly sorrow at work in the soul, and the breathing and going forth of prayer and supplication from the heart. O what a different feeling this is from rebellion and self-pity! And, depend upon it, friends, until the soul is thus meekened, softened, and brought down by the work of the Spirit upon it, there will be no saying with living faith, "Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He hath torn, and He will heal us." It is, therefore, not the daring language of presumption, but the accents of living faith. "He hath torn our souls with conviction; He hath smitten us with sorrow of heart; from Him came the wound, and from the same hand must come the remedy."

8. "After two days will He revive us; in the third day will He raise us up, and we shall live in His sight." In this mention of Ephraim's being raised up on the third day, there is doubtless an allusion to the resurrection of Jesus—Ephraim's covenant Head; for it is only in consequence of their union with their Head, that the members are quickened from their death in sin, are revived in their bondage (Ezra 9:8; Ps. 85:6), and will be raised up at the last day. "Thy dead men shall live; together with My dead body shall they arise" (Is. 26:19). Thus Ephraim speaks in the language of faith—"After two days" (a definite time for an indefinite one) "will He revive us"—that is, out of all our darkness and bondage; "in the third day will He raise us up" by the power of Christ's resurrection, and, as thus rising with Jesus, "we shall live in His sight." Faith was here at work. The Lord gave to Ephraim this sweet confidence, and wrought in his soul a powerful persuasion of coming deliverance.

Now it is absolutely necessary to take all these things into connection with the text in order to understand its meaning. The language here employed by Ephraim is not such as can be taken

into any one's mouth. It is that "fruit of the lips" which the Lord specially "created" (Isa. 57:19); and the root from which this special fruit sprang was the experience that has been described. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord," is not then a general declaration which anybody may claim, but the special language of faith in a living soul, and of that only as having passed through such an experience as has been described.

Having thus cleared our way a little, we come to the text. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth."

1. We gather, then, from these words, that there is such a thing in soul experience as "a following on to know the Lord;" and indeed there is no obtaining the blessings which are laid up for the righteous, unless there is this following on. "To know the Lord" is the desire of every living soul; that is, to know Him by His own divine manifestations, by the gracious revelation of His grace, His love, His presence, and His glory. And whatever measure of knowledge a child of God may have of the Lord, it will always seem in his mind to be an imperfect and deficient knowledge. The blessed apostle Paul, who had been in the third heavens, seemed still comparatively to know Him not, and therefore says, "*That I may know Him*, and the power of His resurrection;" as though all his knowledge of Christ was but as a drop compared with the ocean—as though all his experience was but as a single ray compared with the body of light and heat that dwells in the sun.

"To know the Lord" is to know experimentally and spiritually the power of Jesus' blood and righteousness; to know our eternal union with Him; to know Him so as to be led by the Spirit into soul communion with Him, that we may talk with Him as a man talketh with his friend; to know Him so that the secrets of His heart should be revealed to us, and we enter by faith into the length and breadth and depth and height of the love of Christ

which passeth knowledge; to know Him so as to drink into His Spirit, and to have His image stamped by the Holy Ghost upon our souls; to know Him as coming down into our hearts out of His glorious sanctuary, filling our souls with His presence and His love; to know Him as formed in us the hope of glory, making our bodies His temple, dwelling in us, breathing Himself into us, speaking in us, moving as it were every affection of our heart and every faculty of our soul. Thus to know the Lord is the sum and substance of vital godliness. And, as "to know the Lord" implies, as well as comprehends, the knowledge of Jehovah in His Trinity of Persons and Unity of essence, well may we say that, to know Jehovah the Father in His eternal love, to know Jehovah the Son in His redeeming blood, and to know Jehovah the Spirit in His divine operations and blessed teaching, is the foretaste of bliss below; and to know and see God as He is, is the consummation of bliss above.

But the expression "follow on," implies that there are many difficulties, obstacles, and hindrances in a man's way, which keep him back from "knowing the Lord." We will look at a few of these.

1. Sometimes, for instance, a thought like this will rush into the mind: "My religion is all in the flesh; God did not begin with me: I fear I am nothing else but a base hypocrite; and I have taken up a profession of religion, without the Lord the Spirit leading me into the truth as it is in Jesus." Now, when a solemn dread of this kind, perhaps in the lonely watches of the night, falls, as it were, like a ton of lead into a man's heart, it seems for the time effectually to check all the goings forth of his soul. In whatever state of mind he be, when it seems dropped into his conscience with conviction that he is nothing but a base hypocrite, it seems to cut the thread of all his religion; it effectually stops him from making any movement towards God. He will indeed sigh and groan as a forlorn and lost wretch; but the actings of faith are so damped, that he seems to be nothing but an awful reprobate in the sight of God, and he fears that hell will be his portion for ever.

2. Sometimes when the soul is following eagerly on to know the Lord, Satan will hurl some blasphemous suggestion into our carnal mind. This fiery dart shall so kindle into a blaze those combustible materials of which our carnal nature is full, that it shall set them all on fire. There is no "following on" now to know the Lord, the soul is driven back upon itself; and as it recoils with horror from the imaginations that possess it, it draws back from all approach unto God, fearing to come within the pale of His holy presence, as conscious that His heart-searching eye sees all the abominations that are working within.

3. Sometimes the remembrance of past sins lying as a heavy load on the conscience so presses a man down into despondency and well-nigh despair, that it seems impossible for him to move one step towards Zion. He looks back on his past life, he calls to mind all his sins against God; and they appear so monstrous, so aggravated, so horrible, so black, that it seems utterly impossible they can be washed away, blotted out, and freely forgiven; and this keeps him from following on.

4. Sometimes the gusts of infidelity will so blow on a man's mind as to make him doubt the reality of all religion; aye, for a time persuade him that the Bible is not the inspired Word of God, and that everything which others say they have felt, and even what he has felt himself, was a delusion. Objections innumerable start up in his mind against the Scriptures; and Satan plies every argument that is suitable to nature and reason, till faith appears driven out of the field, and infidelity to riot at large in the soul. Whilst these gusts blow, I am very sure there is no following on to know the Lord; nor until a lull comes, and faith once more lifts her drooping head, is there any power to move forward.

5. Sometimes the recollection of the many inconsistencies, the many foolish thoughts, the foolish words, and foolish and even sinful actions that a man has committed since he made a profession, so stand like mountains of difficulty in the way, that he is utterly unable to pass over them; and thus they check and keep him from following on to know the Lord; for he says to

himself, "If I were really a partaker of the grace of God, I should never have acted in this way; the Lord would never have suffered me to commit this or that sin: surely I can be nothing but a base hypocrite, and the grace of God can never have touched my heart."

6. Sometimes mountains of worldly trouble stand in his way. His religion brings a cross with it. It calls down perhaps the persecution of his relatives; his children or his wife, his master or his parents oppose him; persons from whom he derives his daily bread set their faces against him; and his worldly prospects so stand in the way of his religion that he must either give them up, or the things of God. Here then sometimes the soul comes to a stand; it cannot go forward or backward; it cannot turn to the right hand or to the left: flesh pleads so hard, and faith is so weak; the right path is so rugged, and yet conscience remonstrates so loudly against the wrong, that a step can be taken in neither direction, and this prevents him from "following on to know the Lord."

7. Sometimes such darkness besets the mind, such clouds of unbelief rest on the soul, the way is so obscure, the path so out of sight, and we so unable to see any road at all, that we cannot "follow on," because we know not which way to go. Job was here when he said, "O that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat! Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him." Darkness beset his path; and like a man in a dark night, he could not move a single step forward, lest he should fall down some precipice, or go out of the road altogether.

Now the work of the Spirit in a man's soul is to carry him on in spite of all these obstacles. Nature, and all the work of nature, and all the power of Satan working on nature, is to draw the man back; but the work of the Spirit on the soul is to lead him forward, to keep alive in him the fear of God, to strengthen him from time to time with strength in his inner man, to give him those enlargements, to drop in those hopes, to communicate that

inward grace, and to gird up the loins of his mind, so that in spite of sense, reason, and nature, he is compelled to follow on. Sometimes he seems driven and sometimes drawn, sometimes led and sometimes carried—but in one way or another the Spirit of God so works upon him that, though he scarce knows how, he still "follows on." His very burdens make him groan for deliverance; his very temptations cause him to cry for help; the very difficulty and ruggedness of the road make him want to be carried every step; the very intricacy of the path compels him to cry out for a guide: so that the Lord the Spirit working in the midst of, and under, and through every difficulty and discouragement, still bears him through, and carries him on; and thus brings him through every trial and trouble and temptation and obstacle, till He sets him before the Lord in glory.

It is astonishing to me how our souls are kept alive. I am often a marvel to myself, that ever I should experience any revival, feeling at times such barrenness, such leanness, such deadness, such carnality, such inability to any spiritual thought. I have been often astonished that ever I could preach, that ever I could pray—astonished when the Lord's day comes that I should have a text to preach from, any life in my soul, or any power to say anything for the edification of God's people. I believe a living man is a marvel to himself. Carried on, and yet so secretly; worked upon, and yet so mysteriously; and yet led on, guided and supported through so many difficulties and obstacles, that he is a miracle of mercy, and, as the apostle says, "a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men" (1 Cor.4:9); the world wondering, the angels admiring, and men standing astonished, how the quickened soul is carried on amidst all its difficulties, obstacles, trials, and temptations; and yet in spite of all—"following on."

But "following on" for what? "To know the Lord" as the sum and substance of all religion, as the very marrow of vital godliness; to know Jesus, so as by faith to enter into His beauty and loveliness, and feel ourselves one Spirit with Him, according to those words, "He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17).

But the Church, speaking thus in the person of Ephraim, says, "*Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.*" *What shall she know?* She shall know that the Lord's hand supported her through all her temptations, that none of the devices of Satan against her have prospered, that all her temporal trials have worked together for her good, that God has made use of the things that seemed most against her that they might be most for her, and that He has overruled every dispensation so as to make it a dispensation of mercy. She shall know that her first convictions were of God, that the first dawnings of light and life upon her soul were from Him, that He held her up when she must otherwise have utterly fallen, and that when Satan came in like a flood, it was the Spirit of the Lord that lifted up a standard against him. She shall know, too, that God was the Author and the Finisher of her faith, the source of her hope, and the fountain of her love. She shall know that she has not had one trial too heavy, not shed one tear too much, nor put up one groan too many; but that all these things have in a most mysterious and inexplicable manner worked together for her spiritual good.

Now, friends, till we know something experimentally of the Lord we cannot know all this; till we know more or less of Jesus by His own sweet manifestations, the cloud is not taken up from our religion. Doubts, fears, despondencies, inexplicable mysteries will rest upon our path—both on our path in providence, and on our path in grace. But when we are brought to know Jesus, it is like the sun shining in the midst of the sky. Until the sun shines, mists and fogs hover over the scene; but when the sun arises, then the mists and fogs disperse, and the whole path shines forth outstretched to view. So when the Lord brings the soul into some sweet communion with Jesus, and He is made experimentally known, then it sees that the Lord has led it all these years in the wilderness; then it knows how kindly, and gently, and mercifully, and wisely He has dealt with it; then it feels as a matter of personal, individual, practical experience, that "all things work together for good to them that love God."

II. But we pass on to consider another prominent feature of our text; and that closely connected with the preceding. "His goings forth are prepared as the morning." The Lord had said in the foregoing chapter, "I will go and return to My place;" that is, "I will hide Myself from Ephraim; he shall call, but I will not answer; he shall cry, but I will not appear." Now this is a part of experience through which every living soul passes—to know what it is to seek the Lord, and not find Him; to call upon Him, and receive no answer; to feel that the clouds of darkness so hide the throne of God as not to be able to see it, nor come near it, and yet to know that He is there.

And here lies the difference between a living soul in his darkest hours and a dead professor. A living soul knows that God is to be found of His saints, but cannot always, nor often find Him for himself; but a dead professor knows nothing about God at all. The darkest fog might cover the downs that "heave up their broad backs into the sky" a little distance from where we now are; still I know they are there, because I have seen them again and again; but a thorough stranger to the country, who was passing for the first time through this valley, would not know that they were there, because the fog would hide them altogether from his view. So a soul that has seen anything of the power and glory of God in the sanctuary, knows that there is His dwelling-place (Ex. 25:8), His goings (Ps. 68:24), and His way; and, like Jonah, "looks again toward His holy temple," though clouds and darkness entirely surround Him. But a dead professor of religion has never by faith entered into that sanctuary, nor lifted up believing hands toward His holy oracle (Ps. 28:2); and, therefore, as he knows nothing of light, knows nothing of darkness. All is with him a dead unmeaning service.

It is, then, to the living soul walking in darkness, and unable to find God, that the text speaks: "His going forth is prepared as the morning." There is an appointed time for the Lord to go forth; and this is sweetly compared to the rising of the sun. Does not "the dayspring know his place?" (Job 28:12). Does not the sun arise every day according to the minute before appointed? Is he

ever before his time, or ever after his time? Did the free will of the creature ever hurry or retard his rising for a single second? Thus it is with the going forth of the Lord for the salvation of His people (Hab. 3:13), the going forth of the Lord in the revelation of His presence and His power, the going forth of the Lord from the place where He has for a while hidden Himself, to come down with light and life into the soul. All His glorious goings forth are as much prepared, and the moment is as much appointed, as the time is fixed every morning for the sun to rise.

But what is the state of things naturally, before the sun rises? Does not midnight precede the dawn, does not darkness come before light? And when it is midnight naturally, can we bid the sun arise and disperse the darkness? Is there not, as the psalmist says, a waiting for the morning naturally? "My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning" (Psa. 130:6). Is there not the invalid tossing on his restless couch, waiting for the morning? Is there not the shipwrecked mariner driven on the rocks, waiting anxiously for the morning, to know what is his prospect of safety, what friendly sail may be in sight? Is not the man benighted on the downs waiting for the morning, that the sun may arise, and he find his way homeward? But with all their waiting, they cannot bid the sun arise; they must wait till the appointed time. So the going forth of the Sun of Righteousness, the appearance of Christ in the heart, the sweet revelation of the Son of God, the lifting up of the light of His blessed countenance, is "prepared as the morning"—as fixed, as appointed in the mind of God as the morning to come in its season; but no more to be hurried than the sun is to be hurried up the sky. Aye, and it is as much an impossibility for us to bring the Lord into our souls before the appointed time, or keep Him there when He is come, as for us to play the part of Joshua, and say, "Sun, stand thou still in Gibeon, and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon."

But "His going forth is prepared as the morning," and when He goes forth, He goes forth "conquering and to conquer," mounted on the white horse spoken of in Revelation (6:2). He goes forth to conquer our enemies, to overcome our temptations, to lay our

souls at His footstool, to arise like the sun in his strength, and to come into the heart with healing in His wings.

III. But we have another figure added, which shows the fruit and effect of His coming. "He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." His going forth is compared to the rising of the sun—glorious and certain; His coming to the rain—softening and fertilizing. And there is something very sweet not only in the figure itself—rain, but "in the latter and former rain" spoken of. To understand the spiritual, we must first know the natural meaning of this figure. In the land of Palestine there are not, as in our country, showers at all seasons of the year; generally speaking, there was only rain at two periods—one was called the former rain, and the other the latter rain. Thus we find that the prophet Samuel makes it a miracle, that God should send thunder and rain in the wheat harvest. It would not be a miracle with us, it is a common occurrence; but it is so unusual in those countries to have rain in harvest, that the prophet Samuel speaks of it as a miracle, and as a sign that God was displeased for their asking a king (1 Sam. 12:17, 18). The Hebrews began their civil year in the autumn. Thus "the former or early rain" was the rain that fell in the autumn, and "the latter rain" that which fell in the spring. Now the former rain came upon the seed in the autumn, when it was committed to the furrow, and falling upon it, caused it to germinate and spring up. The latter rain fell in the spring upon the growing crop, and brought it forward for the harvest, which was much earlier there than with us, the barley harvest being at the time of the Passover, or our Easter, and the wheat harvest at the feast of Pentecost, or our Whitsuntide.

Now I think that in this early (or as it is here called, "former") and latter rains, we have a sweet figure of the visitations of Christ to the soul. The early rain, which comes first, is the first sight which the soul has of Christ—the season of the first love, the day of the espousals, when we go after the Lord into a land not sown (Jer. 2:2), when the Lord allures us (as He speaks in Hosea 2:14), into the wilderness; the first days of the Son of man: the

season that Job speaks of, when he says, "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when His candle shined upon my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness, as I was *in the days of my youth*, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle" (Job. 29:2, 3, 4). "The days of my youth"—that is, the days of his spiritual youth—when he first fell in love with Jesus, and was full of zeal and warmth for His honour and glory. Christ then first comes as the former rain which falls on the seed committed to the furrows, and makes it spring up vigorous and strong. But there is a winter to come after that. The Hebrews, as I have just said, began their year in the autumn, at which season the former rain fell. There was a winter then to pass through afterwards; there were frosts to nip the young wheat; there were long, cold, chilling nights to make it turn yellow in the blade: it often became stunted and sickly, and seemed to go backward rather than forward, and so it continued until the second or latter rain came in the spring.

Does not this well set forth the experience of the soul? After the first rain of Christ's presence and Christ's grace and power has come on the seed of truth in the heart, there follows the long winter, when the blades of faith, hope and love turn sickly and yellow, aye, sometimes (as we saw a few winters back), even the very blade gone, so that the wheat seems dead, as though all the crop were utterly destroyed; and yet life in the root, yet life struggling on, but still unable to spring forth until warmth and rain should come to make it shoot afresh. And then, after all this long winter, drops down in the appointed time the latter rain just before the harvest, the warm showers falling on it just before the Lord "putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come" (Mark 4:29). Here is the smile of the Lord upon the soul just before he takes it home, the breathing of His presence and love before He gathers it to be finally and everlastingly in His bosom.

Now it is said "He shall come" in this way, first in the espousals, and then in the wedding; first in the sowing of the seed, and then in the reaping of the harvest; first to make it germinate and come up out of the soil, covered with the thick clods, and then to fill the

ear before it is gathered into the garner to be for ever with the Lord.

The Church speaks here in a spirit of prophecy. If I may use an expression, which perhaps you will hardly receive unless I explain it—the Church here believes for her children. Not believes for them *in a way of justification*, as though her faith could be any substitute for theirs, or be any way available for their salvation; I mean not that; but believes for them in *the way of experience*. We often find this as a daily matter of fact. A man who has passed through some severe trial of soul and been delivered, when he sees another in the same trial, can believe for him, though the man passing through it cannot believe for himself. So the Church in this way believes for her children. She believes in the Lord's faithfulness, and being favoured with strong confidence in His mercy, opens her arms wide, and prophesies of the visitations of His favour to all her children.

And now before I close, let me gather up my fragments, and run over what I have endeavoured to unfold of the meaning of the text. There is then a following on to know the Lord, after the soul has been smitten, wounded, and torn; and he that thus follows on to know the Lord amidst all the difficulties and troubles of the way will surely know Him to his eternal joy; for His going forth is prepared as the morning which must arise in its appointed time. Nor will He go forth only "as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds" (2 Samuel 23:4), but He will also come "as the latter and former rain unto the earth." He will come unto every parched soul that feels itself like a barren wilderness, as the latter and the former rain, to water the ridges thereof abundantly, to settle the furrows thereof, to make it soft with showers, to bless the springing thereof, that the valleys may be covered over with corn, that they may shout for joy, and also sing (Psa. 65:10, 13).

We see, then, that the words of the text are not such expressions as any professor of religion may take into his lips. They are not to be thrown down by the minister from the pulpit to encourage

anybody and everybody, whether they know anything of divine dealings or not. They are not to be held out as an encouragement to carnal people, that *they* are to follow on to know the Lord, and make themselves religious, whether God work in them or not. But they are spoken to those who have passed through a certain experience, and are prophetic of the happy termination of that experience. And all who are passing through it know something of the things I have been speaking of; they know something of the difficulties of the road, something of following on in spite of those difficulties; and something too, at times, of a sweet confidence and blessed persuasion in their souls that they shall know the end of the present trials, and the reason of the Lord's dispensation, believing in their very hearts, by the Spirit's inward testimony, that the going forth of the Lord is prepared as the morning, and that He will come in His own appointed time and way, as the latter and the former rain unto the earth.

THE GOLDEN CHAIN OF TRIBULATION AND LOVE

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, on Lord's Day Evening, August 15, 1852

"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing, that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Romans 5:3-5

What, should you say, was the greatest attainment in religion? If this question were put to different persons, even amongst those who know and fear God, the answer might be different. One might say, "It is to be well established in the doctrines of the gospel; to be no longer a child tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, but to be 'rooted and grounded' in 'the truth as it is in Jesus.'" Another might answer, "It is to have much enjoyment of the Spirit, grace and presence of God in the soul; to have clear and blessed views of our interest in Jesus; and to experience a continual sense of that 'perfect love' which 'casteth out fear,' and of that 'peace which passeth all understanding.'" Another might reply, "It is to have a conscience very tender and alive to the evil of sin, to walk very humbly with God, to be kept very close at His footstool, and to be watchful and prayerful all the day long." Another might say, "It consists in having the mind and will of Christ stamped on the soul, in walking with the strictest regard to all the precepts of the gospel, and in having heart, lip and life perfectly conformed to the image and example of the Lord Jesus."

Now I do not say that all or any of these answers would be wrong; but I do say that none of them would precisely hit the mark. "Well, then," it may be asked, "what do you think to be the greatest attainment in religion?" I answer, "To glory in tribulations." That was certainly the mind of the Apostle Paul, as I think I shall in a few moments be able to show you.

Having, in the preceding chapters, established the doctrine of justification, he proceeds to mention, in the opening of this, some of the fruits which spring out of it. The first is, "Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;" the second, "Access by faith into this grace wherein we stand;" and the third, "Rejoicing in hope of the glory of God." Look at these three blessed fruits of being freely justified by faith. Can anything surpass them? Peace with God, access into a gracious standing before His presence, and a rejoicing in hope of future glory. Yet the fourth fruit of justification surpasses these three rich and ripe clusters. "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also;" clearly implying that to glory in tribulation is a greater attainment than to enjoy peace with God, or to have access by faith into a state of grace, or to rejoice in hope of eternal glory.

But it may be asked, "How can this be?" The answer is embodied in our text, which I shall, therefore, as the Lord may enable me, endeavour to open up this evening.

I find in our text a golden chain, wreathed by the hand of God round the soul; and in this golden chain I find certain blessed links. What is this chain? and what are these links? The chain is that which, let down from heaven to earth, binds the soul to the throne of God. The separate links are:

I.—Tribulation.

II.—Patience.

III.—Experience.

IV.—Hope

V.—The love of God.

And when the first is connected with the last, when "tribulation" is welded on to "the love of God" the chain is complete.

With God's blessing, therefore, I shall endeavour to take up this chain, and, viewing severally its separate links, to show their connection with each other as well as their mutual dependence and beautiful harmony.

I.—The first link in this heavenly chain is a very heavy one, so heavy that it would weigh down them all, if it were not sustained by the last—"**Tribulation.**" And observe that this is the first. We are not at liberty to choose which link we shall lay hold of first, or we should probably begin where we should leave off, and grasp "the love of God" before "tribulation;" seize the crown before the cross, and shout "Victory!" before the battle. God's order must be followed, not ours; for if we begin at the wrong end we shall never make a complete chain. The first link, then, of this heavenly chain is "tribulation;" and this is a very heavy link, because many afflictions are often welded together to make it stout and strong, and give it weight and substance.

The word "tribulation," in the original, means literally a being pressed down; and it is remarkable that the English word "tribulation" has somewhat of a similar meaning, for it is derived from a Latin word, which signifies literally a threshing of corn, according to the ancient way of driving a machine over it. Nothing, then, deserves the name of "tribulation" which does not press down the soul and thresh out the chaff. Little troubles that come and go, passing vexations, transient trials of a day or hour, the varied annoyances which try the temper or mortify pride, unexpected disappointments in business, and a hundred other circumstances which are sufficiently harassing for the time, all fall short of what is meant by the weighty word "tribulation." They are not heavy enough to form a link in the heavenly chain. The Lord's people, however, have many "tribulations," for it stands written in large letters on the arch of the strait gate, "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." These, then, are, or should be, the first words which salute the pilgrim's eye, and show him beforehand the character of the road.

As earth is but a vale of tears, the church has many tribulations in common with the world. Family troubles were the lot of Job, Abraham, Jacob and David; sickness befell Hezekiah, Trophimus and Epaphroditus; reverses and losses fell upon Job and upon the son of the prophet whose widow Elisha miraculously relieved from debt; poverty and famine drove Naomi into the land of Moab. Trouble, then, is in itself no sign of grace; for it inevitably flows from and is necessarily connected with, man's fallen state.

But we should fix our eye on two things, as especially marking the temporal afflictions of the Lord's family:

1. That they are all weighed out and timed by special appointment; for though "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards," yet "affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground." **Job 5:6** And,

2. That they are specially sanctified, and made to "work together for good" to those who love God.

But besides such afflictions as ill-health, family troubles, or straitened circumstances, which the church has in common with the world, she has tribulations peculiar to herself. Some of these are outward, as persecution, oppression, scorn, contempt, contumely; these result from her very position in the world, as a witness for Christ; she suffers them as one with her suffering Head. "If the world hate you," said He, "ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." **Joh 15:18,19** But her chief troubles are inward, and arise from the assaults of Satan, powerful temptations, the guilt of sin laid on the conscience, doubts and fears about an interest in Christ, distressing suggestions, and a daily, hourly conflict with a nature ever lusting to evil.

II.—I cannot dwell upon this part of the subject so long as it deserves, because I wish rather to trace out its particular

connection with the other links of this chain. We read that "tribulation worketh patience." "Patience" here is not to be understood in its usual acceptation, as signifying meekness and quietness of disposition; the spiritual meaning of the word, here and elsewhere, is endurance. There are two different words in the original translated "patience;" one means a quiet, suffering disposition, as in **Jas 5:7,8**, "Be patient, therefore, brethren; — Be ye also patient;" the other word, which is used here, means endurance, as in **Jas 5:11**: "Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job;" properly, "the **endurance** of Job," the two words being the same. It is necessary to make this distinction, for the two words mean quite different things. It is not true that "tribulation worketh patience," in the usual sense of the term. Job's tribulations certainly did not, for he was peevish and fretful; but they wrought endurance. He was assailed on every hand, bereft of family and property, stripped to the very bone, harassed by Satan, and tempted by his own partner to "curse God and die." But amidst all this Job was not free from the surges and billows of rebellion; for he cursed the day wherein he was born, and vented the most poignant complaints. But he endured; he bared his head to the pitiless storm; he bore what God laid upon him, held fast his faith in his Maker, and did not give way to the tempter's suggestion to "curse God and die;" and he bore up and lived through all his trials, as a strong swimmer swims for his life amidst the foaming billows, and so safely reaches shore. This is "patience," that is, **endurance** in the sense of the word as used in the text.

But how does tribulation work patience? A figure may explain this. A horse unbroken cannot bear the slightest load on his back; but to teach him to carry them they are laid on, and the carrying of them at length teaches him to endure them. Or we may take another comparison. A man inured to severe bodily labour will work at it ten or twelve hours a day; I could not work one. Whence the difference? Labour has wrought in him endurance, and he submits to toil through use. So does "tribulation work patience."

But there is something further still. Endurance, in the scriptural sense, implies submission to the will of God. Until the soul is brought to endure in silence and resignation the afflicting strokes of God's hand, "tribulation" has not done its proper work; it has not wrought "patience." The first link of the chain is not welded on to the second. "Tribulation **worketh** patience." This implies a process, a something going on, a something gradually produced and eventually brought forth. It is not often thus at first. When the storm comes on we see no bright sun behind the dark cloud; nay, in a fit of unbelief or peevish rebellion, we are often determined to see no good couched in or likely to spring out of the trial. The first blow knocks down and stuns the soul, and it is often some time before it recovers itself sufficiently to see whence the blow comes, or why it is inflicted. So dark is the mind, so bewildered the judgment, through the pressure of the trial and Satan's suggestions, that we cannot see the hand of God behind the cloud, nor believe that it is sent by Him to work a special work in the soul. Whilst this tumult is going on patience is not produced; the trial that should work patience works only rebellion. The first step, then, towards patience is to see in the trial the hand of God. "I cannot bear it, I will not bear it," says the soul, till then; but when a ray of light comes to show that the trial is from God, that produces at once submission. Here is "tribulation" working, like yeast in the dough, gradually leavening and changing the whole mass; sour indeed and bitter in itself, but eventually producing bread for solid food.

Coupled with this will be a sense of having procured the trial for ourselves. "Hast thou not procured this for thyself?" asks the prophet. "Yes," answers the soul, "indeed, indeed I have." Now comes endurance. "This trial," says the soul, "is of God; it has not come upon me by chance; I deserve it all; and had I ten thousand heavier strokes than I now suffer, I must still confess that I have merited them all. I put my mouth in the dust; I acknowledge that I deserve these heavy strokes; I submit to the rod; and O that it may deeply and lastingly profit me!" How beautifully was this exemplified in David, under God's chastening hand; first, when the child was afflicted with sickness and death,

and then when he fled from Absalom! How "tribulation" wrought "patience" when he endured Shimei's cursing, and uttered that beautiful speech to Zadok: "Carry back the ark of God into the city; if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it and His habitation; but if He thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him." **2Sa 15:25,26** This is what James means when he says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." **Jas 1:2-4** Temptations or trials try faith; and, "the trying of faith worketh patience"—the precise expression of Paul, but "patience" must have its perfect work; that is, must be completely wrought out in the soul, and brought out in its real character. This is welding on the link. "Tribulation" thus "worketh patience," sustains it, and is united to it.

III.—But what does patience work? It inoperative; it has a work to perform. Patience worketh **experience**. What is the meaning of the word "experience" here? It does not mean experience in the usual sense of the term; that is, the whole work of God in the soul. It has here a more limited signification, and means a special experience of the power, wisdom and grace of God in and under tribulation. The word "experience" means literally "proof," and therefore signifies the proof that the soul has of the goodness of God in and under trial and affliction. See the process. Tribulation works endurance and submission; as the soul endures and submits, it gains an experience and proof of the power and goodness of God. This experience is two-fold—a proof of what God is, and a proof of what we are; light direct and light reflected.

When the surges of rebellion are calmed, we can see what a danger was escaped of making shipwreck on the lee-shore of despair, and an experience is gained of our own weakness, helplessness, sinfulness, rebelliousness and inability to do anything good or godly. It is in the furnace that the dross and

scum of nature are brought to light; it is in the path of tribulation that there are such deep discoveries of self in its baseness and blackness, filth and vileness.

But is this the only experience we gain in tribulation's path? No; there is also an experience of who and what God is. But why should patience work out this? Because, till patience has had its perfect work, we do not see God's hand in the trial. God does not reveal Himself in His mercy, love and grace to the soul whilst in a state of rebellion; when it is brought down into meekness, humility and submission, then, sooner or later, He manifests Himself. Thus patience or endurance of His afflicting hand worketh an experience of His dealings in a way of grace.

1. The first thing usually experienced is **an inward proof or approbation of the wisdom of God** in choosing the trial; for, be it ever borne in mind, it is the Lord who chooses our trials; we have no command over them, to bid them come or go; no selection of their nature, degree; or duration. The patient is not allowed to choose his own medicines. The trial, whatever it may be, is chosen in infinite wisdom by the Disposer of all things. If it be sickness, it is His choice; if an affliction in the family, it is His choice; if a trial in circumstances, it is His choice; persecution, opposition, contempt, contumely, all are His choice. Did Jacob choose to lose his Rachel by death, and his Joseph by treachery? Did Job choose his hearth to be desolated at a stroke, his flocks and herds driven away and burnt, and his body smitten with boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown? An unseen, but an unerring bow aimed the arrows, which quivered in his heart. "The arrows of the Almighty are within me," he cried out in his distress, "why hast Thou set me as a mark?"

Now, till patience has its perfect work in the soul, and we can submit to the trial as coming from God, His wisdom in selecting and determining the peculiar form of trial is not seen. But when we begin to feel a measure of benefit springing out of the tribulation, and see what good effects it is working in our soul, such as separating us from the world, bringing us near to God,

winnowing away the chaff, cleansing the dross and conforming us more to the image of Christ, then we gain an experience of the wisdom of God in sending us that particular trial; and then comes the humble acknowledgment, "It is indeed the very trial that I needed; no other would have done for me what this has done. The blow struck me, it is true, in the tenderest part, and yet in the very spot where it was most needful for me to be wounded. I see Thy wisdom in it. What evil it has kept me from! What good it has wrought in my soul! What lessons, what blessed lessons, have I learned in this trial!" Now, do you not see how "patience worketh experience?" Till patient, the mind is too confused to see this. In the calm depths of resignation alone does the wisdom of God pass before the believing eye of the soul.

2. But that is not the only experience we get. We get next an experience of **the power of God in supporting the soul** under the trial. Ah, what is nature, poor fallen nature, when tribulation comes! Can nature bear up against it? Can nature submit to it? Can nature bless God for sending it? All that nature can do is to vent itself in rebellion against the sovereign majesty of the Most High. No kissing the rod, no receiving it as from the hand of the Lord, no acknowledging the wisdom, no submission to the will of God, is there naturally in the heart of man. But if under the trial we are supported, and experience the strength of Christ made perfect in our weakness, this gives us an experience of God's **power**. What but the **power** of God supported Job? The everlasting arms were underneath; scarcely felt, perhaps, but still there. The endurance of the trial gives an experience of the power that has wrought that endurance. And thus patience works experience.

3. But of nothing else? O yes; we gain in it an experience of **the goodness of God**; that He is good in taking away as well as in giving; good in bringing down as well as raising up; good in laying on the rod as well as bestowing the kiss; good in putting the soul into the furnace to purge out the dross, good in sustaining it in the furnace, and good in bringing it up out of the furnace. Thus we get an experience of the goodness of God by

patiently enduring His afflicting hand. "The rebellious dwell in a dry land." What experience, then, have they of "the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living?" It is only when the soul is possessed in patience that "the goodness of the Lord" appears.

4. But is there no other experience gained by patience? Yes; an experience of **the long-suffering mercy of God**; that He should bear with such rebels, that He should not long ago have been provoked by our rebellion to cast us utterly off, cut us down, and send us headlong to hell. When the soul is calmed down to submission, it sees what it was when the waves ran high; and as the crest of the billows subsides, the forbearance and long-suffering of the Lord shine forth in the horizon.

Without enlarging here, we may safely add, that without tribulation there is no patience, and without patience no experience. A patience without tribulation, an experience without patience, we may pronounce sadly defective, if not wholly worthless.

IV.—But experience works something else, and that is **hope**. Do you observe where the apostle places this link? Is it in the beginning, middle, or end of this chain? Most persons place it at the beginning; they begin with hope—without tribulation, without patience, and without experience; but the apostle does not begin there. The chain contains five links, but he does not put hope as the first. **Tribulation** is the first, then comes **patience**, then **experience**, and then—linked on to experience—is **hope**. But what hope? Not hope in the general, but hope in the particular; that is, a hope connected with experience, as experience is connected with patience, and patience with tribulation. I observed before that the experience spoken of was particular; that is, limited to the path of tribulation. So is the hope particular; meaning not so much "a good hope through grace" generally, as a special hope, connected with the experience gained through patience.

But how does a special experience work a special hope? The believer walking in tribulation's path feels and speaks thus: "I get into tribulation; in this tribulation I learn, sooner or later, to submit to the will of God, and to endure the tribulation as coming from His hand. I now gain an experience of the wisdom, power and goodness of God displayed in the trial. As I gain this, I gain some ground of hope for the future; I obtain some firm basis on which to place my hope, that as the Lord has been with me in six troubles, He will also be with me in the seventh; and as in my late tribulation I obtained strength to endure, and when brought to submission sensibly experienced the wisdom, power and love of God, so in my future trials—for I must still walk in the path of tribulation—there rises up in my soul a blessed hope that I shall experience the same deliverance, feel the same power, and enjoy the same blessing."

How different is a hope of this nature, wrought in the soul by the power of God, from a hope that I might almost say is picked up in the streets, like a cast-off shoe that will fit any foot, and is therefore only fit to be thrown in the kennel and shovelled into the scavenger's cart! The hope here spoken of is a shoe that fits the foot of the weary, way-worn pilgrim, for it is made by a divine hand out of "the preparation of the gospel of peace," with which he is shod from the armoury of God. Even natural experience is necessary to hope. A sick person has experienced benefit in a former illness from a certain physician, or a certain medicine; he has recourse to the same person or the same remedy again. "It did me good in a similar illness; why not now?" he inwardly says. Or a friend has helped us formerly; we hope, when we are brought into trying circumstances, that he will help us again. Just see how this feeling of hope was wrought in the apostle's soul. He thus writes to the Corinthian church: "We would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life. But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, who raiseth the dead." **2Co 1:8,9** Observe, when he was thus killed to all creature hope, how God stepped in: "Who delivered us from so

great a death, and doth deliver." Now comes hope, or trust: "In whom we trust that He will yet deliver us." Just trace out the successive steps detailed here. First came a heavy trial, which overwhelmed his soul almost in despair; this crushed out creature trust. Trust in God followed; then came deliverance; upon this followed trust, or hope for the future—that He who had delivered in the past, and was delivering in the present, would also deliver for the future.

Now, this is exactly the same experience as is traced out in the text—tribulation working patience, patience working experience, and experience working hope; that is, a hope that whatever trials come, there will be support under them; that the next trial will be as beneficial to the soul as the last, and that the goodness of God will be seen as clearly, felt as blessedly, and enjoyed as sweetly. This prepares the soul for tribulation when it comes, and raises up a blessed hope that God will support the soul under it whenever it may come, as He has already done.

But, speaking of this hope, the apostle adds, "**It maketh not ashamed.**" Contrast this hope, which springs out of experience, with false and delusive hopes. The great majority of human hopes will prove spiders' webs. The hope that is not wrought in the heart by the power of God will leave the soul at the last, and is therefore a hope, which maketh ashamed. But what a fearful thing is this, that when a man comes to a dying hour, or to stand before the tribunal of God at the great day, his hope maketh ashamed! He is ashamed of it, and it is ashamed of him. And why? Because it had no foundation, no root, for it was not grounded and rooted in his soul by the power of God. It came not either through tribulation, or patience, or experience; it was therefore a solitary link, not joined to experience at one end, or to love at the other, and consequently, like an isolated link in nature, is useless and worthless. Pick up a link of a chain in the street—what is it worth? Would you not be ashamed to be seen with it in your hand? Throw it down again, then, and kick it away. Thus there is a hope, which maketh ashamed; it is an old rusty link. Leave it to the mud-rakers, or kick it away!

Examine, then, your hope, and see whether it be a solitary link, or one in a chain of which tribulation forms one end, and love the other. How did you come by it? Can you run through your experience, and find in it any resemblance to that which is written here by the pen of inspiration? Did tribulation bow your soul down, and was submission given to endure it? Did any sweet experience come into your heart; an experience of the mercy, goodness and love of God in tribulation? And did there spring out of this a sweet, childlike, blessed hope in the mercy of God, of an interest in the precious blood of Christ, and that the Lord would support you through every trial, and eventually set you before His face in glory?

V.—But the apostle adds the chief reason why this hope maketh not ashamed: "Because the **love of God** is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." This is the last link in the chain, and makes it complete—the link of **hope** being now firmly welded on to the link of love. This union it is of hope and love, which makes hope to be "a good hope through grace," and gives it to stand unblushing before the throne of God. And yet "the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost" is united to tribulation by the intermediate links; and thus you see how love, hope, experience, patience and tribulation are all joined together, each link being continuous and mutually dependent, but all combining to form one harmonious chain. They must not, cannot be separated, for God has united them, and what "God has joined together let no man put asunder." But what a blessed link is this last, "the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost!" And what strength and firmness it gives to the preceding, the link of hope! But as all the links in a chain, from the first to the last, have a mutual dependence, the highest link, which is love, and which is linked to the throne of God, bears up and supports the lowest, which is tribulation, and which drags, as it were, on the earth.

This shedding abroad of love in the heart solves the problem, "We glory in tribulations also," and explains what I stated at the

outset, that the highest attainment in religion is to rejoice in tribulation. See this in Paul's case. He was caught up to the third heaven, where he heard unspeakable words, and was blessed with unspeakable manifestations; but was this his greatest attainment? No; he had not then learned to take pleasure in infirmities; to learn to do this he had to come down from the glories of heaven to the gates of hell. Satan was allowed to buffet him. Here was tribulation indeed. But the thorn in the flesh taught him patience. Hence when the Lord told him that His grace was made perfect in his weakness, he got a blessed experience of His power. This raised up a sweet hope of future strength for future battles; and as the love of God was shed abroad in his heart, it made him glory in his tribulations also. Patience had then her perfect work; he was "perfect and entire, wanting nothing;" and these deep and highest attainments in the divine life are embodied by him in those remarkable words: "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong." **2Co 12:10.**

Now, it is this spiritual chain, constituted of these several spiritual links, which distinguishes the people of God from all others. You may have tribulations; but examine these tribulations, their nature and connection. Are they spiritual tribulations? Do they work patience? Here mistakes are often made. Tribulation without patience, or patience without tribulation, is nothing. Many worldly people have tribulations, many are naturally patient, and many profess to have an experience, but it is one of joy without sorrow, mercy without misery, liberty without bondage, light without darkness, and faith without unbelief. Many, too, boast of a hope, and even of "a good hope through grace," who have neither experience nor love, neither patience nor tribulation. A solitary link binds nothing. Such is a hope, which stands by itself; it does not bind the soul to the throne of God; it will not sustain the heart in the day of trial. And what, too, is love, unless in union with experience and hope? Yet many speak of the love of God who know nothing of tribulation, or experience, or hope, or any of these links, as connected with it and each other.

But you will say, perhaps, "I know what tribulation is; I have had, or still have, affliction of body or circumstances, affliction in my family or in my mind." Well, you may have all that; but what has your tribulation done for you? That is the grand point. It may be only a solitary link; and, therefore, till welded on to patience, it must be doubtful whether it be of nature or of grace. What, then, does tribulation do for you? You say, "I find that I am very rebellious under it." Doubtless you are, and left to yourself you never can be anything else. But do you never find anything else but rebellion? Is there no endurance, no submission? Do you never see the hand of God in your trials, bless Him for them, and feel that you would not be without them, however painful? If so, the first link is being welded on to the second; the chain is being made; the blessed Spirit is at work in your soul.

But do you never get beyond this? Because there is a natural patience, as well as a spiritual; a callous stoicism as well as a gracious submission. Do you find anything spring up in your soul out of this patience? A sweet experience of the goodness, mercy, power and love of God? If you can go thus far, and have experienced anything of the power and goodness of God, may I not ask you farther, What made you long after God's testimonies? What made you see the emptiness, uncertainty and folly of everything but an experience for yourself of God's goodness and love? **Tribulation.** No man will want to have a sweet experience of the love of God in his soul until he has been in the furnace. He is always full of self, until it is burnt out of him; but when trials, afflictions, distress of conscience, guilt of soul, fear of death, snares of hell and assaults of Satan have burnt Pharisaism out of him, his soul longs to experience pardoning love and mercy, and to realise for himself that God is his Father and Friend. Is this your experience? If it be, then your hope is "a good hope through grace," and will not make you ashamed.

But have you ever experienced any measure of the love of God? You know that naturally all chains are not of the same weight and size. The number of links may be the same, but the links are

generally proportionate; for it is evident that the strength of the chain is determined by the weakest link. Great tribulation is connected with great patience; great patience with great experience; great experience with great hope; and great hope with great love. And thus conversely, if we have but little tribulation we have but little patience; with little patience, little experience; with little experience, little hope; with little hope, little love. Still, great or small, heavy or light, it must be a complete chain. Now is not this scriptural as well as experimental? Can you deny it? And does not this solve the problem and bring us back to the point whence we started, that the greatest attainment in the divine life, because the last, is to glory or rejoice in tribulations? No man ever did, or could, rejoice in tribulation for its own sake; that would be a contradiction. But he can, and may, and does rejoice in tribulation on account of the fruit it bears, the effects it produces. It is true we cannot pray for it. Our coward flesh shrinks at the thought. And yet what do we know of the power of God or of the suitability and blessedness of the Lord Jesus in the path of tribulation?

What a mercy it is to have a little true religion! There is not much in our day; indeed, there are very few in whom there is any at all. What a mercy to have any, even the least particle! And you may depend upon it the only religion worth knowing is what the Holy Spirit has revealed here by the pen of Paul.

Now if you can find a little of this work going on in your heart, prize it greatly. You may be tried sometimes as to the reality and genuineness of the work. This is a part of the needful tribulation. But cleave to the Spirit's work in your heart. Prize every token for good, every mark of grace, everything which humbles self and exalts Jesus. To His suffering image must all His saints be conformed; and those who suffer with Him here will be glorified with Him hereafter.

The Good Shepherd

A Posthumous Sermon

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, July 25, 1869

"I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment." Ezekiel 34:15, 16

In the chapter from which I have taken my text, God brings a very heavy bill of charges against the false shepherds of Israel; and one which consists of several counts. But before I proceed to open up this bill of charges, and to state the case, I wish to observe that in so doing, I am not declaring who are the modern representatives of these false shepherds. I am not shooting arrows at any particular persons, or aiming my shafts against any well-known names. That would be unbecoming my position. I desire to speak simply and faithfully of the things which I hope God has taught me. I mean, therefore, nothing personal; I only describe characters and aim no arrows against particular persons. So that in reading and opening the bill of charges against false shepherds, I take my stand upon God's word. Whoever he be, in the church or out of the church, in high or in low places; be he bishop upon his throne, dean in his cathedral, canon in his stall, or popular preacher in a dissenting community; or even the veriest ranter who gathers a street audience, or the wealthiest enthusiast who can merely tumble forth words with foaming lips, preaching what he knows nothing of, and teaching nothing that is agreeable to the word and will of God,—I say I pass by all persons, and simply stand upon God's word, which describes characters.

The first count in this bill of charges against the false shepherds

is, that they fed themselves and not the flock; that they had no zeal for the prosperity of Zion, no desire for the edification of the people of God, and no object in the ministry but personal profit—what it might bring, what they might gain by it, and how they might support themselves in pride and self-consequence.

The next count in the bill is, that they did not feed the flock; in other words, that they did not bring before them such food as was needful for their support and nourishment, but either totally neglected feeding them, or supplied them with such provender as they could not eat—tainted with error, mixed with free-will, spoiled in the harvesting, fouled in the gathering, and therefore not food suitable for the clean, delicate, and tender family whom they were **set [sent?]** to feed, as being the flock of God's own choice.

In another count of this bill of charges against the false shepherds, the Lord says they did not take any notice of that part of the flock that required especial care: that the diseased they did not strengthen, neither did they heal that which was sick, nor bind up that which was broken, nor bring again that which was driven away, nor seek that which was lost. That portion of the flock which required special care—all the tenderness, and all the wisdom, and all the skill, and all the knowledge, and all the undeviating attention of the shepherds—they utterly neglected, and left these poor perishing creatures, so far as they could suffer at their hand, left them without ministering to their wants or doing that which was needful for their comfort and support.

And the last count in this bill of charges was that they ruled the flock with force and cruelty. Instead of tenderly cherishing, affectionately keeping, and wisely guarding them against the intrusion of wild beasts, and anything that might hurt and injure, they ruled them with force and cruelty.

Now what was the consequence? That the sheep, for want of suitable shepherds, were scattered upon the mountains in that dark and gloomy day, with no one who seemed to take any

thought for them, feel any kindness toward them, or exert himself in any measure for their benefit. "Well," the Lord says, "shall my sheep, the flock of my pasture, those whom I have eternally loved and redeemed by the blood of my dear Son,— what, shall they suffer because their shepherds are so neglectful of them? No," the Lord says: "I myself will do that for them which their shepherds have failed to do." And thus the very neglect of the shepherds, and the scattered, miserable condition of the flock, only drew out more of the Lord's tender sympathy, and engaged more of his compassionate mercy; and he comes forth out of his place, in the fulness of his wisdom and love, to do that for them and in them which their shepherds instrumentally and ministerially should have done, but which they neglected because they sought their own benefit and not that of the flock.

Then come the words of the text, which stand out in strong apposition and opposition to this bill of charges: "I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment."

Our text seems to fall under three heads:—

I.—*First*, we see in it a *general* description of what God does for his flock: "I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God;" promising them food and rest.

II.—*Secondly*, the Lord goes on to speak of special care to *special* cases, and tells us what his kind, compassionate heart, and what his strong and powerful hand means to do in seeking that which was lost, in bringing again that which was driven away, in binding up that which was broken, and strengthening that which was sick.

III.—*Thirdly*, there comes that awful word—and there is scarcely in the book of God a more awful sentence—what he will do to the fat and the strong: "I will destroy," he says, "the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment."

I.—Food and rest are indispensable to the sustentation of life. We cannot live naturally without food, nor can we live without rest and sleep. And as it is with the natural life of man, so it is with his spiritual life: his spiritual life needs food and rest. And God has provided both in the words of the text: "I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God." But until divine life enters a man's soul and quickens him into that state of which our Lord speaks—"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness"—he neither has nor wants God's food. For God's food is suitable to God's sheep: "Feed me with food convenient for me." The sheep naturally and literally is a very tender and delicate animal, and very choice in its food. It cannot feed upon flesh like the dog, nor upon carrion like the jackal and vulture, nor browse upon thistles like the ass, nor climb the mountain height to feed upon wild thyme like the goat, nor leap from crag to crag like the chamois, nor live upon the scanty herbage of the desert like the camel. Things which feed a coarser animal would be starvation to the sheep: he must have grass, and that not wiry grass, hard and tawny; but the sweet grass which grows under the clouds of heaven, springs up by the water-side, and is fed by the showers from above. Thus, there must be a similarity between the sheep and the pasture. When the shepherds took no notice of the sheep, they wandered upon the mountains, and there they picked up a little scanty herbage; but it was not food that was convenient for them, or suitable to keep them in flesh and condition; they were only one remove from starvation, just kept alive; they were but a bag of bones, with fleeces torn off by briars and thorns,—pitiable objects to look upon.

Now God gathers his sheep away from these wild mountains, on which they have roamed seeking food and finding none, and brings them into his own pastures, of which we have a sweet description in Psalm 23. And when he brings them into his own pastures, then he fulfils the word: "I will feed my flock." In this flock there are lambs, and these lambs are very delicate in their food, and very choice. They can only feed on very tender grass.

Their teeth are not sufficiently strong to eat the coarser herbage. They must feed upon the tender blades of the grass as it springs up. And so in grace: these lambs of the flock need very tender food, such as sweet invitations, gracious promises, and those alluring and attracting words which are scattered up and down through the gospel, and are adapted to the taste of the lamb. They are not yet brought into the strong meat that suits the more established in the things of God, but they can sweetly nibble at the tender grass and find it healthful to their constitution, suitable to their taste, and such as they love to browse upon. You that are lambs in this flock—and I hope we have lambs as well as sheep in this congregation: for what is to become of us if there are no lambs to take the place of the sheep that are removed?—if we have lambs in this congregation, you can feed upon the invitations of the gospel and the sweet promises scattered here and there such as "He that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out;" "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." You can feed, and sometimes very sweetly, upon this tender grass that springs up in this pasture of the Lord, and find it very suitable to your taste, and very nutritive to your spirit, so that you find a blessed food in it from time to time as the Lord is pleased to lead you into it. And then, by-and-by, when you grow out of this lamb state and become more established in the truth of God, you will find the Lord still will fulfil his promise: "I will feed my flock." He will lead you more into the grand and glorious truths of our most holy faith; show you his divine sovereignty in the choice of a people before all worlds; lead you into the mysteries of the Person of the Son of God; open to you his incarnation, how he is God and man in one glorious Person; take you into the garden of Gethsemane and there show you the agonising Lord of life and glory sweating great drops of blood; take you on to Calvary and there show him to you bearing your sins in his own body on the tree, hanging there between earth and heaven, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And you will find food for your soul in looking at him, mourning over him, and receiving him into your heart as made unto you wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption. He will feed you by

showing the fixedness of God's promises, the faithfulness of his declarations, the certainty of salvation to all who are interested in the blood of the Lamb, and that where he has begun he will certainly carry on his work to the end. And thus, from time to time, you will find food in the word, read or preached, and food such as your soul loves, because it is adapted to your hungering state, nourishes your soul, and feeds every grace of the Spirit of God in you. So he will feed your faith by giving you blessed views of Christ, sweet discoveries of his Person, blood, and work; he will feed your hope by strengthening that which he has wrought in you, confirming the good work upon your soul by his gracious word; he will feed your love by showing you more and more how lovely the Lord is, what beauty and blessedness there is in him, and by drawing up your affections to things above will feed the love that he sheds abroad in the heart. And he will feed your patience by giving you grace to bear the weight of the daily cross, by giving you support under every load, so that you may still press on toward the mark of the prize of your high calling, in spite of every foe and every fear. And he will feed every desire that he raises up in your soul, by opening up from time to time his precious truth to your heart, and granting you the desire of your lips, so that you find in the word of his grace food sweet and suitable and convenient to your soul.

Now have you found all this or any of it? Are you in quest of that which can feed your soul? Here is a mark of a sheep: "I will feed my flock." And if we never get fed, and that by the Lord himself; if no food is ever set before us by his own gracious hand, and we have no inward reception of it, receiving it into our souls as we receive our natural food into our bodies, and finding it strengthening, and nourishing, and sweet, we bear little marks of belonging to God's flock.

"And I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God." We want rest as much as food. We are poor, restless beings, and the Lord hunts us out of every refuge, and every shelter, and every false place of rest. If we try to rest in the world, no happiness there; rest in sin, nothing but guilt and bondage there; rest in the law,

nothing but the curse and condemnation there; rest in self, nothing but deceitfulness, hypocrisy, and sin. No rest anywhere but in the Lord, who is our rest. Now the Lord says, "I will cause them to lie down;" not in sloth, not in fleshly ease, not in a name to live, not in an empty profession, not secure in doctrine; but the Lord will make them lie where he himself places them, the only spot where rest and peace are to be found, even in his dear Son: resting in his finished work, in his atoning blood, in his justifying righteousness, in his dying love, in his power and glory, and what he is in himself as the Son, the Christ, and the Lamb of God. And when we are brought there, there we find rest. And there God brings us from time to time, that we may lie down and find rest and peace in him. This is what David means in Psalm 23, when he speaks of "lying down in green pastures and feeding beside the still waters." Now this promise belongs to all the flock, and God will fulfil it to every sheep of the mystical fold. Every one who belongs to the mystical fold will be fed by the hand of God, and made to lie down by his power, the Spirit resting upon him, and giving him rest and peace in believing.

II.—Now the Lord takes up special cases, the same special cases which the shepherds had so grievously neglected, and for which they incurred the deep resentment of the Lord. "Well," the Lord says, "shall these special cases have no one to look after them, because those who should look after them have neglected them? No," the Lord says; "I myself will come forward and do that for them which shall be exactly suitable to their special case, I will give them that relief which they can obtain from no other source."

The first character he takes up in a special way is that of which he says, "I will seek that which was lost." The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. He is sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But the "lost" here seems to have a special reference to being lost upon the mountains, like the lost sheep in the parable, which the shepherd lays upon his shoulders and brings back rejoicing. Now this sheep ought, so to speak, to have kept to the fold, but he did not. He wandered away from the

right place where the shepherd was and got upon the mountains—it might be to seek some new pasture; got tired of his companions; wanted a little novelty; not to be always hanging about after the same shepherd and tied to the same fold, nor continually herding with the same sheep. He would try a little novelty, a little change. A change, he thought, would be very agreeable. And so he is drawn aside after a life of something—he really hardly knows what it is—sufficiently strong and attractive to entangle his love and affections and draw him aside from the fold; till he gets upon some wild moor or mountain, and then he begins to find he has lost his way. And the more he wanders upon this barren moor or wild mountain, the further he is from home and the less able to find his way toward it. This may be the case with some of you. You have been drawn aside in some way by a love of novelty, the spirit of the world, some spirit of error or spirit of evil, and you have wandered you know not where, and have got lost upon some wild moor or mountain, and scarcely know how ever you can get back. Nor would you ever get back unless the Lord sought you out. But he seeks you out too often in this way: by sending some heavy affliction, which is a chastising word from himself, and brings you to see what you have wandered from, and where you have wandered to, and how you have got lost upon this wild moor or mountain side and cannot find your way home. Or he may send a word for you that shall drop upon your spirit with some degree of sweetness and power, and you begin to say, "O that it were with me as in days past! What have I got by wandering from the right paths of the Lord?—leaving his people, his service, his ways, his word, and pleasing myself with some fleshly novelty, and straying from those paths in which I once walked, so as to get so lost that I scarcely know what I am or where I am." And as the mind becomes anxious and troubled on account of its lost state, all being darkness and confusion, there may come a strengthening word—a word of attraction; and you hear the voice behind you saying: "This is the way—walk ye in it." In this way, and others that I cannot now enter into, the Lord seeks that poor sheep that had lost itself upon the wild moor or mountain side, and brings it back to his own fold.

Now take another case. He will "bring again that which was driven away." The lost sheep had wandered spontaneously: it was not driven away by force, but entangled in some alluring snare of sin or Satan, which made it wander from right paths to get into this place of confusion and darkness. But now, we have the case of one driven away by the power of temptation in some form beating upon it; by some assaults of Satan, it may be, for we know what an enemy he is to the people of God, and how he can assail them with all manner of infidel, vile, and base thoughts, so as to drive them in their feeling at times to the very ends of the earth. And they get driven away from peace and rest, and from feeding in the pastures that God has provided for them, and lying down beside the still waters which they have lapped and felt so refreshing. They get driven away by some keen and cutting blast of temptation, or the assaults of sin and Satan; and thus contrary to their best feelings, spiritual desires, and gracious intentions, they are driven by the storm that beats upon them into a spot where they lose all sight and sense of the pasture where they once fed and of the water they once drank. Now what shall become of them? Things may have arisen perhaps in your experience which have driven you away from God's people, God's word, God's truth, and the place where his honour dwelleth; and you may have yielded to the temptation, and by the power of temptation and the assaults of Satan may have been driven away, so as for a time to withdraw yourself from the assemblages of God's saints, from a throne of grace, from reading the word, and almost from a profession of religion. There has come such a storm upon you of guilt, or bondage, or fear, or doubt, or assaults of Satan, as to drive you away even from that which you know is the only food of your soul, and the only rest you have ever found for your weary foot. Well, such as been the power of temptation, the strength of sin, and the force of Satan, it has for a time driven you away. There may be some such case here. I am dealing with special cases. I want to lay my hand upon some special point, because by so doing I may appeal to some one who scarcely knows where he is or what he is, and thus may be God's mouth to him—to show it is a case God has noticed in his word, a

case that comes under God's own eyes; and if God has marked it out, he himself will take special care of it. Now he will bring again that which was driven away. He will bring him to his throne in humbled contrition; bring him back to his house, with many an earnest desire to hear the word and live; bring him back amongst the company of his people, to have once more sweet communion with them; and bring him under his shadow, to sit there with great delight, so as to find his fruit sweet to his taste. He never could bring himself back. The pride of his heart, the rebellion of his mind, his very bondage, doubt, guilt, and fear, would all keep him away. But the Lord, by his powerful hand upon him, brings back that which was driven away, and makes it manifest that he is stronger than the sinner and has prevailed; that where he has begun he will carry on, and never leave nor forsake his own work. Has not guilt, bondage, doubt, and fear sometimes had such an effect upon you, that you have said in your feelings, "I can never go to the house of God again; I can never look up amongst his people again; I can never again go amongst the dear family of God; for I feel such storms of guilt, fear, and bondage in my bosom?" Now the Lord will bring you again under the sweet sound of gospel mercy; he will make his word to come once more with power to your heart; he will heal your backslidings, and show you that where sin abounded, there grace doth much more abound.

And now for another character: he "will bind up that which was broken." This seems to refer to a sheep that had wandered away from the fold and fallen down some steep precipice, and there lay with a broken skin, if not with broken bones. It had climbed, it might be, beyond the safe spot where it could stand, imitating and emulating the mountain goat; but alas! it got where it could not find standing ground; and therefore, through weakness or inability to maintain its footing, it fell, and there it lay bleeding under the ledge from which it dropped. Now some of you may be just this character. You have got broken. God may have saved you from breaking a leg, but you may have the skin broken. If the limb has not suffered, you may have fallen far enough to wound and break the skin. But be it so or not, something has

transpired that has certainly broken you up; and you feel in yourself a poor broken creature that nothing but mercy can save and nothing but the hand of God can heal; broken in limbs like Ephraim, broken in heart, broken in conscience, broken in spirit, broken it may be in body, and broken in soul. And there you lie, like this poor sheep that has fallen from the precipice, without power to get upon your legs, and climb up to the spot whence you fell, or find your way home through the valley. Well, now, the Lord takes special notice of this case also; for he says he will "bind up that which was broken." He will bind round it gospel swathes, pour in gospel wine and oil, bind up the broken limb if the limb is broken, bind up the broken wound if the skin only be injured, and will do for it all that the wisdom and skill of a wise physician can direct, all that his love can urge, and all his power perform.

The last special character is: he "will strengthen that which was sick." Now you may never have been lost by wandering away from the fold, never been driven away by the power of temptation or the assaults of Satan, never have fallen from the gospel ledge so as to break either skin or limb; and yet you may be one of the characters spoken of as "sick." There are many naturally who have no particular disease, nothing to threaten life, and yet carry about with them a very weak and frail tabernacle. So in divine things: there are those who have no special disease, and still are ill all over; for "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." And these are they the Lord takes special notice of, that he may strengthen that which was sick, by healing their wounds, speaking peace to their souls, and applying the balm of his blood to their conscience.

I have not time to enter into these special cases as I should like. But cast your eye at your leisure upon them, and if you can find yourself comprehended in any one of them, bear in mind how tender the Lord is over you, and that as he has discovered your malady, he is sure to bring, in his own time and way, his own special remedy.

III.—Now for our third point, which is what the Lord will do to "the fat and the strong." If you read the chapter, you will observe that these sheep suffered almost as much from the strong sheep as they did from the shepherds; for they pushed them away, spoiled the pastures, fouled the herbage with their feet, and left the poor sickly ones to fare as well as they could, and to eat up what they had spoiled. "The fat and the strong,"—these were the false shepherds' darlings. They took no notice of the lost, and the driven away, and the broken, and the sick: those were beneath their consideration. But O these fat and strong: they were their darlings; they were the choice sheep of the flock. To them the false shepherds gave the best food and the best shelter, and attended to them with the greatest care, because they meant to feed themselves; and therefore the fat and the strong were the very characters that suited their covetous taste. They looked upon them as a butcher looks upon his fat stock—with an eye to the knife; with an eye to what food would come out of these well fed and strong ones. But God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are God's ways our ways. God did not look upon the flock as these false shepherds did—with contempt and suspicion upon the sickly and the weak, and with approbation on the fat and the strong. No; God had other thoughts. He says: "I will destroy the fat and the strong." Now who are the fat and the strong? Of course you must view the words spiritually. A man is no worse for being fat, nor worse for being lean. The whole, of course, is spiritual, and has a spiritual bearing. The "fat" is he who has nothing to make him lean, no desire about him; strong in lung and strong in liver, strong in constitution, strong in thew and sinew and muscle, without any drain upon his constitution, with nothing to take the fat off his bones and make him lean and thin. So these fat ones are they who have no inward complaint, nothing to make them sigh before God and fret the flesh off their bones from crying out continually, "My leanness, my leanness! woe unto me!" And the strong are they who never felt their weakness; who can believe when they please, and repent when they please, and fret when they please, and rejoice when they please; who know nothing of helplessness, weakness, and creature misery, but can always take the promise at their own

command, always believe themselves to be the children of God, and strong because they have never been brought down by the hand of God upon them to show them their weakness. Now God says, "I will destroy them"—cut them off. And how will he destroy them? In a very terrible way. "I will feed them with judgment." "I will give them over to judicial blindness, judicial unbelief, and judicial impenitency. As they have sowed, so they shall reap. They shall perish under the very sound of truth; they shall die in the letter to which they have cleaved, neglecting the Spirit. They shall go to perdition with the very sound of the gospel in their ears, because they were fat and strong, and never knew anything of the strength of the Lord made perfect in weakness. And therefore the Lord says, "I will feed them with judgment." "They were satisfied, and they shall be satisfied. They did not want my teaching, or my dealings, and they fought against all my intentions towards them. Well, I shall leave them to perish in their deceivings, give them up to a reprobate mind; and as they chose these ways, let them die in them and perish in them." Therefore, you who are often writing bitter things against yourselves, because you are so sick and helpless, weak and weary, see how God views the one and see how God views the other, and tremble at being fat and strong; tremble at being anything in yourself; and see how blessed it is to be nothing in yourself, that Christ may be all in all.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND HIS WORK

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, Hampstead Road, London, Lord's Day morning, August 10th, 1851

"I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment." Ezek.34:15,16

The Lord in this chapter brings some heavy charges against the false shepherds of Israel. His accusations against them may be summed up under two leading heads: 1. Their sins of *commission*; 2. Their sins of *omission*. Greediness, selfishness, cruelty, and violence were stamped on all their actions. They fed themselves; they ate the fat and clothed themselves with the wool; they killed them that were fed and with force and with cruelty ruled the flock. These were their sins of *commission*. And to them they added, sins of *omission*. The diseased they did not strengthen, neither did they heal that which was sick, neither did they bind up that which was broken, neither did they bring again that which was driven away, neither did they seek that which was lost. And what was the consequence of these sins of commission and omission on the part of the shepherds? That the sheep were scattered; that they became meat to all the beasts of the field; that they wandered through all the mountains and upon every high hill; and that none did search or seek after them.

But the Lord does not confine himself to the false shepherds; he also files a bill of charges against a portion of the flock itself: "As for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the hegoats. Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet?" "Therefore thus saith the

Lord GOD unto them; Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat cattle and between the lean cattle. Because ye have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, till ye have scattered them abroad; therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle" (verses 17,18,20-22).

But because the shepherds have neglected their duty; and because the fat and the strong amongst the flock themselves have thrust with side and with shoulder, trodden down the good pastures, and polluted the streams, shall the sheep take detriment? Shall they perish through the neglect of the one and the violence of the other? True, they are scattered upon every high hill; true, they have no shepherds to take kindly notice of them; true, they are sometimes gored and sometimes starved. But when man forsakes, the Lord takes them up. Nay, they shall derive benefit from their very loss: shall have God for their Shepherd instead of man. Blessed exchange of Creator power for creature weakness, of divine love and faithfulness for human neglect, cruelty, and worthlessness! "I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment" (verses 15,16).

Our text falls of itself, so to speak, under two leading divisions:

I. The *promises* that God makes to his people generally, and in an especial manner to the diseased portion of them.

II. His *threatenings and denunciations* against *the fat and the strong*. I. If we look at this cluster of promises made to the flock of slaughter, (for it is to the flock of slaughter that the Lord God here speaks), we shall find that the first two have a more general and comprehensive bearing than the rest: "I will feed my flock, and cause them to lie down, saith the Lord."

1. Food and rest are needful for every sheep and every lamb;

indispensable for the sustentation of life itself; and therefore promised alike to all. "His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness;" and therefore food, without which there is neither life nor godliness. The shepherds did not or could not feed them. They feasted while the flock fasted; they ate the fat in the parlour, whilst the sheep could not get a nibble upon the mountain. Shall the sheep then die of the scab? Shall first wool, then fat, and then flesh waste off their bones, till at last they drop down dead under the hedge with nothing but their sunken eyes to feed the ravens? No, says the Lord, "I will feed them."

i. "*I will feed my flock.*" This implies that the flock is hungry; nay more, that it hungers after that peculiar food which alone can satisfy it. Spiritual hunger is a sure mark of life. The Lord's own words are, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matt.5:6). Hunger, we may observe, has a peculiar relation to suitable food. The lion does not hunger for the food of the lamb, nor the dove for that of the eagle. "Feed me with food," prays Agur, "convenient for me" (Prov.30:8), literally, "*appointed,*" that is, suitable to my appetite, ordained by thyself to satisfy it. Thus, a soul spiritually hungry cannot eat trash. God's own mark against "a deceived heart" is, that it "feedeth upon ashes" (Isa.44:20). A living soul cannot, then, feed upon the ashes of its own righteousness; for ashes indeed they will be found when the lightning stroke of God's righteous law has burnt up all creature comeliness. Nor can it feed upon superstitious ceremonies, or the mummeries of Popish Paganism, either in the full court dress of the Catholic chapel, or the undress of the Puseyite church. Nor can it feed upon the, "form of godliness," upon the barren mountains of dead, dry Calvinism, any more than as it grows on the heaths and wilds of flat Arminianism. Nay, the Bible itself, that sweet and sacred record, that blessed revelation of the mind of God, even upon the letter of that the soul cannot feed unless God himself turn it into food. For the promise runs, "I will feed my flock." The food, the only real food of the soul must be of God's own appointing, preparing, and communicating. The babe on the mother's lap must be fed

spoonful by spoonful, and that by the hand of the parent. The food must be put into the mouth, and such food only as is suitable for the growth of the babe. You can never deceive a hungry child. You may give it a plaything to still its cries, it may serve for a few minutes; but the pains of hunger are not to be removed by a doll. A windmill or a horse will not allay the cravings after the mother's breast. So with babes in grace. A hungry soul cannot feed upon playthings. Altars, robes, ceremonies, candlesticks, bowings, mutterings, painted windows, intoning priests, and singing men and women, these dolls and wooden horses, these toys and playthings of the Puseyitish babyhouse, cannot feed the soul that, like David, cries out after the living God (Psalm 42:23). Christ, the bread of life, the manna that came down from heaven, is the only food of the believing soul: "He that eateth me," says the Lord, "even he shall live by me." "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51). A living soul knows when it hungers as much as the babe in the mother's arms knows when it hungers; and knows too when it drinks down the pure milk of God's Word as sensibly and as truly as the natural child knows when its hunger is allayed by the mother's breast. The Lord says, "I will *feed* my flock." They shall indeed suffer first the pangs of hunger to teach them to value it; for "the full soul loatheth an honey comb" (Prov.27:7). Nay more, generally speaking, a certain painful experience is required to produce this appetite. Look at the labourer. What an appetite he has! How he relishes his food, coarse though it be! What gives him this appetite? Why, hard work. He is not your delicate invalid, or your fine lady, that lolls upon the sofa all day long, and whispers at dinner, "I think I can just pick the wing of a chicken;" but he has well earned it, for he has been working while you have been sleeping. So with the spiritual labourer, for such there are in the kingdom of God. "Come unto me, all ye that labour" (Matt 11:28); "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (John 6:27); "In all labour there is profit" (Prov. 14:23). To labour under a burden of sin, against powerful temptations, a body of

sin and death, and a whole host of lusts and corruptions, will make a man hunger after a righteousness better than his own. We rarely cry out for the living bread till brought down to the starving point. Then, when nothing will satisfy but Jesus, God steps in with this Word, "I will feed." Sometimes it shall be a promise; sometimes a glimpse of Jesus; sometimes a sweet assurance of interest in his blood and righteousness; sometimes a smile; sometimes a sip or taste of his mercy, goodness, and love. When any gospel truth is applied to the heart; when faith embraces it, hope anchors in it, and love flows toward it, then the soul is divinely fed. Hunger is then sensibly allayed: the Word of God tastes sweet; Jesus is received into the heart; and as the sheep lies and chews the cud, so the soul meditates and ruminates on the truth of God, and enjoys it over and over again. Never be satisfied with the mere letter of truth. Seek to have fulfilled in your own individual and happy experience that declaration of Jesus, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

ii. *"I will cause them to lie down."* Poor things! Restless indeed they were. Not a spot of soft tender grass was there on which they could repose their weary limbs. Did they seek the good pasture? The best was eaten up, and the residue trodden down. Did they long to lie down by the still waters? They were jostled away by the fat and the strong; and the little they could get was fouled. Thus were they ever on the drive, hurried to and fro, far from rest and peace. Lively emblem of a soul that, like Noah's dove, finds no rest for the sole of her foot on the floating carcasses of a ruined world! What a restless being is a tempted child of God! How unable he often is even to rest locally, to take his chair, and sit quietly by his fire-side!

It is recorded of the prisoners, who in the first French revolution were awaiting in their dungeons the summons to the dread tribunal of blood, that some passed nearly all their whole time in walking up and down their cells. So sometimes under trials and temptations, we pace up and down the room as if we sought to dissipate the exercise of our minds by the exercise of our bodies;

or rush into the streets and fields to pour the heart out in sighs and groans, the restless mind acting and reacting upon the body. And as an exercised child of God often cannot rest locally, so cannot he rest spiritually. He cannot rest in his own righteousness, nor in a sound creed, nor in a form of godliness, nor in the opinions of men, nor in anything that springs from or centres in the creature. There always is something uneasy; either in himself or in the ground on which he would repose. Sometimes it is strewn with thorns and briars; sometimes beset with sharp and rugged rocks. Sometimes the barking dog or howling wolf; sometimes the sturdy ram or butting he-goat; sometimes the goad of the savage driver; and sometimes the fears and anxieties of his own timid heart, prevent it settling down to rest and sleep. And yet, but for these restless, uneasy feelings, how many even of the Lord's own family would settle down short of gospel rest? Some would settle down in false religion; others in the world; some would make a god of their own righteousness; and others, like the foolish virgins, would securely sleep whilst their lamp was burning out. But there is that restless, painful exercise where the life and grace of God are, that the soul cannot, if it would, settle down in any rest but that of God's own providing. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God" (Heb.4:9). That rest is Christ; the blood, righteousness, love, and grace of the Lamb of God.

The Lord says, "*I will cause them to lie down.*" They cannot lie down then when they please. How everything is of grace! Every gracious movement is so from God, that they actually cannot lie down except he cause them. They are like the babe which cannot lay itself down in the cradle. The mother's arms are as needful to lay it down as to take it up. So the Lord is said to cause Israel to rest (Jer.31:2). And David says, "He *maketh* me to lie down in green pastures" (Psa.23:2). Thus the Lord sometimes leads his sheep in the green pastures and beside the still waters. Then he makes them to lie down. "I will give you rest," says Jesus. This rest is himself. Nay more, it is God's rest. "*My rest,*" he calls it. "If they shall enter into *my rest*" (Heb.4:5). Jesus is the true Sabbath, the rest of God and the rest of man. God rests in his

love; when we can rest in that, we are of one mind with God. All rest short of this is a delusion.

Now have you ever found any rest for your soul? If you have ever felt any measure of real rest, however short it may have been, it has only been in Jesus and his finished work, and by the blessed Spirit bringing into your soul some sweet testimony of your personal interest in it. Into this rest we enter only by faith, as the apostle speaks, "We which have believed do enter into rest" (Heb.4:3). But this cannot be till we cease from self, as Paul speaks, "He that is entered into his rest ... hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his" (Heb.4:10). As long as you are trying to get some comfort from your own works, you will never enter into rest. It is by believing, not by working; by the gospel, and not by the law; by Christ, and not by self, that rest and peace are entered into and enjoyed.

2. The two promises which we have been considering, are applicable to *all* the flock, and to each individual member of it, food and rest being alike needful for all. But we now come to a series of promises, which have a special relation to particular cases. The sheep, through neglect and cruelty, had fallen into a miserable condition. Some were "lost;" others "driven" away; some "broken" in limb, wind, and constitution; and some "sick" and half dead with rot and staggers.

Must all of these perish, and feed the vulture and the jackal? No; says the Lord, "I will seek that which was lost," &c. When they are abandoned by the shepherds, and in themselves helpless and hopeless, ready to perish, the Lord steps in with his own almighty arm.

i. "*I will seek that which was lost.*" In the figure of a lost sheep there is something singularly suitable and appropriate to a poor, erring, straying child of God. Of all animals the sheep is eminently the most silly; and it is usually not wantonness, but silliness, that leads it astray. Often through mere folly, it wanders away and becomes lost. But now comes the difficulty. How shall it get home again? The dog, the ox, the very swine can find their

way home. But the sheep has neither the scent of the hound, nor the sagacity of the hog. When it wanders, it loses its way altogether. But it rarely wanders without getting into some mischief. The teeth of the dog, and the tusks of the boar protect them; but the sheep is utterly defenceless. Every beast is against her. Need we go far to find the parallel? Who is so foolish and silly as regards his best interests as a child of God? Who so apt to wander? Who so unable to return? Who so exposed to a thousand enemies? Who so defenceless against them all? And indeed, a sheep may wander far; I dare not say how far! The longer I live, the more I see and know of the evils of my own heart, the more tender I should be in limiting how far it may wander. But it will never roam beyond the bounds of covenant love, will never fall out of the arms of mercy into hell; will never get beyond the eye and hand of the Good Shepherd, for he has a piercing eye and an outstretched hand, a long arm and a strong arm.

But he says, "*I will seek that which was lost.*" With the Lord, to seek is to find. The earthly shepherd may look, and look, and look in vain; down, down in some far away mountain cleft the sheep may lie. But the all-seeing eye of the heavenly Shepherd reaches the most secluded, distant spot; and one word from him finds. The sheep know the voice of the Shepherd. He never speaks in vain; however far they may have wandered, one word recalls. For, with all their folly, they have the distinguishing mark of a sheep, love of the Shepherd; and therefore, when he speaks, it drops into the heart, and brings them back. Thus he finds his poor lost sheep, lays it upon his shoulder, and brings it home rejoicing; mangled it may be and torn; sadly scratched with thorns, bleeding in head and limbs, with its fleece rent and soiled, perhaps its wool half pulled off, but still living, warm, panting, breathing, clinging close to the bosom of its almighty Deliverer. What a mercy to be a sheep! To have any one mark of belonging to the flock of slaughter! To have one grain of grace; I say sometimes the hundredth part of a grain, how unspeakable the mercy! O, to have life in the soul; it may sometimes be at a low ebb, very low, but to have a spark of the life of God in the bosom! Worlds cannot purchase it, and worlds cannot destroy it.

Do not write yourself lost, because you are tempted on every hand. Despair is one of the strong holds of Satan. His first object is to draw you away, and then to tell you there is no hope, that by plunging you into despair, he may hurl you into greater depths of sin.

ii. *"And bring again that which was driven away."* Satan does not deal with all alike. He is a master of arts; he knows how to adapt his devices to every one's constitution and disposition. He did not spread the same net for Peter and David; nor work in the same manner upon Solomon and Jonah. To some he is a serpent, and to others a lion; to this man a tempter, to that an accuser. He fires David's eyes, and swells Hezekiah's heart; sets Asaph in slippery places, and makes Job and Jeremiah curse the day of their birth. Thus some he allures into evil, and in its mazes they become for a time "lost;" others he "drives away." This he sometimes does by injecting blasphemous insinuations and suggestions; as if he would thereby drive them headlong into suicide or despair. Careless sinners he tempts to presumption; but where he sees a work of grace begun, there he tempts to despond of salvation altogether. But besides these temptations of the enemy, some seem from the very tenderness of their consciences "driven away." Their feelings are so acute and sensitive; sin is laid upon them with such weight and power, and they see and feel themselves such monsters of iniquity, that it seems as though the very holiness and majesty of God drove them away from his presence. They dare scarcely speak lest they be cast and condemned under the Word; or pray; lest they add sin to sin. Thus, they are driven away, by the very majesty of God, by their own apprehension of him as a consuming fire, and by the terrors of his holy and righteous law. Thus it was in time of old. The children of Israel could not bear to hear "the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more" (Heb.12:19). Bounds were set round that fiery mount, and they were thus driven away from its precincts. So whenever the law comes with condemnation to the conscience, it drives the soul away. As guilt and wrath drove Adam away from the voice of the

Lord, to hide himself amongst the trees of the garden, so a sense of guilt and wrath drives the soul away from the presence of God. But, besides what takes place in the first work of grace in the soul, even afterwards, often, in after stages, a sense of guilt through having fallen into some sin, or in any way having wounded and defiled the conscience, will drive away the soul from God. Sensible of its guilt and shame, it fears to approach him, and by staying away makes the matter worse, and the breach harder to be healed. Sometimes these fears work so strong, as almost to make a man give up his very profession. He says to himself, "I cannot go among the people of God; they would shun me, if they knew what I was; I cannot, I must not go to hear the truth, for I shall only hear my own sentence; and therefore I had better stay away; nor will I ever open my mouth about religion again lest my place be among the hypocrites." Thus, by their very doubts and fears and sensitiveness of conscience, they are driven away.

But the Lord has respect unto these also. He says, "I will bring again." This shows they were formerly in the enjoyment of his comfortable presence; that they had been embraced in the arms of mercy; that they had been folded to the bosom of love; but they were driven away. Guilt, temptation, Satan, doubts and fears had driven them away from the shelter of the tabernacle. Yet the promise runs, I will "bring again that which was driven away." But how? By nothing but a sense of mercy. It is not by frowns, but by smiles. "I drew them," says the Lord, "with the cords of a man," (that is, the tender feelings that are bound up in the human heart,) "with the bands of love" (Hos.11:4). You may thunder, you may lighten, you may take the whip and flog a poor backslider. You can never flog him home. He must be drawn by mercy, by the goodness of God, which leads to repentance. How was Peter brought back? By that look which Jesus gave him, as he stood in the hall of the high priest, that look of mingled love and reproach. It was this that made Peter go out and weep bitterly. A frown would have driven him into despair, and made him hang himself by the side of Judas; but that look of mingled reproof and love wounded and healed, filled heart and eyes with

the deepest grief and sorrow; and yet poured such a healing balm into his mourning soul that when Jesus was risen from the dead, and by his angel sent him a special message that he would see him again in Galilee, he leaped into the sea to meet him, when he stood on the shore of the lake Tiberias. But for that look and for that message, he would rather have leaped to the bottom with self-reproach, than leaped to the shore with love and affection. Thus was brought again poor driven-away Peter. And thus too, by the voice of pardon, was brought again poor driven-away David. For the Lord deviseth means that his banished be not expelled from him.

iii. "*And will bind up that which was broken.*" Some then in the flock are broken, broken in wind, limb, and constitution.

1. Some are *broken-winded*, asthmatic and coughing all the day long, unable to travel, and lying down at every step, with gasping mouth and panting flank. There are spiritual asthmas and winter coughs among the Lord's family. Poor feeble ones that cannot step without a sigh or a groan, wheezing at the least exertion, and dying away up every little hill.

2. Others are *broken in limb*. They have slipped down a precipice, and broken a leg. And doubtless, there are many more limbs broken than you know of. It is not everybody that shows his broken leg. Many poor children of God have had their secret slips, that have broken all their bones, and yet known only to God and themselves. Who is there that is not, more or less, guilty of slips with the eye, with the tongue, with the hand, the foot, the ear, or the heart? Sometimes this breaks the arm, so that it is not lifted up as it should be in prayer, and is, from being crippled, unable to embrace the Son of God; sometimes the leg, so that it cannot readily run the race set before us.

3. Others are *broken in constitution*. Sickness and disease have gradually drained away their native strength. Their wisdom is broken, their righteousness, their strength, their resolutions, their false hopes, their creature religion; so that "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint" (Isa.1:5).

But the Lord says, I will "bind up that which was broken." He swathes up the tender chest, and heals the gasping, panting lung; he kindly sets the broken bone, and puts it into close apposition. It shall not be like many a limb that the doctors set which leaves a limping leg ever after, but it shall be stronger than before. And the broken constitution he renovates by the balm of Gilead, so that the soul renews its youth like the eagle.

4. But, besides broken wind, limb, and constitution, the Lord's people have *broken hearts*; and a broken and a contrite heart is in God's eyes of great price. None but he who made the heart can first break it, and then bind it up; but he can do both effectually. To this man God looks; for he has promised to look "to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa.66:2); and with him he dwells. "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa.57:15). And where the Lord dwells, he binds.

5. But the same blow which breaks their heart often breaks their *confidence*. So David found it. The same Psalm which says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit," breathes also the prayer, "Cast me not away from thy presence" (Psalm 51:17, 11). There was perhaps a time when they could speak confidently of what God had done for their souls, and believed in their very hearts that the Lord loved them, and gave himself for them. But this true confidence (for there is a true as well as a false one) is often so sadly broken that they cannot put it together again. But the Lord has promised to "bind up that which was broken;" and this he can do by one look, one word, one smile, one beaming in of his presence and grace. Every scattered bone and joint now drops into its place; and the whole is then so firmly swathed round with love as to be as strong or stronger than before. You have come sometimes to hear, perhaps with scarcely a hope in your soul; you have been so knocked about by sin and Satan, and have got

into such places, that you have dreaded and feared whether there was a spark of grace in you; and yet, when all seemed utterly gone, and you at your wit's end, a line of the hymn, or a word dropped in prayer, or something in the sermon, all of a sudden entered into your soul, and came with such overwhelming power, that your very heart was melted within you. This was binding up that which was broken; and the confidence which before was like a dislocated limb, or a foot out of joint, unable to bear any weight or pressure, leaps, like Naphtali, as a hind let loose.

iv. *"I will strengthen that which was sick."* Peculiar maladies require peculiar remedies; but here is a general remedy, a family medicine. The Lord not only has strong remedies for desperate diseases; but in the divine medicine chest he has his restoratives and cordials. "Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples," cries the Bride, "for I am sick of love" (Song of Sol.2:5). She was in a swoon, and needed a reviving cordial to restore her. So a poor fainting soul may come to hear the preached gospel, or may open his Bible, and say, "What is here for me? When I hear any deep experience described, that seems to cut me off as too deep; and when I hear great manifestations entered into, that cuts me off as too high. So I seem to be a strange being, a peculiar out-of-theway creature, that can neither dive nor fly, sink nor rise." Well, you are sick; you are like one in a hospital, ill of a malady that puzzles all the doctors. At last one more skilful than his brethren, says, "There is no peculiar disease. But the man, like many of our London patients, is suffering from want of nourishment, dying from sheer exhaustion. He wants better blood put into him. He must have some good meat, wine, and porter, and a nourishing diet to recruit his strength and put new life into his body." Thus acts the great Physician, Jehovah Rophi. I "will strengthen that which was sick!" The blood and righteousness of Jesus, that flesh which is meat indeed, and that blood which is drink indeed, is given to the hunger-bitten wretch to revive him as with a heavenly cordial. There is balm in Gilead; there is a Physician there; to that balm and to that Physician sin-sick souls seek. If you have a real case, you may depend upon it, there is a remedy in the family chest. It is not found out yet, at least you

may not have found it, but there is a drawer, and in that drawer there is a draught devised by infinite wisdom and compounded by everlasting love. It is indeed a remedy such as no learned physician of the school of the Pharisees ever prescribed, or an apothecary wise in his own conceit ever compounded; but yet the very thing, the very thing. And when that drawer is opened, and the draught brought out, and you take it, you will be able to say with David in the joy of your heart, "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Psa.103:1).

II. But I pass on to the second part of our subject, where the Lord leaves his dear family, the sheep of his pasture and the flock of his hand, to utter a very sad and striking denunciation: "*But I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.*" Hard words! Heavy tidings! I scarcely know heavier tidings through the whole Word of God. For, look at the two characters whom the Lord threatens to destroy. They are "*the fat*" and "*the strong.*" A man, may be both this, though very, very consistent; religious, highly religious, in the common sense of the word.

1. Let us, therefore, go a little beneath the surface, and examine its spiritual meaning.

i. One thing is very evident; that the persons spoken of as "fat" and "strong," are not afflicted with any disease; if they were, it would soon pull the fat of their bones. They are in very good case; and the reason is, they have no wasting malady. Is not this a description of many, too many in the professing church of Christ? "Surely," say they, "we are not such very great sinners; and if the heart be bad, we do not want to hear it spoken of." But if these persons had a severe malady, they would be very glad to have the symptoms of that malady described. And if they found day after day they were losing flesh, and gradually wasting, they would want to know the cause, whether it sprang from a consumption, or a diseased liver, or some internal malady. So when a child of God finds his strength and flesh going, and he is pining away for his iniquities, as the Scripture speaks

(Ezek.34:23), let Pharisees speak as long as they please, he likes to hear the malady opened up as he feels it. But "the fat " and "the strong" cannot bear the sight of affliction. They are like healthy people going into the wards of an hospital. O how it disgusts them! Here is a man with an abscess; there a poor woman with a cancer; here one wretch coughing up his lungs, and there another in the very agonies of dissolution. How repugnant is every sight and smell! So it is in a religious sense. The whole the stout, the fat, and the strong never like to be amongst the sickly, the consumptive, and the cancered.

But the Lord says, he will "*destroy* the fat." There is no promise of mercy for them; no gracious intimation that the Lord will seek them, bring them again, bind up, or strengthen them. They want it not; are in good case; are fat and strong; have neither ache nor sore; and therefore need no remedy from the Physician.

ii. But hard *labour* will keep down fat. Where will you find a country labourer carrying much flesh upon his bones? Where will you find, to come lower still, a hard-worked horse carrying much fat and flesh? So in grace; labour with temptations, do a deal of hard work by fighting hand to hand against the flesh and the devil; and you will find that it will rub off your flesh.

From this, therefore, we gather, that the people against whom the woe is pronounced do not know much of heart-work nor spiritual conflict. Free from sickness and labour, the two great wasters of flesh, "their eyes stand out with fatness" (Psalm 73:7) and they "maketh collops of fat on their flanks" (Job 15:27).

2. But there are also "the *strong*." Such are those who know nothing of their own wickedness and sinfulness. "What have I to do with sin? Sin! I can keep it at arm's length; I can fell it at once with a knock-down blow." Such is the spirit, if not the language, of many. As to Satan, his temptations, they fear not. Doubts and fears? They have got miles and miles, leagues and leagues beyond them. This is wide encampment ground. Many who bitterly anathematize each other, pitch their tents on the ground

of creature confidence. Papist, Pharisee, Antinomian, have all room for their manoeuvres, here.

Now, I do not say that even a child of God may not for a time be entangled in this snare; for we are poor fools, the best of us, and have all gone aside into some by-path or other. But if year after year a man go on laying on fat and strength, ignorant of sickness, sin, and sorrow, needing no support of a heavenly arm, no remedy from an almighty Physician, God has in this portion of Scripture treasured up a very hard word against him, "I will *destroy* the fat and the strong." How? By cutting them off; sending them to hell at a stroke? No. If he did, London would be at once depopulated; it would be like Lisbon after the earthquake. If the Lord struck down every presumptuous wretch, every ungodly sinner in the act of sinning, the metropolis would be a waste. Nay, I do not know how many corpses we might not have in this chapel.

But the Lord has other means of executing vengeance. He says, "I will *feed* them." What! The Lord feed them? Yes, he will. "I will feed them." With wisdom? No! Mercy? No! The flesh of Christ? No! Gospel promises? No! "I will feed them with;" (what an awful word is coming!) "*Judgment.*" I will leave them alone. That is the meaning of it. The way, then, in which the Lord destroys "the fat and "the strong" is to give them up to their own delusions, to their own errors, to their own follies. And this judicially. God does not tempt, nor is the author of sin; but as he judicially hardened Pharaoh's heart, so judicially he feeds these with "judgment," merely by leaving them in a way of sovereign righteousness to fill up the measure of their own iniquity, and to walk after the imaginations of their own evil hearts. Now when is a man fed with "judgment?" When he is inaccessible to all reproof, beyond the reach of all admonition and of all warning; when he deliberately embraces error, and feeds upon it; when he wraps himself up in his own delusions, holds a lie in his right hand, and rejoices in it. We can scarcely credit there can be an individual professing great light and knowledge, who has arrived to that degree of presumption and confidence as to have no checks of conscience,

no remorse for the past, no apprehensions for the future; no confession, no supplication, no prayer, no desire after manifested favour and mercy, but is satisfied with a form of religion, wrapped up in notions without the power, and rolled up in doctrine without the sweet application of God's truth to the soul. Yet, you may depend upon it, there are many, very many, both in town and country, ministers and people, whom the Lord is feeding thus with judgment, abandoning them to their own devices and delusions, not taking pains to strip off the veil, but leaving them to settle quietly down in the belief of a lie, or in a notional faith and profession of the truth. Examine yourselves on which side of the line you stand, if you would be honest with your own consciences. You are a professor, I presume, by your coming here. Now you must very well know in your soul whether you are hungering at times after food, restless, lost, driven away, broken, and sick.

Now if there be any such experience in your heart, to you belong all these sweet promises. They are yours, really yours. The Lord that has made them will surely fulfil them. But there is room, much room for holy jealousy on which side of the line we stand. Haply you may be one of "the fat and strong," and not one of the sick, or the broken, or the driven away. You way have no experience either of sorrow or joy, of trouble or deliverance; or, what is worse, may secretly despise God's tried and exercised family. But O what a mercy to have some soul experience of the bitterness of sin, the evil of the heart, and the manifestations of Jesus! The worst of all cases is, to have no experience and no desire after any, but to be satisfied with the perishing things of time and sense, or the knowledge of the truth without the power, with the form without the reality.

The Good Work Begun and Finished

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Lord's Day Morning, Oct. 2, 1864

"For your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."
Phil. 1:5, 6

It is now more than twenty-eight years since I first opened my mouth in this pulpit to preach the word of life, and very nearly twenty-six since I was permanently settled as the minister over this congregation; for at that time the church here of which I am the pastor was not formed. In that space of time, more than a quarter of a century, I have lived to witness great changes. Those who then came to this place as babes in their mothers' arms, or as little children, are grown up into men and women, fathers and mothers of families, and have either remained with us, or from various causes have left us. The young have become middle-aged; the middle-aged have grown old; and the old have gradually sunk and passed away out of sight, some to eternal happiness, some to eternal misery. I myself have grown grey in your service. I have given you the best part of my life. I have spent upon you whatever strength I have had both of body and soul, and freely given you of both whatever the Lord has freely given me. And though time has dealt with me, as time has dealt with many of you, in robbing me of much of my activity and energy both of body and mind, I should have still gone on labouring among you in word and doctrine if I had been able to do so. But my failing health, and the attacks which I have had for several successive springs of illness, which, if not very severe, has usually been very long and weakening, warn me that I cannot go on as I have done. I am not able to bear the continuous labour that I have borne thus far, or expose myself in travelling to the change of the weather at all seasons of the year as I have done for many years: and were I to persevere, I have been warned by strong medical authority that it would probably cast me into a

state of health from which there would be no recovery. I have no other reason but this for giving up my charge. When I was favoured with better health, I have always resisted every temptation to leave you from worldly motives, or to move in, what is called, a more enlarged sphere of usefulness; but what I would not have done willingly, I now feel compelled to do by necessity; and if I am but favoured to see in the step I am now taking the good hand of God upon me in leading as well as his stretched-out hand, in compelling, I shall hope to feel submission to his holy mind and will, however painful or trying it may be to the flesh. And I hope that you also, my dear friends and brethren, may so see in my leaving you the will of God and his outstretched hand, that you too may be reconciled to what no doubt is a trial to you as well as to me.

The apostle in the chapter before us (Philippians 1.), after the usual salutation and usual prayer for grace and peace, goes on to express his thankfulness to God for the mutual fellowship and communion in the gospel of Jesus Christ which he and the Philippian church had enjoyed together: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." (Phil. 1:3, 4, 5.) He then goes on to express his confidence that this fellowship of the gospel and their participation in its blessings would not die away and come to nought, or be dissolved even by death, but would be strengthened until perfected: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:6.)

In endeavouring, therefore, to open up, as far as I understand it, the mind and meaning of the blessed Spirit in the words of our text, I shall,

I.—*First*, attempt to show what this "*good work*," of which the apostle speaks is.

II.—*Secondly*, how God begins it, carries it on, and "*performs*,"

or, as the margin reads, *finishes* it.

III.—*Thirdly*, that this performing or finishing of it, is "*until the day of Jesus Christ.*"

IV.—And *Fourthly*, the *grounds of the confidence* expressed by the apostle, that he who had begun would surely perform or complete the good work begun in them.

I.—Let us first then attempt to examine, if the Lord enable, what a "*good work*" is, for that is the foundation of our whole text and subject; and if we stumble at the onset, we shall incur the liability to miss the mind and meaning of the Holy Ghost altogether.

i. Look first then at the word "*work.*" It is something more than a thought, which may perish in the very conception; something more than a word, which is but a fleeting breath. It is something real, solid, and abiding. Again, look at the expression "*good.*" To make a work good, two things are requisite: there must be good material, and there must be a good workman. However good the workman, he cannot make good work out of bad material. The most skilful cabinet-maker could not make a mahogany table out of a deal plank, nor the greatest master of the craft make up the "old shoes and clouted" of the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:5) into the beautiful shoes of a Prince's daughter. (Song Sol. 7:1). The badness of the material must defeat all the skill of the artist. But another thing is requisite—ability and skill in the workman. You may have good material—gold, silver, and precious stones; but put them into the hands of a bad workman, and his want of care or defect in skill would ruin and spoil the best material. But when you have sound, solid, good material, and a skilful, able workman, there you have all the needful elements of good work.

Now apply this explanation and definition to the illustration of our subject. The "*good work*" of our text, is not a good work outwardly, but a good work inwardly, for it is spoken of as the good work in us, for, says the apostle, "He which hath begun a good work *in you.*" This good work in us is the work of grace; and

this is emphatically a good work, for it is good in its beginning and good in its end, good in its source and good in its streams, good for time and good for eternity. But to be a good work, it must be approved of God, for he is the Judge, the only true, infallible, and authoritative Judge of good and evil, and therefore of the goodness or badness of the work. It is not what may be generally commended or counted good by human approbation, or be reckoned good weight as weighed in an earthly balance. To be counted good work, it must pass under the eye and be approved of by the judgment of the all-seeing and infallible God.

ii. But now let us apply our rules of decision to the "good work" of our text. God, as we shall by and by see, is himself the workman. In him, therefore, as the workman, the good work has one certain element and requisite of goodness. But what as to the material? Is that good too? Is it worthy of the workman? a fit subject for an all-pure, all-wise, almighty hand? Now if God were to work upon our corrupt nature, the old man of sin, the worthlessness of the material would effectually prevent the work being a good work. I dispute not the power of God; but the badness of the material must, as I have explained, impair the goodness of the work. God, therefore, who is the workman, for it must be either he or we, and if we, the work could not be good from the defects of the workman—God, I say, does not take the old Adam nature to work upon; but he himself, by his Spirit and grace, creates in us a new heart and a new spirit; for as "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," so "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6.) "Put on the new man," says the apostle, "after which God," that is after the image of God, (as explained Col. 3:10,) "is created in righteousness and true holiness." (Eph. 4:24.) It is then upon this new heart, this new spirit, this new man of grace that God works. The material is thus good, good in itself by a divine creation, and therefore pure and holy, for it is born of incorruptible seed and sinneth not. This is John's testimony: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin because he is born of God." This new nature is "born of God" and therefore "sinneth not." It is not our old nature fresh done up, renewed and

renovated, but a new nature, a new creature, or creation, as the apostle testifies: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature"—literally a new "creation." (2 Cor 5:17.) Thus much for the goodness of the material. Now for the goodness of the workman. This is no less than God himself. "He which hath begun a good work?" Who is this mighty He but the Lord? "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else." (Isa. 45:5, 6.) Look then at the power and the skill of the workman. All power belongeth unto God. His name is Almighty. He is Omnipotence itself; and therefore none can doubt the ability of the workman to make good work. And as he has all power in himself as the Omnipotent God, so he has all wisdom; for he is "the only wise God." (1 Tim. 1:17.) If, therefore, I may use such an expression, he is both skilful and able to make good work from the depths of his own infinite wisdom, as well as from the boundless extent of his Omnipotent power. Who then can deny that this must be good work? If the old creation, before sin marred it, was "good," yea, "very good," and declared to be so by God himself (Gen. 1:25, 31); must not the new creation be good, yea, very good, as wrought by the same wise, holy, and powerful hand?

But now I come more to detail. You whose souls have been made alive unto God want to know what this good work is in its root and branches, in its various points and excellencies, in its difference from and superiority to bad work, and how as the work of the good workman it may be known from all the bad work of bad workman; you want to find some evidences in your own bosom, whether you are partakers of this good work. I must therefore show you in a little detail what this good work is, that you may by comparing your experience with it, gather up some comforting, encouraging testimony that it has been wrought in you.

iii. Let us begin then from the beginning, and trace in it from the first the hand of the Almighty workman, for God himself is said in

our text to begin it. It is therefore all of his sovereign grace, the fruit of eternal choice, of electing love. No man can ever begin a good work upon his own heart. It would not, it could not be a good work if the creature began it. God himself therefore begins it by his sovereign grace and almighty power, that it may be good from its very beginning, sound at and from the very foundation. But we know it better by its effects than by its causes. We can see better the work by looking at it as God works it, than understand the mode in which he produces it. It is with the work of grace as often with a piece of beautiful workmanship, say a porcelain vase or a marble statue; we can see the results of the workman's skill better than we understand the process which he employs to produce what so commends itself to our admiration. The Lord himself tells us, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8.) And so speaks Solomon: "As thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of the God who maketh all." (Eccles. 11:5.) Let us look then at the effects rather than the cause, and, let us view them in due order.

1. The first beginning of this good work is *repentance*. Our Lord himself, when he preached the gospel said, "The kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe the gospel." He bade also his disciples preach "repentance and remission of sins in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:47.) According, therefore, to this command, when those who were "pricked to the heart" asked Peter and the rest of the apostles what they should do, his answer was, "Repent ye and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38.) And again, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." (Acts 3:19.) The preaching of repentance as the first work lay at the foundation of their ministry as of that of their blessed Lord's. And thus also Paul "testified both to the Jews and also to the Greeks,

repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 20:21.) There is indeed the false, deceitful, hypocritical repentance of a Saul, an Ahab, a Judas; but all real, all true, all saving repentance is the work of God; for it is "he who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure;" and as Jesus is "exalted to give repentance," the work of grace begins with it. But what is meant by repentance? By repentance I understand a conviction of our sins as committed against a holy and just God, springing from a change of heart, attended with a sense of our lost, ruined condition, with the weight of eternal realities laid upon the conscience, and the entering in of condemnation through a broken law. Conviction, sound, genuine conviction of sin, must ever lie at the root of vital godliness; for "the whole have no need of a physician, but those that are sick;" and Christ "came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." A sense then of our lost, ruined condition must ever be the beginning of the work of grace upon the heart; and the deeper the repentance the more clear and manifest will be the work.

2. But where there is true repentance, and this springing from a change of heart, for real repentance means as well as implies this, there will be *confession* of sin; for there is no genuine repentance unless there be heartfelt confession. The two invariably go together. Though not in his case the first work, yet we see this point well illustrated in the case of David when convinced of his sin. For a while he nursed his sin in his bosom; but when Nathan came to him with "Thou art the man," and conviction smote his breast, he immediately confessed "I have sinned against the Lord." And he tells us in Psalm 32., how it was with him until he was able to confess his sins. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sins unto thee, and my iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord;"—and then what came? "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Thus repentance, confession, and forgiveness go with and follow upon each other. Where there is repentance there is confession; where there is confession there

is forgiveness; corresponding to that gracious promise, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9.)

3. As a necessary and indispensable consequence of true repentance and heart-felt confession of sin, there will be a *forsaking* of it. Without this there can be no manifested mercy, but all must be rottenness and death: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." (Prov. 28:13.) How strong is the testimony here of holy writ against all who do not forsake their sins: "Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth: though he hide it under his tongue; though he spare it, and forsake it not, but keep it still within his mouth: yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him." (Job 20:12-14.) Hard may be the struggle to give up bosom sins and crucify idol lusts; but wrath and terror, guilt, fear, and alarm will pursue every awakened sinner till he forsake all known sin and abandon his seen and confessed filth and folly.

4. A fourth mark of this good work—for in order to give clear views, we must in some measure separate what really is one—a fourth distinguishing mark of this good work is *the implantation of the fear of God*, which therefore is called "the beginning of wisdom" (Psa 111:10), and is indeed a choice new covenant blessing: "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." (Jer. 32:40.) Now it is this possession of this grace of godly fear as "a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death," which distinguishes spiritual convictions from natural convictions, spiritual repentance from fleshly repentance, and spiritual confession from mere lip confession. This fountain of life plays its springs upon the internal graces of the Spirit, and draws them into living efficacy; and thus the fear of God watering the soul gives genuine repentance, genuine confession, and, as a fountain of life, a departing from the snares of death.

5. Connected with this, to pass on to another point, is a *spirit of grace and of supplications*, which God has promised to pour upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (Zech. 12:10.) This is not only one of the clearest but one of the most blessed marks of the work of grace on the heart; for it is by this pouring out of the spirit of grace and of supplications upon us that we are enabled to pour out our heart before God, to seek his face, to call upon his holy name, to confess our sins, and to sue for mercy. Who can describe the wrestlings that go on in a quickened soul—the sighs, the cries, the groans, the tears, the lamentations, the beseechings which ever attend a genuine work of grace? As I have brought forward the fear of God as one peculiar evidence that distinguishes the work of grace from all its counterfeits, so I may place side by side with it the spirit of prayer in a believer's breast. We find in the Scriptures instances of deep natural conviction, but no instances of prayer to God under those convictions. Saul fell upon his sword; Ahithophel went home and hanged himself; and Judas committed suicide in the same awful manner. There was in them a conviction of sin, but no repentance unto life; no godly sorrow which needs not to be repented of; no confession before God, and no spirit of prayer in their bosom for manifested mercy. Despair seized hold of its miserable victims, and under it they died and went to their place. But whatever depth of conviction, repentance, or confession there is in the heart of a child of God, the spirit of grace and of supplications always attends it; and by the aid of this blessed Spirit who helps his infirmities, interceding in and with him with groanings which cannot be uttered, he pours out his heart before God; and thus his prayers, being indited by the Spirit of God, enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

6. Another part of this good work is *faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*. For faith and repentance were always preached together as kindred graces by the Lord and his apostles. Thus we read that our Lord when he opened his ministry, "came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God; and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." (Mark 1:15.) Paul's preaching as I said

before, consisted in these two grand points: "Repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ." Faith in the Lord Jesus is indeed so eminent a mark and feature of a good work, that the very goodness and soundness of the work seem to depend upon it; for if "without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb. 11:6); if by faith we are justified (Rom. 5:1); if by grace through faith we are saved (Eph. 2:8); if we become the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26); if by faith we stand, walk, and fight; if by faith in the Son of God we live, and in faith are to die that we may receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls, how important, how indispensable a part of the good work must faith be! For what is all conviction, repentance, and forsaking of sin, confession, seeking the Lord's face and pouring out of the heart before him, if there be no faith in the Son of God? Without faith in his Person and work, in his blood and righteousness, we must eternally perish. How decisive here is the Scripture: "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." "He that has the Son of God hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." Without faith therefore in the Son of God there is, there can be no salvation. But are we able to raise up this faith in our breast? No; we may experience deep and strong convictions of sin; eternal realities may lie with great weight and power upon our mind; we may see and feel ourselves to be in a lost and perishing condition; under the pressure of guilt we may confess our sins before the face of him against whom we have so awfully transgressed; we may hate and loathe ourselves in our own sight because of our iniquities; but what is all this if we fall short of faith in the Son of God? Where is there any relief but by faith in his name; and where is there any promise of salvation except to those who believe? But what we cannot do for ourselves God can do for us. He is the giver of this most precious grace; for it is declared to be his express gift. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." "To you it is given not only to believe, but also to suffer for his sake." Jesus is called "the author," that is, the beginner as well as the finisher of faith. All faith therefore is God's express gift, wrought in the heart by his own divine power, and lodged there by his own

heavenly hand. But how is this faith given? By some spiritual and gracious discovery to the soul of the Son of God; by some revelation of the Person and work of Jesus as suitable to our lost, undone condition. When I speak of a revelation of Christ, as I often do, I am not contending for anything visionary. Dreams, voices, appearances in the air, sights and sounds, crosses in the sky, and apparitions at the bedside, I must leave to others. I believe that for the most part they are the portion of visionaries and enthusiasts, for we have all these in the visible church of God, as well as Pharisees and hypocrites, Arminians and Antinomians. I will not indeed deny that the Lord may have wrought by them in some peculiar instances, as in the cases of Augustine and Colonel Gardiner. But taking the generality of God's people and the ordinary mode of divine operation, the revelation of Christ to the soul is a gracious internal discovery by the power of the Spirit, revealing him to the eyes of faith. Nothing is seen or heard by the bodily senses; and yet his glorious Person is as much seen, and his voice as much heard, as though eye and ear beheld his glory and listened to his words. It is altogether of grace, wholly heavenly and divine, and therefore nature, sense, and reason have no place here. It is a divine bringing into the heart of the power and presence, grace and glory, love and blood of Christ in a way that may be felt but never described. Under these spiritual operations and influences—for it is the Spirit's work to take of the things of Christ and reveal them to the soul; it is his covenant office to testify of Jesus under these sacred influences, divine anointings, and gracious operations, Christ is made known unto the heart and looked unto, according to his own word: "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." He is therefore looked unto, believed in, laid hold of, and brought into the heart, where he meets a most cordial and blessed reception; for he takes his seat upon the throne of the affections, and sways his peaceful sceptre over every faculty of the soul.

7. Now where there is this faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, there will be as its accompaniment, and also a part of the good work, what the Scripture calls "*a good hope through grace;*" and surely if it

be a good hope through grace, it must be a part of the good work. The Scripture speaks of it as an "anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and entering into that within the veil." If therefore it enters within the veil where Christ now is, taking fast and firm hold of his glorious Person, as the anchor takes fast and firm hold of the sand or gravel in which it is embedded, I must have faith before I can have hope. Faith is its very substance (Heb. 11:1), and hope does but expect what faith believes. Here, then, we see the necessity of faith for the communication and maintenance of a good hope. How can I hope in the Lord if I know nothing of the Lord? How can my hope in that within the veil be an anchor of my soul both sure and steadfast, to take hold of Jesus, unless I have seen by the eye of faith something of the person and work, grace and glory, blood and righteousness, sweetness and suitability of the risen Son of God? And how in a storm will my anchor be able to hold fast the ship of my soul amidst the temptations which threaten to wreck it unless it can hold its own by what it has tasted, felt, and handled of the Word of Life, of what I have received from God by faith, and what has been lodged in my bosom by the holy Spirit, through the operation of faith upon the Person and work of God's dear Son?

8. Accompanying, and a part of this good work is love. "For he that loveth is born of God and knoweth God." Whenever Christ is revealed to the heart by a divine power and hope springs up as faith's accompaniment, the hand-maid love will join the train; for these are the three Christian graces, all intertwining each other, and walking in sweet union and most blessed concert. "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Love therefore must ever be an eminent part of the good work; for where there is no love there is no grace, no heavenly birth, no knowledge of the Father or of his Son Jesus Christ, no evidence that we have passed from death unto life, because there is no love for the brethren; for observe, that by love I mean love not only to the Lord Jesus Christ but those who are Christ's. Wherever then there is love to him that begat, there will be love to those begotten of him. Love to the Head will produce love to the members, love to the bridegroom will certainly ensure love to

the bride; and if we love the Lord, we shall love those that belong to the Lord, that know the Lord, and love the Lord. You find therefore that our gracious Lord, in the parable of the sheep and the goats, brings forward as the distinctive mark of saving grace the love which had been shown to himself not in person, but to the members of his mystical body as though they were himself. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Then sounds forth from the same lips the invitation: "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

9. But I have not yet exhausted my description of the good work. Besides those leading features which I have already brought forward, there will be *obedience*, sometimes called "obedience to the gospel," sometimes spoken of as the obedience of faith, or obedience to the truth. And is not this a most important feature? What religion worthy the name can a man have if it has not produced practical obedience? What evidence is there of the good work if a man's life, conduct, and conversation are what they were before? Now the first act of obedience is to come out of the world: "Come out from among them and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing." It is the first act of obedience, and the first to which there is a promise attached. Abram proved it so. He went out to a land whither he knew not. The first distinctive feature of his call was his obedience to it. And that call separated him for ever from his own kindred and from his father's house. Again, this coming out of the world is connected with a joining oneself with, and a cleaving unto the people of God. Why do we leave the world? Because it is a place and a people with which we feel no longer union or communion. We feel the truth and force of the words of the prophet: "Arise ye and depart; for this is not your rest." And why? "Because it is polluted." (Micah 2:10.) By the implantation of a new heart and a new spirit, we become separated from the things of time and sense as unclean things, and from the company and society of those who are devoted to them as unclean persons. And this not from Pharisaic pride, or an assumption of superior holiness, but from the fear of God and a tender conscience. With this coming out of and separation from

the world, as if instinctively and almost instantaneously, there is a going forth of love and affection toward the family of God. We never knew before that God had a family. We might have seen or known persons moving about us of a peculiar stamp, an odd kind of people like no others, whom we might have honoured or despised according to the way in which we were brought up, and the natural tendency of our minds to religion or profanity. But as to any internal perception of the grace of God in them, or any love or affection to the mind and image of Christ visible in them, not having that spiritual understanding or feeling ourselves, not knowing anything of Christ in our own bosom, we could not see, recognise, or feel any union with what we saw in them. But the same blessed Spirit who baptises us into a knowledge and experience of Christ, baptises us into love and affection to all in whom we see the mind of Christ; and this is necessarily attended with a cleaving to them. See how it was with Saul of Tarsus. He came to Damascus' gate like a roaring lion or bloodthirsty wolf, to ravage Christ's little flock. He is struck down by the exceeding great light which shone above the brightness of the sun, and arrested by the words of the persecuted Lord, which thrilled through his inmost soul. Conviction seizes his breast; three days and three nights he neither eats nor drinks nor sleeps, so pierced was he by the arrows of the Almighty. At the end of that time Ananias comes to him with a message from the Lord—pardon and peace reach his heart. He arises and is baptised. And now what follows? "Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were in Damascus"—the very disciples whom he came to drag bound unto Jerusalem. And what more? "Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues that he is the Son of God." (Acts 9:18-20.) Thus at once he leaves all his bloodthirsty companions, gives up everything he formerly held dear, joins himself to the despised, hated family of God, amongst whom he continues in life and death in the firmest union and the warmest, tenderest affection. So we trust it has been with us. Like the bride, we have forsaken and forgotten our own people and our father's house; for Jesus is our Lord whom we desire to worship and him alone. (Psa. 45:10, 11.) Thus, wherever there is a good work it will be clearly manifested as such by a full and final

separation from the world, a joining one's self unto, and walking in love and union with the dear family of God, esteeming them the excellent of the earth, casting our lot in among them, as having the same faith, the same hope, the same Lord, the same God and Father of all who is above all, and through all, and in them all. (Eph. 4:4-6.) Such has been my case. I never thought, till wrought upon by a divine power, of casting in my lot among the saints of God. Indeed I did not know that there was such a peculiar people; for I was brought up in utter ignorance that there was such a thing as spiritual religion, or that the Lord had saints now upon earth. I had other views, other prospects, other expectations, and should, but for God's constraining grace, have been well satisfied with a portion in this life, with scarcely a thought of eternity. I was not compelled by necessity to leave the world, or abandon my earthly prospects by misconduct, as if turned out of it whether I would or not; but was led, as I hope, by a divine influence to come out of it, when I might, to my great advantage, have continued in it, to cast my lot amongst the poor, despised saints of God. And may I not add that but for that constraining influence calling me out of the world, and fixing my heart and affections on the Lord and his people, you would never have heard my voice in this place?

But the same power which brings us out of the world and unites us with the dear family of God, leads also to all other spiritual and practical obedience. The love of Christ constraining us, we are led to attend to the ordinances of his house; to live godly, uprightly, and consistently before God and man, the church and the world; to minister, according to our means, to the temporal wants of the family of God; to abstain from everything unbecoming the gospel in word and deed; and to live or desire to live to the honour and glory of God.

II.—But let us now pass on to consider our second point, how this good work is *begun, carried on, and completed*.

i. I shall not be very long upon this point, at least not upon the first part of the good work; for that has been already entered

into; and I have sufficiently pointed out that nothing short of the sovereign grace of God could begin it. Indeed upon this point we need go no further than the testimony of our own conscience, which must speak loudly in our breast if it have any voice at all. If any man were to assert in my hearing that he began the work of grace upon his own heart, that by the exercise of his own free will he turned to God, and produced in himself faith and repentance, I should instantaneously feel and declare that such a one was completely ignorant of the very beginning of a work of grace; for I am certain it is the universal feeling and confession of all the subjects of regenerating grace, that God and none but God began that work upon their heart. Besides, therefore, the testimony of the scripture, which on this point is so clear and decisive, you have the testimony of your own conscience; and in the mouth of these two witnesses this truth is established. Were you not thinking of anything but the Lord, seeking anything but his favour, and desiring anything but his mercy, when he was pleased in a sovereign way to work with divine power upon your heart? Thus, one wave of your hand, one breath of your lips, is able to sweep away all the cobwebs of free will.

ii. But the same God who began *carries on*. This though not expressed is implied in our text; for if God begin and finish the middle cannot be left out. But if that middle were left for us to do, it would harmonise with neither beginning or end, foundation or top-stone, both of which are laid in grace (Zech. 4:7-9); nor could the whole be called a "good work" if spoiled by bad hands and bad material half way. But we feel inwardly convinced that we have no more power to carry on the good work than we had power to begin it; and that were it left in our hands it would, like Jerusalem of old, lie desolate, so that the bear out of the woods would waste it and the wild beasts of the field would devour it. (Nehem. 2:17; Psa. 80:13.) But this is the unspeakable mercy of those who have an interest in these divine realities, that he who began carries on; for "he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;" and David could speak in sweet confidence, "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me." (Psa. 138:8.)

1. But how does the Lord carry on this good work? Mainly by and

through his word, and especially what the scripture calls "the word of his grace," as I may perhaps have an opportunity of opening up more fully this afternoon. It is mainly then by the word of his grace that God carries on the work begun. He has therefore, as one branch of this word of grace, appointed a preached gospel to be a means of building up his people on their most holy faith. This is clearly laid down in Ephesians 4., where the apostle instructs us into the nature and intent of those spiritual gifts which the Lord gave unto men when he ascended upon high. "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." Here we see the object of the institution of a gospel ministry; whether the ministers be apostles, or prophets, or evangelists, or pastors and teachers, it is to perfect the saints—that is, to establish them firmly in the truth; to carry on the general work of the ministry in its various branches of calling, comforting, instructing, and reproof; and to edify or build up the body of Christ, both by adding fresh living stones to the mystical temple, and building up individual saints in faith and love. By "the word of his grace" we may also understand the word as read and meditated upon, and applied to the heart in private. For we are bidden to search the scriptures (John 5:39); and give attendance to reading and meditation. (1 Tim. 4:13, 15.) We also read, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works." (2 Tim. 3:16, 17.) Thus it is by the word of his grace read and meditated upon, and made life and spirit in private, or brought home to the soul in public under the ministry of the gospel, that God carries on the work of grace begun.

2. But that we may spiritually understand, and savingly believe the word of his grace, and thus find that "whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4), it is *through a path of tribulation* that God for the most

part carries on the good work. His own testimony is that it is through much tribulation we are to enter the kingdom of God; and as this kingdom is within us (Luke 17:21), and a spiritual kingdom, as being "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17), every branch of this kingdom must be entered into through tribulation. Thus, though God uses the word of truth to carry on the work begun, yet it is the word of truth as revealed to our understanding and applied to our heart in a state of tribulation. That the kingdom of heaven may be ours, we must be "poor in spirit," for they are the children and heirs of it. (Matt. 5:3.) To them God looks and with them he dwells. (Isa. 57:15; 66:2.) But it is through tribulation that they become so. Through affliction then of body and mind; through severe and painful trials; through distressing bereavements; through powerful temptations; through assaults of sin and Satan; through discoveries of our own corrupt nature to humble us in the very dust, and, in a word, through the various paths of tribulation in which the Lord leads his people, he mercifully and yet mysteriously carries on the work begun. It must needs be so. The Lord's people are a poor and afflicted people, and each member must be conformed to the suffering likeness of a suffering Head. But how many and various are the sources of suffering and the paths of tribulation. We carry about with us a body of sin and death, our greatest plague and sorest annoyance. Our poor frail bodies, created out of the dust of the earth, and soon to return to it, are exposed to the incursions of every kind of disease and sickness; we live in a world that hates Christ and his people; the enemy, sworn foe of God and man, is always upon the watch, ever seeking to entangle by treachery or assault by violence. Need we wonder then at the number and variety of the afflictions and sorrows which fall to the lot of God's people and through which he carries on the work begun? But for these afflictions and trials, and exercises of mind which they produce, we should think we had some power of ourselves to carry on the good work; but those tribulations beat all such weapons out of our hands, and we are glad to come to such points and such Scriptures as these: "I will work and none shall let (or hinder) it" (Isai. 43:13): "Their strength is to sit still" (Isai. 30:7): "But now O Lord, thou art our

Father; we are the clay, and thou our potter, and we all are the work of thy hand." (Isai. 64:8.) Here then the word meets us in the path of tribulation, is made sweet and precious to tried and afflicted souls, and thus instrumentally carries on the work. How sweet for instance is the promise when the soul is brought down by trouble into a state to need the help it gives, and the support it yields; and adapted are the consolations of the Gospel to a season of affliction; how suitable the deliverance in a time of bondage; how blessed the liberty proclaimed by the gospel, when sunk into captivity; and how gracious the light to the soul that walks in darkness. Thus we see that though the word of God's grace brings with it light and life, grace and strength, liberty and love, it is only so as it is made the power of God in those seasons of trial and affliction to which it is suitable.

iii. But this work is not only to be carried on, it is to be *finished*. Nor will its beauty, blessedness, and perfection be fully and clearly known until it is completed. I adopt the marginal reading, "finish," in preference to what we find in the text, "perform;" for it more distinctly points out an end to a beginning. This finishing is essential to the goodness of the work; for it is in grace as in nature. Until the work is finished we cannot see what is the design of the architect in some grand or noble building, say a palace for a king. In its rough, rude, unfinished state the beauty of the design, the proportion of every part and the grandeur of the whole cannot be seen. But when finished, then it stands forth in all its beauty and glory, fit residence for a monarch. The same thing is true of every other work of art, as a picture, a statue, an engraving. Until finished their beauty cannot be seen. We cannot judge therefore of the beauty of this good work, the work of grace, whilst we see it in its present imperfect state. It is being carried on, but not finished. But it is to be finished, to be completed, as was the building of the restored temple, after the return from the captivity, the foundation of which was laid by the hands of Zerubbabel. The Lord we read was "jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy." He therefore said, "I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies; my house shall be built in it, said the Lord of hosts." (Zech. 1:14-16.) He then gave

this promise: "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it." Neither the jealousy nor the mercy of the Lord would suffer him to leave the temple in ruins, or that his servant Zerubbabel should not finish what he had begun. He therefore declared, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain; and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying grace, grace unto it." (Zech. 4:6-7.) So shall it be with the temple of mercy. He who has begun the good work will certainly finish it.

III.—But when? In *the day of Christ*, our third point: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:6.) It is "until" or up to "the day of Jesus Christ" that this work is to be finished.

i. By the day of Christ I understand three things.

1. I understand by it, first, the day in which Christ is revealed to the soul. We often find a peculiar day spoken of in the prophets which is sometimes called "the day of the Lord," and sometimes more briefly "that day." Now generally speaking "the day of the Lord" or "that day" is connected with some great deliverance, some manifestation of the Lord's power, or some discovery of his salvation; as where we read, "And in that day shalt thou say, O Lord, I will praise thee though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." (Isa. 12:1, 2.) Now when Christ is revealed to the soul by the power of God, it is in a special sense "the day of the Lord," or "the day of Jesus Christ;" for it is a day of days, a day which he made for himself—a day in which he specially magnifies his grace, reveals his beauty, and discovers his glory. We may say therefore that in a certain sense it is the finishing of the good work; for it is an accomplishment of, an answer to the prayers, tears,

supplications, wants, wishes, and desires of the quickened soul in which the good work is begun. To have Christ revealed to the heart with a clear testimony of interest in his blood and righteousness, is to the soul's feeling an accomplishment of its most earnest desires. And thus in that sense there is a finishing of the work, and accomplishing and performing of it, until and up to this day of Christ.

2. But there is another sense of the word which we may I think fairly adduce. *Christ is to be made our all in all*; and this is not, usually speaking, done in the first days of our profession. We have to be effectually stripped of all our own wisdom, strength, and righteousness, that Christ may be experimentally and feelingly our all in all; that we may have none but Christ and nothing but Christ, so that all we are and have may be in Christ, and through Christ, and him alone. But O what stripping do we need to pull away the rags of self-righteousness which cleave so closely to us; what hard labour to wear us out of all our own strength, and exhaust us of our own wisdom. What discovery after discovery of our wretched and miserable inability is needed to bring us down to that spot of felt helplessness and utter ruin in which Christ becomes our all in all. Now when Christ is thus made our all in all, after, it may be, many a long and weary season of struggling with a body of sin and death, with a burden of guilt and shame, condemnation and self-reproach; after being exercised, perhaps for years, with powerful temptations and many grievous afflictions,—when we thus cease to be nothing and to have nothing, and by some clearer and brighter discoveries of his glorious Person and work, Christ becomes our all in all, that is a performing or finishing of the good work until the day of Christ. For it is a good work to bring us unto Christ; and to make Christ everything to us which our souls can desire is accomplishing the good work, and if possible making it better still, by setting on it God's own crown and bringing forth the top stone of his love and goodness "with shoutings of grace, grace unto it." And surely that must be truly and emphatically "the day of Jesus Christ" when he is thus supremely exalted: "And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and

the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." (Isa. 2:17.)

3. But there is a third sense, and one that seems to be especially the mind of the Holy Ghost in the text—*the day of Christ's appearing*, when he will come a second time without sin unto salvation. This second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the glory of the Father is much spoken of in the New Testament, and formed an important portion of the preaching of all the apostles. This second coming is often spoken of as "the day of Christ." Thus to the Corinthians Paul writes: "Waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 1:7, 8.) So elsewhere the apostle speaks of being "sincere and without offence till the day of Christ," and of his hoping "to rejoice in the day of Christ that he had not run in vain neither laboured in vain." (Phil. 1:10; 2:16.) Now the good work begun in the heart of the saints of God will never shine forth in all its completeness and glory until this day of Christ; for when all the veils and coverings of mortality are dropped then will the work of God burst forth in all its beauty. When a statue, erected to some distinguished individual, as say, the late Prince Consort, is to be what is called inaugurated, and exposed to public view, it is kept closely covered up until the appointed day; and then when all the preparations made for the occasion are completed, and the Sovereign herself perhaps present, it is suddenly uncovered, and in one moment stands forth in all its beauty. Nobody could see its grace and beauty until the covering was removed; but now all may admire its exquisite proportions and the truthfulness of the attitude and likeness. What the statue was when covered up so is it now with the saints of God. God is working by his Spirit and grace in their soul a glorious and yet hidden and invisible work, but now covered up by a body of sin and death. But in that day when Christ shall be revealed; when he shall come with all his saints; when the bodies of the sleeping saints shall be raised from the dust and reunited to their souls, made perfect in holiness, and the living be changed in the twinkling of an eye, without passing through death—in that day of Christ what glory will be seen encompassing the saints of God. What glorious souls, purified

from every spot and stain of sin, and what heavenly, spiritual, and immortal bodies will each combine with all their powers to praise the God of their salvation. This will indeed be the "day of Christ," when he shall take to himself the kingdom and reign before his ancients gloriously; when his people will shine, according to the ancient promise, as pure and as numerous as the dew in the morning; when the church will come forth as the bride adorned for her husband, and reign with him in glory for ever and ever.

IV.—I now pass on to my fourth point, *the confidence* of the apostle that God will do all this.

i. His confidence rested upon two grounds: first, *general*; secondly, *particular*.

1. It rested first upon the *general* ground of God's faithfulness—that he would be faithful to his word and his oath as made in and ratified by an everlasting covenant. This covenant is "ordered in all things and sure," and contains a special promise made in it to the Son of his love, "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David: His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me." (Psa. 89:34-36.) According to the tenor of this promise in the eternal covenant, none of the elect can ever perish, or otherwise the seed of the spiritual David would not endure for ever. But need we any other testimony than our Lord's own declaration? "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." (John 10:27, 28.) But I need not dwell longer on a point so firm and clear.

2. I will therefore pass on to the *particular* ground of confidence in the case of the Philippian church, as forming a part of our text: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy, for *your fellowship in the gospel* from the first day until now, being

confident of this very thing," &c. Thus we see that it was their fellowship with him in the gospel which gave him a sure confidence on their behalf that he who had begun the work would finish it to the day of Jesus Christ. But let me explain in a few words what is meant by "the fellowship of the gospel." It means a mutual participation in the blessings, in the grace, and in the power of the gospel, cementing their hearts together in the union and communion of the Holy Ghost. He had felt union and communion with them; they had felt union and communion with him; and this was the ground of his confidence, that he who had begun the good work in them, which he knew was the case from his feelings towards them, would finish it unto the day of Christ, when they and he should be glorified together.

Now may I not in some measure say the same thing of those of you in the church and congregation, in whom there is any real evidence of the good work having been begun? Have we not some mutual fellowship in the gospel? Has not this been the ground, the sole ground, of our love and union with each other? Have we not felt and known something within these walls of the power of the gospel? Has it not reached your heart sometimes from my lips, and been made the power of God unto your salvation? If I have felt, as I hope I have the power of the gospel in my own soul, within these walls, and you have felt the power of the gospel in your soul under my ministry, that has given us fellowship; that has united us in the gospel, and made us mutual partakers of the blessings of the gospel, the consolations of the gospel, the hopes of the gospel, and the promises of the gospel. We may esteem or like each other from various motives, and to some I may have been as a "lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument" (Ezek. 33:32)—the instrument of preaching. But all these are earthly ties, pleasures which perish in the using. It is nothing but the fellowship of the gospel which unites heart to heart and knits people to minister and minister to people. Now you and I for many years—I speak to those who desire to fear the Lord and have been hearers of mine, whether in the church or out of it, for I do not tie up my esteem and affection within the bonds of

church membership, you and I have had for many years some fellowship in the gospel. What motive, what inducement has brought you here, many of you from long distances, through all weathers, except to hear the gospel with some power and savour to your hearts? And when you have come and heard something that has brought life and liberty, love and mercy into your soul, it has been through the power of the gospel, and nothing but the power of the gospel. It has not been my eloquence, nor abilities, nor talents, nor anything of that kind, for I have but little of them; and if I had, in this matter of fellowship in the gospel, they would be worthless. But it has been the simple power of the gospel which has come out of my heart and through my mouth into your soul. That is the foundation, and the only foundation, of all our fellowship, of all our union, love, and affection. This fellowship of the gospel must be mutual, from the very meaning of the word. So it was with Paul and the Philippians; for if you look at the margin in the 7th verse you will find it read, "Ye have me in your heart," as well as "I have you in my heart," as in the text.

Now it was this mutual fellowship in the gospel which made him feel the sure confidence that he who had begun the good work could carry it on. May I not feel and say the same? If you were mere cold, dead, indifferent hearers, how could I think or speak with any confidence that he who had begun a good work would carry it on? But so far as I know you, or any of you, to have some experience of the work of God upon your soul, or some hope that he has wrought savingly and graciously upon your heart under my ministry, I feel a sure confidence that he who has begun the good work will perform it to the day of Christ, and that independent of me or any other man. It does not want my presence, though you may value it; it will not fail through my absence, though you may feel it. It depends upon the faithfulness of God as I have opened it up. Whether, therefore, I be present or absent, it will not affect your salvation or the carrying on of the good work. It may for a time affect your feelings. I should indeed be a poor minister not to be missed; and it would not speak much for my character in or out of the pulpit if we parted without

affection and without regret. But as regards the carrying on and finishing of the work, remember this—I did not begin that work upon your soul; and I shall not complete that work of grace upon your soul. If I did, it would not be a good work. If I had given you the material it must be bad, as my gift and not the gift of God. If the material were good, if I were the workman I should spoil the material by my bungling hand. But if, as I pointed out in the beginning, it is a good work from goodness of material and goodness of workmanship, the finishing of the work in its beauty and perfection does not rest upon me or any man, but upon the faithfulness, the wisdom, the skill, and the power of him who began it. In this spirit therefore, the spirit I trust in some measure of the apostle, I commend you to him who began the good work, in the sweet confidence that he will carry it on; and O that it may be carried on day by day and hour by hour in my breast and in your breast until finished, that when the great and glorious day of Christ comes, you and I may stand before the great white throne, clothed in white garments and the palms of victory in our hands, and lift up our united voices to sing honour and praise and glory and power to him that sits upon the throne and to the Lamb for ever.

GOSPEL FRUIT THE TEST OF GENUINE DISCIPLESHIP

Preached on Tuesday Evening, October 31st, 1854, at Oakham, Rutland

"Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples." John 15:8

Why does the farmer, at this season of the year, cast into the bosom of the earth so much valuable corn? That at harvest time he may reap a crop. Why does the gardener now transplant fruit trees, and put them by the side of a sunny wall? That those trees, when their bearing season comes, may produce rich and ripe fruit. If the farmer reap no crop, if the gardener gather no fruit, each is disappointed, and they would conclude, either that the seed was bad and the tree worthless, or that there was something wrong about the soil. So it is in grace. Why does God sow the seed of His Word in the heart of any? or why does He plant any tree of righteousness in His garden here below? That there may spring from the one a crop which may issue in His glory; and that fruit may be found on the other which shall be acceptable in His sight.

How much and how pointedly does the Lord Jesus Christ in this chapter insist upon fruit as a mark and evidence of true discipleship! With what unsparing hand does He cut off the branches that bear no fruit, and what a fearful doom does He pronounce upon them! And how He brings before our eyes His heavenly Father, investing Him with that striking character of "a husbandman," whose office it is to take away the fruitless and purge the fruit-bearing branches. "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." But the Lord seems to sum up the whole in the words before us, in which He speaks as if He would urge the strongest motives upon His followers to induce them to live to His glory. "Herein is My Father glorified,

that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples."

In speaking from these words, I shall, with God's blessing, endeavour to show—

I. *What it is to bear much fruit.*

II. *How God is glorified thereby.*

III. *That to bear much fruit is a mark and test of genuine discipleship.*

I. In looking at our first point, *the bearing of much fruit*, I shall endeavour mainly to show three things: 1, that this fruit is not found in any heart by nature; 2, the source whence this fruit comes; and 3, the nature of the fruit thus produced.

i. Now, upon the first of these points we have not only the unanimous experience of God's people, but the positive assertion of Him who cannot lie, of Him who is Incarnate Truth itself. "Without Me," He says, "ye can do nothing." This declaration from the Redeemer's own lips should be decisive; it should stop at once all disputing; and we should bow down to it with hearty assent, as being convinced of it, not only from our own experience, but also from the infallible authority of the Lord Himself. In the margin it reads "severed from Me," that is, disunited from Me; in other words, "without union with Me" ye can do nothing. All fruit, therefore, or appearance of fruit, which is not produced by virtue of a living and spiritual union with the Lord Jesus, whatever fair show it may assume, however shapely and beautiful it may look to the eye, is not such as God is glorified by; nor is it that which forms a test of genuine discipleship.

Amidst all the wreck and ruin which sin has wrought in this once fair world, amidst all the hideous forms of wickedness and selfishness which everywhere meet our eye, we cannot but be struck with the exceeding loveliness of some characters, and with

the devotedness, self-denial, liberality, and religious zeal of others. It may seem harsh and unwarrantable to throw all this fruit rudely on the ground, and crush it under foot as worthless. But we must not call that gospel fruit which is not produced by the gospel, nor pronounce that spiritual fruit which is not the fruit of the Spirit. Nature can, and indeed does, produce much that wears a very close resemblance to gospel fruit; but it puts me in mind of what one sometimes sees made by the skilful fingers of young ladies—what is called wax fruit. I have seen sometimes under glass shades fruit so ingeniously made, so artistically shaped, and so beautifully tinted, that at first sight I could scarcely distinguish it from real. But were you closely to examine it, were you to touch it, smell it, and taste it, you would find it destitute of every qualification that constitutes fruit. It never grew on a tree, it possesses no flavour, contains no juice, the sun never ripened it, the dew never mellowed it; human fingers, and human fingers alone, manufactured it. However neatly moulded and beautifully coloured, it is, after all, but a piece of dead wax, a deceptive imitation, a false appearance, meant merely to catch and please the eye. So there may be in many characters, amid the various sections of the religious world, an appearance of fruit, much that resembles, and even externally surpasses, the fruit which grows upon the gospel tree, as the waxen fruit may to the eye be more beautiful than the real, the choicest fruit alone being imitated; and yet it wants the gospel flavour, the gospel substance, the gospel reality, and the gospel vitality. It never grew upon the gospel tree, and, with all its outward beauty, is only a waxen imitation, wrought by the skilful fingers of the dexterous artificer, at best a cheat and a sham.

Again, there may be fruit which differs from this imitation fruit in having a certain kind of life in it, but, after all, is only what one may call hedge fruit—sloes, leather-coats, crabs, mere productions of the hedge and copse, only fit for the teeth and stomach of plough-boys. Now, as no one but a plough-boy would presume to say that these products of a wild crab or sloe tree are worthy of the name of fruit, that term being properly reserved for the product of the garden and orchard, so whatever fruit springs

out of a man's natural heart, and is produced by mere human exertions, can only be truly characterised as hedge fruit.

This, therefore, we may lay down as a most certain truth, that every product of nature, however wearing the appearance of religion, from the highest Calvinism, the wax imitation, to the most grovelling Arminianism, the sour crab, cannot be called gospel fruit. It does not flow from union with Christ; it does not grow in the gospel garden; it is not matured by the dew and rain of the Spirit; and it is not ripened by the Sun of righteousness. It lacks, therefore, every qualification of gospel fruit—the fruit here spoken of whereby God is glorified, and whereby His people are manifested as true disciples of the Lord Jesus.

2. But this leads us to look more closely at the only source of all gospel fruit. The Lord Himself sets forth this point in a most beautiful and blessed manner. "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me." He here declares the original source and continued production of all true fruit. It springs, in the first instance, wholly and solely out of union with Himself, and is maintained by an abiding in Him. The branch cannot bear fruit of itself. No life is in it, no fruit is on it, but as it grows out of and maintains its union with the stem. It has no independent, self-sustained life, sap, or fruitfulness. All these it derives from its union with the stem, living only in its life, and growing only with its strength. The natural vine is a beautiful emblem and representation of this. In the same way, then, as the natural vine pushes forth the bud out of itself, which expands into a branch, upon which branch the grapes grow, deriving all their substance, shape, and flavour from the sap that flows into them from the stem, so all gospel fruit is procured by the spiritual branch having first union with the Lord Jesus Christ, and then receiving out of His fulness those supplies of heavenly grace whereby fruit is borne and matured to His honour and glory.

But before we can realise in our own souls this heavenly union, so as to become by virtue of it gospel fruit bearers, we must be

taught and brought to see and feel that without Christ we can do nothing; and the conviction of this must not be a mere matter of doctrine or theory, the easily adopted article of a religious creed, but must be so deeply wrought into our hearts as to become a living part and parcel of our daily experience. Many sighs and cries, groans and desires, must have been elicited from a conviction of our helplessness, barrenness, and unworthiness before we shall realise such a vital union with the Son of God as sensibly to receive out of His fulness. And when we have felt this living union which springs out of a manifestation of Christ and a receiving of Him into the heart by faith and love, we must also, through the operation of the blessed Spirit, receive such continued communications out of His inexhaustible fulness as to maintain the union thus realised. To experience this is to experience the inflowing and incoming of the sap out of the stem into the branch. As, then, out of the stem, by virtue of the sap, the bud was first formed, which became lengthened into the branch, so from the same sap the branch, when grown, pushes forth leaves, flower, and fruit, the latter gradually swelling and ripening till fit for the winepress or the table.

3. But, leaving the natural figure, we will now look a little more closely at the nature of the fruit that grows upon the gospel tree, and is produced by virtue of a living union with the Lord Jesus. We may divide gospel fruit into three leading kinds—fruit in the heart, fruit in the lips, and fruit in the life; and these three we will examine separately.

i. The fruit of the heart is first in origin and first in value. The other two being worthless without it, it justly takes precedence of them. As God looks to and works on the heart, the production of heart fruit is His special prerogative. We therefore read that "He worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure," and declares, "from Me is thy fruit found." He it is who by His good and gracious Spirit produces and brings forth every grace in the soul. Some of these we may consider.

1. First, then, there is the *fear of God*, which in two places of

Scripture the blessed Spirit declares to be "the beginning of wisdom." Whatever slavish fears may work in the natural conscience, there is no filial, godly fear in the soul which is not derived from union with Christ, and does not come out of His glorious and inexhaustible fulness. It is, therefore, a new covenant grace, the special implantation of God's own hand. "I will put," the Lord Himself says, "My fear in their heart, that they shall not depart from Me." This fruit being the beginning of wisdom, all other gifts and graces of the Spirit will certainly and necessarily follow.

2. *Faith*, therefore, that special gift of God and choice grace of the Spirit, is eminently a gospel fruit of the heart. Speaking of faith last Lord's day morning, I called her the queen of graces. We may well say, therefore, that faith is a most excellent fruit of the heart, and assign it a first and foremost place among the fruits that grow on the gospel tree, as springing so eminently out of union with the Lord Jesus, for "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." It is by faith that this union is first experimentally produced, and it is by faith that it is subsequently maintained; for through it as a living channel all sap and virtue flow out of the Lord Jesus Christ into the soul. There is therefore no grace more highly spoken of and commended in both Old and New Testaments.

3. And what shall I say of *hope*? Is not hope too a fruit of the heart? Does it not grow a fair and goodly fruit on the gospel tree? What "good hope" is there except "through grace" producing union with Christ? and what hope is there which maketh not ashamed that does not spring out of the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost? and where but within does hope dwell? Every ray of gospel hope flows out of union with Christ, and is received out of His fulness, as every well-grounded expectation of being with Him in glory springs from some manifestation of His favour and love.

4. Every warm feeling of *love* towards His name, truth, cause, and people—is not this too another fruit of the heart which flows into the soul from its union with the Lord Jesus? This is the

crowning fruit, the richest, choicest, and ripest that is found among the clusters, as well as the highest and most distinguishing mark of true discipleship. "If ye love Me keep My commandments." "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another."

So might I run through every inward fruit, such as repentance and godly sorrow for sin, contrition of spirit, humility of mind, prayer, watchfulness, with every grace whereby a Christian is inwardly adorned, and show that they all grow upon the gospel tree, and all spring out of union and communion with the Lord Jesus. May we not say, then, of one who is blessed with the possession of these fruits of the heart, that he resembles the king's daughter, who is "all glorious within," as adorned with every grace of the Spirit, as well as all resplendent without in her "clothing of wrought gold," the righteousness of her spotless Head?

ii. Now from fruit in the heart there springs fruit in the lip, "for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10). As faith is heart fruit, so confession is lip fruit, and as the former is unto righteousness, so the latter is unto salvation. But as to believe with a justifying faith is of God, His gift and work, so to confess with a saving confession is of the same divine operation. "I create," He says, "the fruit of the lips." This fruit of the lips we give Him when, in spite of all opposition from without and from within, we confess His holy name before an ungodly world. The order of divine fruitfulness may therefore be thus laid out. The Lord first plants His fear deep in the heart. With this grace He at the same time communicates faith, which, indeed, is the main source and spring of godly fear; and as He draws forth faith into living exercise upon the word of His promise, it credits His testimony concerning Jesus, and thus sets to its seal that God is true. This is heart fruit. But as the Lord proceeds to bless the soul with manifestations of His mercy and goodness, He raises up a spirit of thankfulness and praise, which issue forth from the lips.

1. This is putting a new song into the mouth, as was the case with the children of Israel (Exod. 15), Hannah (1 Sam. 2), David (Ps. 40:3), Hezekiah (Isa. 38), and the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:46); and this song of praise for manifested mercy is the first fruit of the lips which God is said to create.

2. From this secret song of praise flows the second fruit of the lips, which is confession of Him openly before man. This consists in making a public profession, boldly declaring on whose side we stand, in not being ashamed of the Lord Jesus in the face of His scornful and bitter enemies, in bearing His cross, carrying it upon a bold shoulder, and, though sometimes galled with the weight, still to sustain its load, remaining faithful unto death, that we may obtain a crown of life.

3. To speak a word in season to the Lord's tried and tempted family, and out of your own experience, so far as enabled, to bring forward something that He may have done for your soul, is another fruit of the lip, and one whereby the Lord is glorified and His people edified.

4. Always to employ kind and affectionate language in your intercourse with the Lord's people, and to treat them with unvarying tenderness and sympathy, is also a fruit of the lips. I do not mean the canting, hypocritical softness of the day, but the kind and tender words which spring from real love and affection.

5. To call continually upon the Lord's name in prayer and supplication to tell Him all our trials and exercises, and to beg of Him to visit, water, and bless our souls, is also a fruit of the lips. To make it truly such, heart and tongue must ever move together; and it is a great mercy when we can say with David, "Give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips." Such prayer as this, the breath of God's Spirit in the soul, makes sweet music in the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Christ's own mark of the elect is that "they cry night and day unto God."

6. To drop a word, as occasion may arise, of warning, rebuke, or

instruction, in one's family, before the world, to those in affliction and distress, is another fruit of the lips. No one can tell what power there may be in a single word, "for life and death are in the power of the tongue." A word may be dropped that may hereafter be useful to some one in a foreign land, on a sick bed, on a field of battle amid the wounded and dying, which perhaps has been long forgotten by you and by him too, till God brought it to his mind, and blessed it to his soul. Or you may be called upon to stop, by a word, the mouth of an enemy, or to speak in defence of the truth before a superior. Thus the apostle urges Timothy "to be instant in season and out of season;" and speaks of his "holding fast the faithful word as he had been taught, that he might be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gain sayers" (Titus 1:9). Whatever is thus spoken in the name of the Lord, with a single eye to His glory, will be accepted of Him as a fruit of the lips.

7. Nor will we exclude from this fruit the pen of a ready writer; for some can write who cannot speak, and Christian correspondence has often been signally blessed; and many a gracious man by his writings still speaketh whose tongue has long been silent in the grave.

But we must ever bear in mind that the fruit of the lips must always flow from fruit in the heart. "The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth," says Solomon, "and addeth learning to his lips." It is only when we speak out of a full heart that our words fall with any weight or power on the heart of others. It is good to feel as David felt when he said, "My heart is inditing," literally "bubbling up, a good matter." When there are these inward bubblings up of good matter, and the heart, like a gushing stream, pours forth its gracious feelings, it is a blessed fruit of the lips, and often ministers grace to the hearers.

iii. But besides fruit in the heart, and fruit in the lip, there is fruit in the life. A conversation in all points fully agreeable to the gospel of Christ; acts of liberality where we possess the means; undeviating integrity and honesty, in spite of all temptations; the

strictest, most unswerving fidelity to all engagements; faithfulness to one's word under all circumstances, though to adhere to it may be against our own interest; these are some of the fruits in the life. Laying aside also everything unbecoming the gospel and our profession of it in word and action; endeavouring to commend our religion even to the enemies of God and godliness; maintaining a sober, godly, circumspect deportment before the family, the church, and the world; obeying Christ's precepts, and walking in His footsteps; adorning the doctrine by a separate, devoted, self-denying life—these are some of the clusters of fruit which hang visibly before the eyes of men on the gospel bough.

And all these fruits are not to be a thin, scanty, wizened crop—two or three berries on the top of the uppermost bough, and they concealed from sight by the broad leaves of a luxuriant profession, but a crop so abundant as at once to show the fruitfulness of the tree; for it is the bearing of much fruit in the heart, in the lip, and the life, whereby God is glorified, and Christ's disciples manifested. The Lord's words on this point are very expressive and emphatic—"Herein is My Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples." Observe the stress which the Lord lays on the words "much" and "so." It is only those who bear much fruit that glorify God; and those only are fully manifest as the disciples of the Lord Jesus.

II. We are thus brought to our second point, which was the glory brought to God thereby. What a wonderful thought it is that God should be glorified by such a poor insignificant creature as man! That the great God, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, who fills all time and all space, and "dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto," should derive glory from the words and actions of a worm crawling upon earth. What an insight it gives us into the character of the Most High! How it seems for a few moments to lift the veil that hides the Majesty of heaven from our view, and to show us something of His unspeakable and infinite condescension. That He can take a kindly interest in what His people on earth think and say for the honour of His great name,

and bestow an approbation of the tribute of praise which they bring, is enough to overwhelm our minds with wonder and astonishment. That you—even you—weak and worthless, a poor insignificant worm, crushed before the moth, may by bearing much fruit, bring glory to God! How such a thought seems to surpass every conception of the heart. To glorify God is the highest ambition of angels. The brightest seraph before the throne has no higher aim, no greater happiness, than to bring glory to His name. And yet a poor sinner on earth may glorify God as much, and in some ways more, than the brightest angel in the courts of eternal bliss. What different views the eyes of God and the eyes of men take of events passing on the earth. Men have been almost everywhere rejoicing in what is called the "glorious victory of the Alma," though purchased by such a dreadful expenditure of life and suffering. As an Englishman I cannot but rejoice in the victory our gallant soldiers have gained, though as a Christian I must ever hate war, and mourn over such torrents of blood, and so many souls hurled at once into eternity. But the great God of heaven and earth, when He looks down on a field of battle, what glory does He see there?—what sees He but the violence and wickedness of man—greater cruelty and ferocity displayed by human beings towards each other than by wild beasts? What glory is brought to God by all the victories gained by one country over another? I have thought sometimes that a poor old man, or feeble, decrepit woman, lying on a workhouse pallet, fighting with sin, self, and Satan, yet enabled amidst all to look to the Lord Jesus, and by a word from His lips overcoming death and hell, though when dead thrust into an elm coffin to rot in a pauper's grave, brings more glory to God than all the exploits of Nelson or Wellington, and that such victories are more glorious than those of Waterloo or Trafalgar. It is true that the parish officers will not proclaim such a victory; nor will bells ring or cannons roar at such exploits; but the God of heaven and earth may get more glory from such a despised creature than from all the generals and admirals who have ever drawn up armies in battle or sunk hostile fleets beneath the wave. Truly does the Lord say—"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways."

It is indeed marvellous that glory should be brought to His great name by what His people do and suffer upon earth; that their feeble attempts to believe, to love, and to hope in Him; to speak well of His name; and to adorn His doctrine in their life and conversation, should redound to His honour and praise. Wondrous indeed is it that a poor insignificant worm, whom perhaps his fellow-mortal will scarcely deign to look at, or passes by with a shrug of contempt, should add glory to the great God that inhabiteth eternity, before whom the highest angels and brightest seraphs bow with holy adoration! Well may we say—What are all the glorious exploits that men are so proud of compared with the tribute of glory rendered to God by His suffering saints? You may feel yourself one of the poorest, vilest, neediest worms of earth; and yet if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with a living faith, hope in His mercy, love His dear name, and in your vocation adorn His doctrine by a godly, consistent life, you are privileged above princes and nobles, yes, even above crowned heads, and all the glory of man, because you are bringing glory to God. It matters not what may be your station in life. You may be a servant, master, wife, husband, child; your rank and station may be high or low; but whatever it be, still in it you may bring glory to God. If a servant, by obedience, cleanliness, industry, and attention to the directions of your master or mistress. If a master or mistress, by kindness and liberality to your dependents, and doing all that you can to render the yoke of servitude light. There is not a single Christian who may not glorify God, though in worldly circumstances he be, or seem to be, totally insignificant. Glory is brought to God by those who live and walk in His fear and more sometimes by the poor than by the rich. Only adorn the doctrine of God in all things, and you will bring glory to God in all things.

When the Lord Jesus Christ was upon earth He was in a suffering state; and to this suffering image must all His people be conformed. In that suffering state He brought glory to God; and is now exalted to the right hand of the Father. So those who suffer with Him will be also glorified together; and glorious indeed

will they be, for they will shine like the stars for ever and ever, resplendent in the glorified image of the Son of God. The apostle therefore says, "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." The Lord did not assume angelic nature. He therefore did not adorn or beautify it; but by assuming our nature, the flesh and blood of the children, into union with His own divine Person, He invested it with surpassing lustre. This is the foundation on which a redeemed sinner brings glory to God—not in himself, but as being a member of Christ, "of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." What a thought it is that the lowest believer should actually bring more glory to God than the highest angel; and that the suffering obedience of a saint should be of higher value than the burning obedience of a seraph. To bring glory to God, then, should be our highest aim and most ardent desire. How the Lord urges this upon the consciences of His true disciples in the words of the text, "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." A little fruit brings but little glory to God. It is in proportion to the amount of rich, ripe fruit that is borne upon the branches of the vine, that the Lord is glorified.

III. But we pass on to our third and last point, which was to show that the bearing of much fruit is the test of genuine discipleship. "So shall ye be My disciples."

We are not to suppose that the bearing of any or much fruit makes a person to be a disciple of Jesus; but it manifests him as such. It is therefore a mark, test, and evidence of true discipleship.

But what is it to be a disciple of Jesus? We read of the twelve disciples, though one of these was a traitor; but were they Christ's disciples only? The Lord clearly had others besides those whom He specially called such, and who were in more immediate and continual attendance upon Him; for He said on one occasion to others, "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 8:32). What, then, is the exact meaning of the word

disciple? It means, properly, a learner, one who is under a teacher, whose submissive and devoted pupil he has become, and from whom he receives continual instruction. A disciple of Christ, then, is one who is admitted by the Lord Jesus into His school, whom He Himself condescends personally to instruct, and who therefore learns of Him to be meek and lowly of heart. A disciple of Jesus is one who sits meekly at the Redeemer's feet, receiving into his heart the gracious words which fall from His lips. This was Mary's happy posture, whom the Lord commended for choosing the better part. Such is also the posture of all the saints of God, according to the ancient declaration, "Yea, He loved the people; all His saints are in Thy hand, and they sat down at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words" (Deut. 33:3).

But a true and sincere disciple not only listens to his master's instructions, but acts as he bids. So a disciple of Jesus is one who copies his Master's example, and is conformed to his Master's image. A sincere disciple is also characterised by the love which he bears to his Master; so a disciple of Jesus is one who treasures up the words of Christ in his heart, ponders over His precious promises, and delights in His glorious Person, love, and blood. A disciple of Jesus is one who bears some reflection of the image of his heavenly Master; he carries it about with him wherever he goes, that men may take knowledge of him he has been with Jesus; and as when Moses came down from the mount his face shone from the reflection of the heavenly glory which had streamed upon his countenance, so does the true disciple shine before men with some sparkles of the glory of the Son of God.

To have some of these divine features stamped upon the heart, lip, and life, is to be a disciple of Jesus. But this we cannot be without some union and communion with His gracious Majesty. Even literally and naturally we cannot associate with people without catching a certain resemblance to them, for good or evil. If we are much with a person, especially if he be of marked or peculiar habits, we are apt—almost without knowing it—to catch his manner or expressions. This kind of imitation seems almost

innate in us; and we see almost daily its effect in producing a similarity between persons otherwise different. It is in this way that children catch the ways, manners, and language of their parents; and thus friends and relations learn to understand and often imitate each other. It has been frequently remarked that wives and husbands, as they get old, often grow like one another—their very faces becoming assimilated. All these instances show how imitation and similarity are continually produced by close and intimate association. So it is, in a higher sense, in the things of God. To be much with Jesus is to be made like unto Jesus; to sit at Jesus' feet is to drink in Jesus' words; to lean upon Jesus' breast is to feel the warm heart of Jesus pulsating with love, and to feel this pulsation causes the heart of the disciple to heat in tender and affectionate unison; to look up to Jesus is to see a face more marred than the sons of men, yet a face beaming with heavenly beauty, dignity, and glory. To be a disciple, then, of Jesus is to copy His example; to do the things pleasing in His sight; and to avoid what He abhors. To be a disciple of Jesus, is to be meek as He was, humble as He was, lowly as He was, self-denying as He was, separate from the world as He was; living a life of communion with God, as He lived when He walked here below. To take a worm of earth and make him a disciple of Jesus is the greatest privilege God can bestow upon man. To select an obstinate, ungodly, perverse rebel, and place him in the school of Christ, and at the feet of Jesus, is the highest favour God can bestow upon any child of the dust. How unsurpassingly great must be that kindness whereby the Lord condescends to bestow His grace on an alien and on an enemy, and to soften and meeken him by His Spirit, and thus cause him to grow up into the image and likeness of His own dear Son. What are earthly honours and titles when compared with the favour thus conferred upon those whose foundation is in the dust? Compared with this high privilege, all earthly honours, stars and garters, titles and robes, sink into utter insignificance.

But look at the test of being such a disciple of Jesus as I have been attempting to describe! It is to bear much fruit. This alone proves we are in His school. Suppose a new schoolmaster were to

come into this town, an able teacher (for a clever man sometimes cannot teach), and were to open a school upon some new principle; and suppose that by his able teaching he were to draw a number of scholars together. Well, after some time had passed away, sufficient to prove the value of his system, we should expect some fruit to be found from his teaching. We should expect his pupils to manifest the great advances they had made in the various branches of art and science taught in this new and excellent school. But if we saw no fruit from his teaching, and the children who went to the school were rude, rough, and ignorant, making no progress, and showing no proficiency, we should at once condemn the master; and say that his profession of being such an eminent teacher was an impudent and worthless boast; or that those who said they went to his school were not his real scholars, and paid no heed to his instructions. May we not take this comparison into the things of God? How is it to be known that you have been admitted into the school of Christ? How are men to know you are a disciple of Jesus? Is it by great swelling words, telling them under what a blessed Instructor you have enrolled yourself? Or is it by letting people see, by your life and conversation, what advances you are really making in vital godliness? The honour of the teacher is reflected in the excellence of the pupil; and by the progress of the disciples we appreciate the excellence of the master. So, when we see those who profess to belong to the Lord Jesus acting contrary to His will and Word; when we view them proud, wrathful, covetous, selfish, unfeeling, unkind, disobedient, worldly minded, occupied wholly with business, and devoting little or no time to the things of God, we must fear they are either deceiving themselves, or trying to deceive us. Must we not say, "Why, these persons may profess to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ; but it does not appear as if they had got any profit from what they call His teaching?" On the other hand, if we see them meek, holy, humble, gentle, affectionate, and can clearly perceive that the Lord is at work in their soul, conforming them to His divine image, training them up to be heirs of His heavenly kingdom; and not only thus teaching them inwardly, but also bringing forth in their lips and lives the fruits of righteousness—then we feel that such indeed are

disciples of Jesus Christ.

Thus the bearing of much fruit not only brings glory to God, but proves such rich fruit bearers to be genuine disciples of the Lord Jesus. Now, though there is no merit in their bearing fruit, they sometimes get comfort from it, as proving an abiding union with Christ. "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." There is no maintaining of holy confidence in the soul but by walking in godly obedience; nor can there be any true spiritual communion with God whilst the guilt of disobedience lies hard and heavy on the conscience. To make straight paths for our feet; to walk in the fear of God; to live to His glory—are not only sweet tests of genuine discipleship, but faith, hope, and love cannot be maintained without them. Yet, my friends, if we know anything of what gospel fruit is, and what we are as poor, vile sinners, must we not too often put our mouth in the dust? Instead of rejoicing in our fruitfulness, must we not often rather lament our barrenness, and cry out, "My leanness, my leanness! Woe unto me!"? Still, if we see and feel a deficiency in these points in ourselves and others, and comparing our hearts, lips, and lives with the Word of truth, must plead guilty, shall this utterly discourage us? Are we necessarily brought to this point to say, "Well, if this bearing of much fruit be a necessary test of discipleship, I have no part or lot in the matter. I had better give up all my profession, and abandon myself to utter despair?"

No. This very discouragement may prove of service to us. It is good, at times, to be discouraged; because it makes us learn that "without Christ we can do nothing," and that it is only by His grace that we can produce fruit to His glory. It is, therefore, good to see and feel our barrenness and unfruitfulness; for it is this very sight and sense of our own want of fruit that leads us in earnest desires to the Lord Jesus Christ to work in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure. All who know anything of what gospel fruit is must come to this conclusion, "From Me is thy fruit found." What they do, they do by grace; grace being the source not only of every desire, but also of every good word and work.

And I may add this remark, by way of conclusion, that, as in autumn the tree which is laden with the weightiest crop of fruit bends its branches most to the ground, so the Christian who bears most fruit is ever the lowest in his own eyes. Nor is it those branches which rear their heads highest in the sky which bear the best or heaviest crop. The nearer the ground, generally speaking, the more fruitful the branch. The crowning fruit of a true disciple is humility. And the more sensible that he becomes of what the grace of God is and does, the more will this rich and ripe fruit be brought forth in his heart, lip, and life.

The Gospel the Power of God unto Salvation

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Dec. 9, 1860

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Romans 1:16

There is scarcely any one, perhaps, in this congregation arrived at mature age who has not witnessed great external changes and improvements since he was old enough to notice passing events; and those of us who have climbed the topmost hill of middle life, and are now declining into the vale of years, have seen since the days of our boyhood and youth advances in art and science and a general growth and material progress which would make our forefathers, could they rise from their graves, stare with astonishment, and scarcely able to believe it was the same England in which they had lived and died. We have planted colonies at the ends of the earth, we may say under our very feet, which instead of being as in their day, mere hulks for convicts, are now flourishing and populous communities, sending us gold weighed by tons and counted by millions. We are borne from town to town with all the speed and more than the endurance of the racehorse. The electric telegraph conveys messages with the velocity of lightning across continents and under the very waves of the stormy sea; so that an Emperor cannot die at St. Petersburg or a King be driven from his throne at Naples but it is known all over Europe in a few hours. Trade and commerce have been tripled, and population doubled since some of us lay in our mother's lap, and the wealth and power of our native country are proportionally increased. Nor does there seem to be any standing still in this race; for look where we will, almost everything seems to betoken progress, advance, improvement.

But amidst all these wondrous changes and amidst all this improvement, can we believe or hope that religion, that is, spiritual religion, has made any advance? Has that shared in the

universal march of intellect? Have railways and telegraphs and gold ships, all the progress of art and all the discoveries of science, advanced one jot the kingdom of God as a living reality in the land generally, or as a more powerful display of his grace and glory in the heart of individual believers? We are compelled to say "No;" for, looking around us with enlightened eyes, we must say that there are two things which in these days of "March, forward," have made neither improvement nor progress: one is the *Gospel*, that is, the revelation of truth in the word, and the other is the *effect* of the gospel—the kingdom of God set up in the heart by the Holy Ghost. It is true that there is a greater profession of religion; Bibles are sown almost broadcast over the land, and many speak well of Jesus Christ and of salvation by his name. But a flood is not a river. If a stranger were to stand this morning upon Stamford Bridge* and look around him, he might think what a noble river flows by our town. But we who live here know that in a few days this wide sea of waters will shrink into its usual insignificant channel. So a stranger to God and godliness, in its life, experience, and power, looking merely at the wide flood of profession in this country, may think what a noble stream of religion flows down the vales of our native land. But one that knows divine things by divine teaching sees with keen, discerning eye that a shallow winter flood is not a deep, abiding stream; and that muddy waters, however widely spread over low meadows, may breed fever and ague, but are not that pure river of water of life which issues from the throne of God and the Lamb. In fact, so far from improving, man cannot touch God's work without marring it. Could any skill or power of man improve the sun?—though we should be very glad just now to see a little more of his bright and warm beams. Could they improve the rain?—though we should be pleased if, after so deluging a year, it would now suspend its continued fall. Could they improve light?—though we should gladly hail a little more of it on this dark December day. So no advance in science, no progress in wealth or civilisation, can improve the gospel. And if they cannot effect any improvement in the gospel itself, they certainly cannot produce any in that kingdom of God set up by divine grace in the heart, which, as intimated in our text, is the effect of the gospel as

made the power of God unto salvation.

* There was a very great flood at this time.

The apostle assures his brethren that he was "ready to preach the gospel to those who were at Rome also," for though he had not yet seen them in the flesh, yet he loved them in the bowels of Christ, and his heart being full of the spirit and power of the gospel, to preach it far and wide that many might be saved thereby was his dearest employment. He tells them, therefore, in the text that he was not ashamed of this gospel; and gives a very valid and blessed reason why he felt no shame or disgrace in proclaiming it; "For," says he, "it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Approach these words then with me, and let us see whether we cannot find in them four leading points which may, with God's blessing, profitably occupy our thoughts this morning.

I.—*First, what is the gospel of Christ?*

II.—*Secondly, how it is the power of God unto salvation.*

III.—*Thirdly, the persons to whom it is made this power: "every one that believeth."*

IV.—*Lastly, that this being the case, we should not and must not be ashamed of it.*

I.—But first what is the meaning of the word "*gospel*?" It is a good old English term, and means literally "good news," "glad tidings." But what are these good news, these glad tidings, and what is it that makes them such? They are so as being a message of pure mercy from heaven; a revelation of the free, sovereign, distinguishing grace of God to lost, ruined man. The gospel is here called "the gospel of Christ," for as he is the grand Subject, so he is the grand Object of the gospel of the grace of God. In him, that is, in his glorious Person, it all centres, and out of the fulness of his eternal love it all flows. Thus we may say that every

line of the gospel comes *from* the Person of Christ as its eternal centre; and from every part of its wide circumference does every line also run *back* to him. It is therefore called emphatically "the gospel of Christ," as being a revelation of his love and grace, his Person and work, his blood and righteousness, his risen power, his ascending glory, his prevailing intercession, his sovereign dominion, and his mediatorial reign in heaven and in earth. But it is called the "gospel" chiefly as proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation to the children of men without money and without price.

i. But though it is chiefly the gospel as the revelation and proclamation of this salvation in time, yet its plan was laid in the mind of God from all eternity. We read, therefore, of "the counsel of the Lord standing for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations." (Psal. 33:11.) The counsel of God's heart was the gospel of peace, for we read that "the counsel of peace shall be between them both" (Zech. 6:13); that is, the Father and the Son. This counsel of peace was ratified by an everlasting covenant, according to the words, "My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him." And, to show its stability, he adds, "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David;" that is, the spiritual and mystical David, God's own beloved Son, of whom the son of Jesse was but a type and figure. (Psal. 89:28, 34, 35.) In this everlasting covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ undertook to suffer and die in our nature for the sins of his people. He is, therefore, called "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," and as such to have "a book of life," in which the names of the elect are written. (Rev. 13:8.) He thus represents himself as addressing his sheep on his right hand at the last day, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matt. 25:34.) This may seem to some hard doctrine, and so indeed it is to the natural mind of man; but the very nature of an infinite, eternal, unchangeable God, apart from all other considerations, compels us to believe that it cannot be otherwise. For would it not make him a changeable Being if there could be any new thoughts in his mind, or if any fresh purposes

could spring up in his heart? We must view the gospel, then, as a revelation of that eternal grace, mercy, love, and compassion which always were in the bosom of God; and that it is a making known unto us in time of "the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself," and "wherein he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence." (Eph. 1:8, 9.)

No sooner, therefore, did sin enter into the world, and death by sin, by the fall of our first parents in Paradise, than the gospel began to rise as a light from heaven in the thick darkness that then fell upon the heart of man. It has ever since shone upon this poor dark, benighted world—sometimes as a feeble star, glimmering through clouds, as under the Old Testament dispensation; sometimes as a bright and glorious sun, as when the Sun of Righteousness arose with healing on his wings; when the Son of God came from the bosom of his Father, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. But whether as a star or as a sun, it has always been a light that has shone upon this dark world, and in fact has ever been the only light that has guided man into the ways of truth and peace. Look with me, then, at the various times and ways in which this light has enlightened benighted man with the light of the living. It arose first in Paradise, in the first promise given by the Lord that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. Next it shone in Abel, when he "brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof; and the Lord had respect unto him and to his offering." (Gen. 4:4.) For was not this offering and the respect which God had to it and to the offerer a type of the sacrifice of Christ and the acceptance of his people in him? Then it shone in Enoch, who "walked with God and was not because God took him;" but how could he walk with God except as accepted in the Beloved, and being thus reconciled unto God was enabled to walk with him and before him in the gospel of peace? Next it shone in Noah, and especially in the ark wherein he and his family were preserved from the waters of the deluge—for the ark was a type of Christ; and as those in the ark rode safely over the waves of that flood which destroyed the world, so those who are in Christ,

the ark of the covenant, will ride safely over the billows of God's wrath, which, not with water but with fire, will consume the present earth. Again it shone in Abraham, in the promise given to him that in him and his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed. It shone also in Isaac and Jacob; lighted up the soul of Joseph in the prison-house and in the court of Pharaoh; and though afterwards obscured for 400 years, it burst forth with renewed splendour in the call of the children of Israel out of Egypt. It was typified by the Paschal Lamb; by the passage of the Red Sea; by the cloudy pillar in the wilderness; by the manna that fell from heaven; by the Rock that followed them through their journeys, which we are expressly told was Christ. (1 Cor. 10:4.) So also in all the Levitical sacrifices; in every ancient type and figure: in all the ordinances of the old covenant did this gospel continue to shine. It shone, too, in all the promises that stud the Scripture from Genesis to the close of the Old Testament canon. It shone in all the prophets, from Enoch down to Malachi; and in all the saints and righteous men, the Old Testament worthies, all of whom "died in faith, not having received the promises," that is, in their fulfilment in the Person and work of Christ, but "having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Some speak as if there were no gospel preached or known until Christ came into the world; but how clear are the words of the apostle to the contrary! "Unto us was the gospel preached as well as unto them." (Heb. 4:2.) It is true that it was a dim light compared with the glorious gospel preached by the apostles, but it was nevertheless a true light. But when the Son of God came into this world, then indeed in a more especial manner "the day-spring from on high visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:78, 79.) Then the very angels were sent from heaven to proclaim "good tidings of great joy which should be to all people." And what were these good tidings but that "there was born in the city of David a Saviour, which was Christ the Lord?" (Luke 2:11.) It is, then, in the Person and work of Jesus that the gospel specially shines. When, therefore, he came into this world a babe in Bethlehem's

manger, and for more than thirty years lived in it as a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" when he hung upon the cross in dolorous agony of body and soul; when he thus put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and by one offering "perfected for ever them which are sanctified;" when he cried out with expiring voice, "It is finished," he gave the sealing testimony to the gospel of the grace of God. And this he more fully ratified by his resurrection from the dead; by his commission to the disciples to go into all the world and preach it to every creature; by his ascension to heaven; by his glorification at the right hand of the Father; by the sending down of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost; and by the mighty power which attended the preached word, when the apostles, under that divine influence, "gave witness of his resurrection," and "being filled with the Holy Ghost spake the word of God with boldness." However obscured at different times, the same gospel, and therefore called "the everlasting gospel," has shone ever since, and will shine unto the end of all time. It is true, indeed, that the Lord puts this treasure into earthen vessels when he gives his servants power to preach it with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; but so far as they proclaim it in its purity and power, it is the same message of glad tidings; and when attended with a blessing from above, every one that receives it into a believing heart is a witness that the gospel is still preached by the servants of the Lord, and that God still makes it his power unto salvation.

ii. But if the gospel mean "good news," "glad tidings," and if that be its distinguishing characteristic, we may next enquire to *whom* is it glad tidings? To *whom* does it bear in its bosom good news?

1. Is it so to the man *dead in sin*? How can it be? He has no ears to hear its joyful sound; no eyes to see the beauty and blessedness of Jesus whose love and blood it proclaims; no heart to feel its power. Being dead in sin, he is utterly insensible to its melodious voice. Besides which, he loves his sins, is infatuated with his lusts, hugs and caresses his bosom idols; and as the gospel proclaims war unto death against these abominations, he naturally views it as a sworn enemy to all his delights. Its very

sound is, therefore, hateful to his ears; for the gospel calls men to repentance of their sins, to the forsaking of their idols, to the giving up of their lusts, and to a life of holiness and godly fear. It is clearly impossible that the gospel can be glad tidings to a man in love with sin, drunk with his lusts, and madly determined sooner to perish than to part with his beloved idols. It is therefore, it ever must be, a gloomy sound to him, and he hates to hear its very name, for it speaks of a deliverance from the love and power of the very sins in which his whole heart and being are wrapped up.

2. But is it a pleasing sound—does it bring good tidings to the *Pharisee*, to the proud, unhumiliated professor, who is enamoured of his own good deeds, his long and unwearied attention to every religious and moral duty, and who as such is seeking to establish his own righteousness, and climb to heaven by a ladder of his own construction? How can free grace, salvation by atoning blood, justification by the imputed righteousness of the suffering Son of God, be good news to one who has never seen or felt his lost, ruined condition, or ever smitten his breast with a cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner"?

3. Is it glad tidings to the *man of business*, occupied from morning to night with anxious cares how he shall best advance his schemes and speculations, and to whom money is the one great object of life? Has he any heart for the riches of God's grace, or for the spiritual blessings which are treasured up in the Lord of life and glory? Six per cent is more to him than any gospel promise; and to live and die rich a greater treasure than to live and die in the Lord.

4. Is it glad tidings to those whom the apostle describes as "*lovers of pleasure* more than lovers of God?" How can it be glad tidings to such bright, gay butterflies, who sun their short hour in the amusements, dress, and follies of this vain world, and hate the very name of religion as a sound full of melancholy and gloom? And why so, but because it would call them away from these vain pleasures, and sounds in their ears that the end of

these things is death?

iii. We see, then, that to all such the gospel is not good news. But does it belie its name? Has God himself named it wrong? We durst not so think. To *some*, then, it must be good news, glad tidings. And who these are we will now enquire.

1. First, then, it is good news to the *self-condemned* and *self-aborred*; to those who by the law and by the verdict of their own conscience are brought in guilty before a holy God. These are "the sinners" of whom the Lord speaks that he came to call them to repentance (Matt. 9:13); these are "the lost" whom the "Son of Man came to seek and save;" these are "the ungodly," that is, feelingly so, whom God freely justifieth (Rom. 4:5); and these, too, are those "without strength" to help or save themselves, for whom Christ died. (Rom. 5:6.) These are "the mourners in Zion," whom he came to comfort; "the broken-hearted," whom he came "to bind up;" "the captives," to whom he was anointed "to proclaim liberty;" and "the meek," to whom he preaches "good tidings." (Isa. 61:1, 3.) To tell such that in Christ there is a full salvation from all their sins, a blessed pardon through his atoning blood, a complete deliverance from death and hell through his finished work, and all this without money and without price,— what good news to them is this! What glad tidings does the gospel bear in its bosom to such hopeless, helpless wretches as these!

2. Again, to those who are *stripped of all their strength*, wisdom, goodness, and righteousness, who lie before God in the dust of self-abasement, having nothing and being nothing but a mass of sin and wretchedness:—to these the gospel is good news, for it tells them that there is a righteousness which can perfectly justify them "from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses;" that there is a fountain opened in a Saviour's blood for all sin and for all uncleanness; that the work of Christ is a finished work; that those who believe in his name are "complete in him," "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing;" that no goodness on our part is required, but that salvation is all

of grace for the repenting sinner. Is not this to such the best of all tidings, the happiest of all news?

3. Again, it is good news to the *afflicted*; by which, I mean not so much those who are loaded with worldly sorrow, which often works death, but those who are afflicted by sin, by Satan, by spiritual trials and temptations; and besides these sorrows in grace, are often also afflicted in body or in mind, in family or in circumstances, so as to have been stripped of all worldly comfort, and to find nothing but death within and death without. To these the gospel is glad tidings, good news; for it declares that as the afflictions abound so also do the consolations, and leads up their heart to the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who is able to comfort them in all their tribulations, and give them a deliverance out of all their troubles.

4. Again, to those who truly *fear God*, who have spiritual life in their bosom, whose conscience has been made tender, whose hearts are broken, whose spirits are contrite, and who are humbled in the dust to receive salvation as a free gift; who have worked and worked until they are worn out of working, as finding themselves getting every day worse and worse instead of growing better and better; to such as these the gospel of the grace of God is good news, glad tidings, for it tells them that "their warfare is accomplished, that their iniquity is pardoned" (Isa. 40:2); and that God has "cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:19.)

II.—But let us look a little further into this subject, and view the matter in connection with the experience of a soul taught and blessed of God; which leads me to my *second* point, which was to show how the Gospel of Christ is "*the power of God unto salvation*;" for it is this peculiar blessing belonging to it, which makes the gospel to be so precious.

i. The Gospel in its power is not a mere proclamation of mercy; not a mere declaration of good news; but it brings the mercy which it proclaims, and communicates the salvation that it

reveals; for you will observe that these two things are perfectly distinct—a wide gulf of difference between them. Say, for instance, that the Queen sent forth to morrow a proclamation of a general gaol delivery, and that in consequence there was a royal pardon for all the criminals now shut up in the various prisons of the land. That would be very good news to them if they heard through the bars of their prison windows the herald with his trumpet proclaiming that such was the Queen's good pleasure. But what if they were imprisoned still, and that for weeks or months after they had heard the sound of the trumpet? What if they were yet under bolts and bars, and neither warder nor keeper ever came to open the prison doors and take them into the light of day? What would the mere proclamation be for them if they were still in gaol? An aggravation only of their misery. So the gospel is good news, glad tidings; but if the gospel do not reach the heart; if it do not speak peace to the conscience; do not reveal pardon and peace to the soul as a manifested blessing; do not set the prisoner free, or bring the captive out of the low dungeon; however blessed the declaration may be in itself, it falls utterly short if it leave the prisoner still in the prison house. We see then that something more is needed than a mere proclamation of mercy; and that the same God of all grace, who has sent forth the glad tidings of pardon and peace in the gospel, must himself apply it with a divine power to the soul; for I am sure that without this, it falls utterly short of a deliverance from the curse of the law, the accusations of Satan, and the condemnation of a guilty conscience. Now God will not let the gospel thus fall short to any vessel of mercy: he will make it more than a mere message of good news; it shall be in his hands something better than a mere proclamation of mercy. It shall *do* as well as *speak*; it shall act as well as preach; it shall liberate the prisoner as well as tell him that there is liberty for him. This is what the apostle means when he says that it is "the *power* of God;" for God puts forth a certain power in the preached gospel, which he does not exert in any other way, or through any other instrumentality. It is true that the law has power to condemn, but the law has not power to save; the law has power to kill, but not to make alive; has power to put into prison, but not to break

open the prison doors; power to curse, but not to bless; power to send to hell, but not to take up the soul to heaven. But the gospel can do what the law cannot do; for "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh," God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh could and did do, which was "to condemn sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit." (Rom. 8:3, 4.) When, then, God the Holy Ghost is pleased to apply the gospel to the sinner's heart, and to make it known as a personal message from God, in which he himself speaks with his own pardoning voice to the guilty conscience, then there is something more than a mere message; something far beyond a mere proclamation; for it does that for him in a moment, which nothing else could do, viz., it assures him of his personal interest in the blood and obedience of the Son of God, and thus brings salvation in all its fulness and blessedness into his heart. It is this feeling experience of "the power of God" as an inward, divine reality, which distinguishes the "blessed people," "who know the joyful sound" from those who merely hear it in the letter, and to whom it comes merely in word; for "the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." It is this power also, which distinguishes the preaching of the sent servants of God from the ministry of those who know nothing, and preach nothing beyond the mere letter of truth. The apostle, therefore, declares that his preaching was "in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power;" and assigns the reason why he was so desirous thus to preach the gospel, that the faith of his hearers "should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (1 Cor. 2:4, 5.) He thus tells the Thessalonians, that he knew their election of God, and the reason was, because his gospel "came not unto them in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." (1 Thess. 1:5.) Do look at this point, for it is one of the deepest importance. Never think that you have heard the gospel to profit unless you have felt that gospel to be, in some measure, the power of God to your soul. Never think that you have heard the joyful sound as a message of mercy from God, unless it has been made a joyful sound to you by communicating some joy to your troubled heart, and speaking peace and consolation to your guilty

conscience. This is the very glory of the gospel, its distinguishing feature and its highest blessing; that it is the very power of God himself.

ii. But if it then be "the power of God," it will display that power in a variety of instances. Let us look at some of them:

1. First, then, it *raises the dead*, for "the Son of God," we read, "quickeneth whom he will." (John 5:21.) And again, "The hour is coming, and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live." (John 5:25.) This voice of the Son of God is heard in the gospel, for it is "the gospel of Christ." But who are the dead here? Are they the dead in sin, or the dead in feeling? In the latter surely. Let us look at this point a little more closely. Here, then, is a poor soul dead under the law, in the same sense as Paul was when he said of himself, "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." (Rom. 7:9.) And why was this, but because "the commandment which was ordained to life, he found to be unto death?" (Rom. 7:10.) In this sense is the condemned sinner "counted with them that go down into the pit, even as a man that hath no strength" (Psa. 88:4); for he is without power even to lift up a hand or utter a sigh or cry for mercy, in his feelings doomed to die, and in some cases on the very borders of despair. Now what can give help or hope to one in this state? What can lift him up out of his miserable condition? Nothing, nothing but the gospel as the power of God; for when that reaches his heart as the very voice of the Lord speaking with power to his soul, it at once lifts him up out of condemnation and death into the light and life of God's countenance. And every such poor, self-condemned wretch, who has ever felt the power of the gospel to give him light and life, liberty and love, knows that it is the power of God; for nothing short of that divine power could reach his heart and save him experimentally from death and hell.

2. It is the power of God also in *opening the ears*; as we read, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped;" for that this is by the power of the

gospel is plain from the words that immediately precede, "Behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you." (Isa. 35:4, 5.) And how does God come and save but in the gospel, and by making it his own power unto salvation? If you look back at your experience you will see that one of the first effects of the power of the gospel upon your heart was, to open your ears to receive it as a message from God. When, for instance, you were first brought under its sound, and began to understand and feel what you heard, was there not given you, as it were, new ears to hear it and a new heart to receive it? Were those not with you memorable days when you first heard the joyful sound of salvation by free grace; when it first dropped that blessed news into your soul which made your very heart thrill with unspeakable joy? God was then circumcising your ear, unstopping it, and conveying the gospel into your heart through it. "For faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Rom. 10"17.) "As soon as they hear of me," says, the Lord in prophecy, "they shall obey me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me." (Psa. 18:44.) That gospel which was death to others was life to you; and that message at which others perhaps gnashed their teeth, came into your heart with an indescribable sweetness as the very voice of God to your soul.

3. The next thing that the gospel does is to *open the eyes*; for "the eyes of the blind are opened" as well as "the ears of the deaf unstopped." See how the Lord works in bringing about these miracles of mercy through the power of the gospel. First, life flows through it into the soul to lift it up out of condemnation and death; then the ears are opened to receive in faith the message of mercy; then as the ears are opened, and a way is made through them into the heart, there is a dropping from the eyes of the scales of darkness and unbelief. Now as you look up and see the glorious Person of the Son of God in the vision of faith, then you see the beauty of the gospel; of salvation by free grace; of manifested mercy; of the atoning blood of Jesus; of his divine righteousness as covering your needy, naked soul; and especially of the glorious Person of Immanuel, God with us, as the very sum

and substance of the gospel itself. It is in this way that you see a beauty and blessedness in these divine realities, so as at times to rejoice in them, as thus seen and felt, with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

4. The same power put forth in the gospel also *opens the heart*. It was in this way that the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, so as to receive into it the love of the truth that she might be saved thereby. Until this melting power is felt within, the heart is closed and barred by unbelief, infidelity, doubt and fear, guilt, sin, and shame, so that the gospel cannot find its way in, nor obtain an entrance so as to be entertained in its inmost depths by faith and love. His promise is, "I will break into pieces the gates of brass and cut in sunder the bars of iron;" which he accomplishes when he brings the gospel with power into the heart. Then all obstructions give way; then "the stony heart is taken out of the flesh and a heart of flesh" is given, which is the "new heart" God has promised to give his people, and the "new spirit" which he puts within them. (Ezek. 36:26.) This is God's rending the heavens, and coming down so that the mountains of unbelief flow down at his presence.

5. But when the heart is thus opened to receive the love of the truth, then *the mouth is also opened* to bless and praise God for his mercy. How we find this was the case with the saints of old! Look, for instance, at Hannah. There was a time with her when she could only mourn and weep; she was so troubled that she could not even eat, but could do nothing but lament and sigh, as fearing that the hand of the Lord was gone out against her in smiting her with the curse of barrenness. But when the Lord was pleased to reveal a sense of his mercy to her soul by manifestly hearing and answering her cry, then her heart and mouth were both enlarged, and she could sing a song of holy triumph to him and before him. "My mouth," she sang, "is enlarged over my enemies, because I rejoice in thy salvation." (1 Sam. 2:1.) Was not this salvation the gospel as the power of God unto the salvation of her soul? So David speaks of being brought up out of a horrible pit, his feet set upon a rock, and "a new song" put into

his mouth. (Psa. 40:2, 3.) And is not the Church bidden in Isaiah to sing "a new song?" (Isa. 43:10.) Why new? Because until then she had never been able to sing it.

6. But the power of God is also made manifest in *guiding the feet* into the ways of peace. Is not this the effect ascribed to "the dayspring from on high" (and what is that but the gospel?) in the words, "To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace?" (Luke 1:78, 79.) Thus David speaks of God's making "his feet like hinds' feet," that is, to leap with joy like "a hind let loose" (Psa. 18:33; Gen. 49:21), and thus set him upon his high places, the mountains of salvation.

7. But the same power also *opens the hand* to receive the blessings that God has to bestow; for as without the hand being stretched out and opened to receive, no gift is effectually made our own, so we may view the opened hand as the acting of that living faith whereby Christ with all his saving benefits is received and entertained in the heart. We, therefore, read of "strengthening the weak hands" (Isa. 35:3); for until they are strengthened by the power of God they cannot hold the mighty weight of a full and free salvation.

iii. But this leads us to see what the gospel specially is in its full and eternal blessedness; for not only is it "the power of God," but it is so "unto salvation." It does not end with time as it did not begin with time, but as it originated in an eternity past, so it stretches into an eternity to come. And here indeed is the main blessedness of the gospel, that it does not leave us at the grave's mouth, but is with us in death and takes us to heaven after death; for it is "unto salvation," and if unto salvation it can be nothing less than a full and complete deliverance from death and hell. Now everything but the gospel falls short of this, and therefore falls short of giving eternal life. A good life, a consistent walk, acts of kindness and benevolence, a rigid attention to all the claims of duty and morality; nay more, a long profession of religion without a vital experience of its power, all fall short of

salvation, all leave the soul exposed to the wrath of him who is a consuming fire. But if these be insufficient to save the soul, look at the various schemes of earthly happiness; count them one by one: examine the long catalogue of all that this world can give; and then see where and what they all are when death comes to close the scene. Are they not all in a moment cut off? As when one cuts off the bough of a tree on a summer's day, at once it falls to the ground, and with all its leaves, fruits, and flowers withers and dies; so how often death comes to cut down youth, health, and beauty in their prime; and then where are all their schemes of earthly happiness? How terrible to such it is to die! But the gospel of Christ is not only the power of God in life; it is the power of God in death, for it is "unto salvation" in death and after death. This is, then, its supreme and unspeakable blessedness, that every one who has received the gospel into a believing heart is everlastingly saved thereby, and will surely be in heaven with all the saints who are now before the throne. Nothing, then, can give real and solid peace to the conscience but this; for everything short of salvation leaves us under the wrath of God, the curse of a broken law, and the condemnation of a guilty conscience. We want something that can save our souls; and what is any religion worth, call it what you will, that cannot do this? But, O, how many are deceived here! And what an end is theirs! To go on for years, perhaps, in a profession of religion, associating with God's people, sitting under the sound of truth, singing the most spiritual hymns, and constantly assembling themselves in the house of prayer, even perhaps to partake of the ordinances of the church, and to be considered by themselves and others children of God; and then after all this profession, it may be of a long life, to sink and die under the wrath of God, and be cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, as having no interest in the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ—O what an end is this! And yet, it is to be feared, the end of many who for a time flourished like a green bay tree in the courts of the Lord. But to have received the gospel into a believing heart as the power of God made there effectually known, so as to be saved thereby with an everlasting salvation,— what a contrast is this, and how worthy of the eternal praise of an

immortal tongue!

III.—But we now come to the distinguishing *character* of the persons to whom the gospel is made "the power of God" unto a salvation so full and so free. It is made such "*to every one that believeth;*" not to every one that worketh; nor to every one that willeth; nor to every one that runneth; nor to every one that professeth; for "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong;" and "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." (Rom. 9:16.) How precious must be that gift and grace of faith, which gives the soul a manifested interest in so great and glorious a salvation! But in proportion to the value of this faith we must be careful, in examining its nature, to distinguish between the true and the false; for there is more than one sort of faith. There is a faith that is of nature, which endures for a time, but does not save the soul; and there is a faith which is God's own gift and work, which is raised up by his own power, which does save, for we read, "receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your soul." (1 Peter 1:9.) There is a faith which may remove mountains, which may enable its possessor to bestow all his goods to feed the poor, and to give his body to be burned, and yet profit him nothing. (1 Cor. 13:2, 3.) Esau, Balaam, Saul, Ahithophel, and Judas all had faith. But what faith was it? Not one raised up by the power of God; and therefore it neither saved nor sanctified their soul. The only true faith is that which accompanies salvation, and through which, as being wrought in the heart by the power of God, salvation is made known as a most blessed inward reality.

i. But if saving faith is a blessing so great, may we not inquire *how* a man is made to believe? I have already shown that it is God's gift, God's work, and therefore given in a certain way, and done at a certain time. When, then, does God give it; when does God work it? When he makes the gospel to be the power of God, as a felt inward reality. Examine this point in the light of your own experience, for it is one of very great importance. Have you not often tried to believe the gospel, but could not? Have you not

often endeavoured to work yourself into a faith that you were one of God's people; but were scarce able to raise up even a good hope through grace? Have you not tried, when you have read a promise or heard of Jesus Christ, to summon, if you possibly could, faith to your aid, that you might look unto him and receive him into your heart as your own most blessed Saviour? But you felt your inability to call him yours. And have you not sometimes, as you sat under the preached word, and heard Christ held up as the only Saviour of the soul, the work of grace traced out, the experience of God's saints described, atoning blood proclaimed, and his justifying righteousness set forth—have you not assented to all those gospel truths as they sounded in your ears and were brought before your eyes, but you could not with all your power raise up in your bosom a living faith so as to appropriate any one of them, so as to be sure of your personal interest in it, and thus to make it your own? And this brought condemnation into your conscience, so that the very gospel itself seemed to increase your trouble. Now what did you learn by these lessons, painful though they were? This grand truth, that faith is the gift and work of God. But there may have been another time when your eyes seemed as if suddenly opened, your ears unstopped, your heart softened, your spirit broken, your mind humbled, and a certain indescribable power commended God's truth to your heart, so that you could not only believe it, but could believe also your interest in it. You could not, perhaps, describe what the feeling was, and yet were sensible of it; for it came in a still small voice which broke your heart, softened your spirit, and melted down your unbelief like a wreath of snow before the sun. Now here the gospel was made "the power of God" to you, for you heard the voice of God speaking in it; and as this power was felt in your soul, it raised up faith, and a faith which stood not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. We do not believe the gospel first, and then find in it the power of God; but the gospel is first found and felt to be the power of God; and as this power sweeps away unbelief, infidelity, doubt, fear, and a guilty conscience, faith is raised up, as its fruit and effect, to believe the gospel, and receive it as bringing to us the good news and glad tidings of our salvation. You must not, as many do, invert the way of God's

dealings with the soul in this important matter; believe first, and get the gospel after. "Take God," they say, "at his word." But this taking God at his word never brought pardon and peace into a guilty conscience. No: get the gospel into your heart first, as a message from God in its experimental power; and then you will find that the same power which makes the gospel sweet will raise up a living faith in your breast which will work by love, purify the heart, make Christ precious, cast out fear which hath torment, give union with Jesus, and lift the affections from earth to heaven. It is in this way that the kingdom of God is set up in the heart, which is not in word but in power; even that blessed kingdom which is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." It is in this way that the gospel of Christ becomes "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." If you have never thus been favoured and blessed, have you not, at least, been made to feel your deep need of this power of God that your soul may be saved thereby? You may have been exercised, it may be for many years, with a sight and sense of your sins, fearing there was no hope; or may have felt yourself a poor, guilty backslider, dreading that your backslidings never could or would be healed; or been tempted by Satan to suicide, infidelity, despair, or to give up even a profession of religion; and under these painful feelings you have sighed and cried, groaned and prayed, and yet got no relief. Like the poor woman with the issue of blood, you have tried many physicians, and instead of getting better have only got worse; so that, like her, you have almost despaired of a cure. Now you are the very character for the gospel; you are the very person to whom it is good news; for its end and object is to save such poor self-condemned sinners as you. But you cannot believe it for yourself; you can believe it for others; but for you it seems almost too good news to be true. Such a polluted wretch as you are, you think never can be the object of God's love; and Christ is surely too holy ever to cast a glance of his favour upon you. This is true humility; this is real self-abasement, a sincere putting your mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope; a hiding your face, as Elijah hid his in his mantle when he heard the still small voice. You may not see it to be so in your own case; but this is to be "the poor whom the Lord

raiseth up out of the dust, and the beggar whom he lifteth up from the dunghill to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory." (1 Sam. 2:8.) But when the Lord shall be pleased to appear on your behalf and to send his gospel with power into your soul, your present fears and desponding feelings, though they now seem against you as so many impassable mountains, will all become as chaff before the wind.

ii. But I would not be misunderstood. In speaking of faith, I have spoken chiefly of that degree of it which is raised up in a special manner and at special seasons by the mighty power of God applying the gospel to the heart. But I would by no means say that there is no other faith but this. The word of truth plainly speaks of different degrees of faith, such as "little faith;" O, thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt; and "weak faith," as "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye" (Rom. 14:1); and "faith as a grain of mustard seed" (Matt. 17:20), "which is the smallest of all seeds." Then again there is "strong faith," as Abraham is said to have been strong in faith giving glory to God" (Rom. 4:20); there is also the "full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22); and the apostle thanks God that the faith of the Thessalonians grew exceedingly. (2 Thess. 1:3.) It is evident, therefore, that all believers have not the same degree of faith. There is the faith of the babe, the faith of the young man, and the faith of the father. There is faith in the blade and faith in the ear. There is faith in the bud, in the bloom, and in the fruit. But all faith has salvation in it; for we are saved not by the quantity of our faith, but by its quality. It is not the amount; it is the living possession. It is not whether I have so much or so little faith, but whether I have faith at all? Now a child of God may be often deeply exercised whether he has any faith at all; for when he reads what faith has done and can do, and sees and feels how little it has done for him, he is seized with doubts and fears whether he has been ever blessed with the faith of God's elect. This makes him often say, "O, do I indeed possess one grain of saving faith?" But he does possess it: nay, it is his very faith which makes him so anxiously ask himself the question, as well as see and feel the nature and amount of his unbelief. It is the very light of God shining into his soul that

shows him his sins, their nature and number; convinces him of their guilt and enormity; lays the burden of them upon his conscience; and discovers to him the workings of an unbelieving heart. But besides this, if he had no faith at all he could not hear the voice of God speaking in the gospel, nor receive it as a message of mercy; so that he has faith, though he has not its witnessing evidence, or its abounding comfort. This faith will save his soul; for "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29); that is, God never repents of any gift that he bestows or of any calling which he has granted. If, then, he has ever blessed you with faith, however small that faith may be in itself or in your own view of it, he will never take it away out of your heart, but rather fan the smoking flax until it burst forth into a flame. He will never forsake the work of his own hands, for he which "hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:6.) If ever then, if but once in your life, you have felt the gospel to be the power of God unto salvation; if you have ever had one view of Christ by living faith; if but once only, under the influence of his blessed Spirit on your heart, you have laid hold of him and felt even for a few minutes that he was yours, your soul is as safe as though it were continually battling in the river which maketh glad the city of God, continually drinking of the honey and milk of the gospel, and walking all day long in the full light of his most gracious countenance. Not that a man should be satisfied with living at a poor, cold, dying rate; I mean not that, but merely to lay it down as a part of God's truth that as regards salvation, it is not the amount, but the reality of faith that saves the soul.

IV.—But now for our last point. The apostle declares that he was *not ashamed of the gospel of Christ*. Are we one with him here? Are we not rather often ashamed of it? But why so? Because we do not continually feel it to be the power of God unto salvation. When this feeling is gone, need we wonder what shame creeps in? Yet what is the reason that we are so often ashamed of it? Several causes may be named why this shame is felt.

1. Because the *enmity* of the human mind is more directed

against the gospel than any other object. And why? Because the gospel sets forth more conspicuously than anything else the glory of God, and leaves less to the creature to boast of and glory in. This enmity, though really against the gospel, naturally falls upon the persons of those who profess it. Thus, when we feel that we are hated on account of the gospel, it makes it at times a galling yoke to bear, and we are tempted to be ashamed even of the truth of God, if it brings upon us the dislike of those with whom we wish to stand well.

2. Again, the gospel is generally very much *despised* and *ridiculed*. Those, then, who profess it are considered very weak-minded people, if not worse, to believe such foolish doctrines; and as they usually hold them with great firmness and tenacity, as knowing their value and preciousness, they are viewed as poor narrow bigots, who condemn everybody but themselves, and think that nobody is going to heaven but a few such as they. As then our poor, proud nature feels contempt even more than dislike, we are often tempted to be ashamed of the gospel, for bringing with it such an amount of scorn and ridicule.

3. Again, the gospel is often *misunderstood*. People who are themselves ignorant of what the gospel is, and of what the power of God can effect by it, cannot distinguish between a true and a false profession of it. But this they know, that it requires consistency of religious and moral conduct. When, then, they see that the lives of men who profess the gospel are often inconsistent with its principles and practice, they cast the blame upon the gospel, instead of throwing it upon those who are virtually ignorant of it, and by their conduct disgrace it. As having thus to bear the consequence of this inconsistency, we have to endure a measure of its shame.

4. But as a natural consequence of this, it is often *misrepresented*. The doctrines which we profess are called licentious, and our principles are calumniated, as if they were opposed to good works and to a life of holiness. These are indeed sad misrepresentations; for if such persons had ever felt the

power of God upon their souls, they would know that the gospel leads to holiness and every good word and work, and that what does not lead to holiness in heart, lip, and life, is not the gospel. Still, we feel these misrepresentations; for as there is yet much natural pride of heart in our breast, we sensitively shrink from calumny and misrepresentation; and this, as I may call it, foolish feeling makes us sometimes almost ashamed of the precious gospel of Christ, though all our hope of salvation centres in it. This is a part of the conflict between nature and grace; for we have still natural feelings, and our proud heart revolts from everything which galls and mortifies it. But when the gospel is made the power of God unto our salvation, and we know something experimentally of its sweetness and blessedness in our own heart, are we ashamed of it then? No. We rather bind it to our bosom, with all its shame, as our choicest ornament, and if men hate, persecute, revile, or despise us for the gospel's sake, we count ourselves even unworthy to suffer such shame for Christ's sake. To experience this, and I have experienced it, is to glory in the cross of Christ; not to be ashamed of the gospel.

But we know the solemn doom which awaits him who is *openly* ashamed of Christ. Christ will be ashamed of him before his Father and before the holy angels. We must not then be ashamed of the gospel before men, though we may often internally feel so; nor must we allow ourselves to be so ashamed of it as to hide our colours. What would be thought of an ensign in the day of battle, who, for fear of being shot at by the riflemen on the enemy's side, should take the colours off the standard, throw them upon the ground, or hide them out of sight? No; he advances with the colours in his hand, that his men may follow his lead, and he and they may rather die than flee. So ministers especially, who bear the gospel flag, should of all men be least ashamed of their colours. They should be willing to mount the breach with the banner of truth in their hands, and unfurl the gospel which they have felt to be the power of God unto salvation in their own bosom. Do we not read, "thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be *displayed* because of the truth?" (Psalm 60:4.) "Displayed," not put out of sight! And you will find,

whether minister or hearer, that if you are enabled from time to time not to be ashamed of the gospel, but boldly to declare what you know of it in its experimental power, and what God has done for your soul by it, he will honour that testimony; he will smile upon you, will give you the inward support of the light of his countenance under reproach and shame; or if not so favoured, you will at least have the witness of a good conscience that you do not deny his name.

But one thing I would have deeply impressed upon your conscience and mine,—that we may never bring reproach upon this gospel! We need never be ashamed of the gospel itself, but may justly be ashamed if we do anything to tarnish it. The ensign is not ashamed of England's flag; but he might well be ashamed of his own cowardice if he dropped it in the day of battle, or if he tarnished it by turning back in the face of the enemy. So we are not to be ashamed of the gospel; but we may well be ashamed if by our life or conduct, words or actions, we bring discredit upon it, cast any reproach upon that name which is above every name, or cause men to speak evil of those doctrines which they know we profess. Thus there is a being not ashamed of the gospel, yet a being ashamed of any conduct unbecoming the gospel.

If, then, the gospel be unto us what I have attempted to describe it to be, let us not be ashamed of it before friend or foe. If it has reached our heart and been made the power of God to our soul, let us speak well of a blessing so great, so undeserved, and so free. The patient healed can speak well of the physician who cured him, and well of the remedy. If, then, the gospel has been to us a healing medicine, we can speak well of the balm which we have found in Gilead, and can proclaim with no faltering voice to every sin-sick soul that there is a Physician there.

THE GOSPEL SEED-BED

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning, July 22, 1849.

"But that on the good ground are they, which, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." Luke 8:15

The words of our text, I need scarcely observe, are taken from the Parable of the Sower—perhaps the most striking parable that fell from the Lord's lips. In this parable, the Lord represents the preaching of the gospel, and the effect it has upon the hearers: and he brings forward four points of resemblance. The **sower** is the minister of truth; the **seed** is the word of God which he preaches; the **soils** are the different hearers; and the crop represents the fruit and effects that are produced in them.

Now in order to shew the difference between those in whom the word of truth takes a deep, permanent, and saving effect, and those who endure for a time and then fall away, the Lord sets before us four distinct kinds of hearers. In attempting this morning, therefore, as the Lord may enable me, to unfold the meaning of my text, I shall endeavour to describe these four distinct hearers; and in so doing, shall consider what is meant by

I.—First, the way-side hearer.

II.—Secondly, the stony-ground hearer.

III.—Thirdly, the thorny-ground hearer.

IV.—Fourthly, the fruitful hearer.

But we must bear in mind that the parable of the sower is not applicable to every minister, nor to every congregation. No man is really a sower except one whom God has taught, qualified, commissioned, and sent forth to preach the word of life; for it is only such that are made spiritually manifest in the gospel ministry. And the next thing that we must bear in mind, is that

what he sows is **truth**, the pure word of God. He does not go forth with a seed-basket of mingled wheat and tares; but he sows the pure word of God, "the truth as it is in Jesus." So that the parable is not descriptive of every minister, nor of every congregation; but is only applicable to a minister of truth, and to a congregation that professes the truth; and therefore applicable, we trust, to us this morning.

I.—**First**, then, let us, as the Lord may enable, consider the **way-side** hearer. These hearers form the great bulk of a congregation: and the Lord compares them to soil, of which the emblem is the way-side. Now, observe that in this case there is no penetration whatever of the word of truth: the word falls upon them just as seed-corn might fall upon the hard turnpike road, or on the slabs of a London pavement. It is at once trodden under foot; the first passer-by sets his shoe upon it and crushes it into powder. There is no entrance, no burying: but Satan, compared here to the fowls of the air, comes at once and devours it up. This is the case with the great bulk of hearers; they hear, but hear to no purpose. There is no entrance of the word of life into their judgment, their heart, their conscience, or their affections; it falls upon their ears as literal grains fall upon the hard road, whence it is soon picked up by Satan, producing no solid, real, abiding effect. I shall not dwell any longer upon this unhappy case.

II.—But pass on to consider our second hearer, who is represented in our parable under the figure of him who receives the seed upon stony ground; or, as it is in Luke, "upon a rock." Now there are certain circumstances which, at first sight, seem to distinguish this hearer in a favourable way; yet, if we look to the fruits and effects, we shall find that these favourable marks are only such in appearance.

i First, then, when compared with the hearer whom we first considered, there is some penetration of the word, some entrance. On the first hearer it falls like seed upon the hard ground; there is no entrance of the word of truth; but, in the second hearer, there is some penetration, there is an entrance.

But where does it enter? Merely into the judgment, the natural judgment. How many there are, who have heard sound Calvinistic ministers almost from childhood, and been continually accustomed to have the truth set before them! Of these some receive the doctrines of grace from constantly listening to them. The word of truth has entered into their natural understanding; they contend for it earnestly, believe it strictly true, and are well satisfied that it agrees with God's revealed word.

ii But there are others who can go a step further than this; they not only receive the word into their judgment, so as to be sound, orthodox, doctrinal Calvinists, but also receive the truth into their natural affections; they read or listen to it with "joy." They have a degree of delight in it: their carnal affections receive it gladly, and, like John's hearers, they rejoice in the light.

Now, at first, this seems to be a very favourable circumstance, that persons should receive with joy the word of God; that they should find a pleasure in hearing the truth preached; that they should understand it in a measure; and, not only so, but feel a gladness of mind in hearing of election, predestination, redemption, and salvation by grace; of the perseverance of the saints, and of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done, according to covenant engagements, for his elect people. That they should receive these truths in their judgment, and feel gladness, pleasure, and delight in hearing them, seems at first sight a very favourable mark indeed. But when we come to look at the other side, then we see that there are unfavourable things set against it. What are these things?

1. They have "**no root.**" The heart has never been ploughed up with convictions; because, had the ploughshare of conviction broken up the heart, there would have been a seed-bed for the word of life to take root in. But they have "no deepness of earth:" the plough of guilt and wrath has never passed into and through the soil, so as to afford a tilth for the word of truth to fall into, there to take root downward, and bring forth a lasting, fruitful crop upward. They "received the word with gladness;" but

without previous sorrow, conviction, or temptation; without their heart being ploughed up by the law, or its hard crust torn asunder by the coulter; therefore there was no broken earth, no loosened soil, no deep furrows, into which a root could penetrate, so as to push downward and grow.

2. There was another fatal mark: they "**lacked moisture.**" The Holy Ghost was not in all this; it was not a work of grace; the blessed leadings, secret teachings, divine waterings, and heavenly bedewings of the Holy Spirit did not attend the word of life. The word merely lodged in the judgment, and was received into the natural affections; therefore it sprung up quickly and rapidly; it had no depth of earth, therefore no deep root; it lacked moisture, therefore no growth.

3. The third fatal mark is, that for the want of root and moisture, in time of temptation, they "**withered away.**" How many do we see just in this state! There was a time when they heard the word with gladness, when they would walk almost any distance to hear the truth, would sit and listen with delight, and seem to spring up as grass by the willow-courses. There was every mark, every appearance of their being children of God.

And yet, if a discerning eye had looked into the work that seemed to be the work of grace, it would have perceived these two things wanting; **first**, that the Holy Ghost had not ploughed up the heart, nor broken up the soil, so as to receive the seed of truth in any real depth; and **secondly**, that there was no moisture, no savour, dew, power, or divine feeling, none of the watering and bedewings of the Holy Ghost. Seeing these two things wanting, a man of discernment would have predicted the consequences—that as this joy was merely earthly joy, as this consolation was but carnal consolation, as this delight was only a sensual delight, the lighting up of natural affections, without the real teaching and work of the Holy Ghost, when temptation came, it would all wither away.

How many do we see withering away in the time of temptation! How many professors of the doctrines of grace do we see withering away under the temptation of strong drink! I do believe, that if many great professors of the doctrines of grace were to put down on one piece of paper what they spend upon gin, and upon another what they give to the Lord's poor, we should find an awful balance in favour of the gin-bottle. This is a temptation to many carnal professors. They fall into the love of drink, which gradually increases upon them till at last they wither away. Some give up even the very profession they have long made, and sit under Arminian teachers, whilst others go into the world, or perhaps attend no place of worship at all, and at last die the death of the drunkard. Such has been the end of many who once seemed to run with gladness in the way of the Lord, and receive with joy the doctrines of grace as they came forth from the lips of gospel ministers.

Others fall a prey to sensual lusts. Satan lays snares for them in various ways. In these snares they are entangled, make awful shipwreck, and often wither away as to the very form of religion, become hardened Antinomians, live inconsistent lives, indulge in ungodly practices and vile lusts, and become an open reproach and stumbling-block.

Others who do not wither away, in an open manner, by strong drink, sensual lusts, covetousness, or other gross sins, yet wither away as to anything like fruitfulness, usefulness, zeal, activity, and liberality. They become poor dead hearers, buried in the world, prayerless and careless, blighted and mildewed, a dead weight in churches and congregations, making a minister who has any life and feeling in his soul groan at the very sight of them. I do verily believe that if we were to examine the condition of many large churches, we should find them filled with these stony-ground hearers, a plague and a burden to the living members.

III.—The **third** hearer is the thorny-ground hearer. These seem to be a step nearer salvation, and to have something more like the work of grace than the preceding; because there appears not

only in this case a reception of the word, but also a bringing forth of some fruit; though we read, that "they bring forth no fruit to perfection."

Now these receive the word in their natural conscience. The first class of hearers did not receive the "word" at all; they did not receive it even in their judgment. They came and went, came and went, understanding nothing, if they listened at all. The second went a step further; they received the word into their **judgment**; and not only so, but, beyond this, into their natural **affections**; there was in them a springing up of something that looked very much like a real work of grace.

But now we come to the third hearer; and he seems to go a step further still. He not only receives the word into his judgment; but beyond this into his conscience, his natural conscience. But still a work of grace is wanting. Nothing of the blessed Spirit's work is here; but still such a work as looks very much like it; there is some feeling, a conscience moved and wrought upon; and almost everything that looks, at first sight, as though it were a solid work of grace.

This hearer, then, receives the word into his conscience: he has convictions of his lost and undone state by nature; sees the plan of salvation; and at times feel what he hopes, expects, and others fancy is the real work and teaching of the Spirit; yet, with it all, fruit is not brought forth to perfection; it is choked by the cares, pleasures, and lusts of the world. These grow up, as it were, with the world in his heart, and choke and suffocate it, so that no fruit is really brought forth.

God does not put forth his hand; does not pluck out the weeds; does not burn them up; does not exercise his soul as he exercises the souls of his people; but leaves cares, anxieties, and lusts to spring up, together with the truth; and these grow so thick, that they overspread the truth, and suffocate everything like life and feeling in the soul. Thus all the crop is stifled, and no fruit

brought forth to perfection; nothing in the end is found to manifest it as a real work of grace.

Now you will find, wherever the truth is preached, that the great bulk of hearers are made up of these three: of way-side hearers, who come and go, and no impression whatever is made on their hearts; of stony-ground hearers, who hear with joy and gladness, but in time of temptation fall away; and of thorny-ground hearers, who seem to have something like a conscience, like feeling, like life, like a conviction, like the work of grace upon their souls, but no reality. Follow these to their houses; go with them to their respective occupations: you will see them suffocated and buried in worldly cares, anxieties, lusts, pleasures, and earthly pursuits. Nothing is brought forth of real gospel fruit, nothing that God himself approves of, nothing which springs from a work of grace upon the heart.

Now if this be so, what reason have all who desire to fear God, to look into their hearts, and see whether they can find anything there really different from what I have this morning been endeavouring to unfold! I believe the child of God will be very jealous on this point, knowing how soon and easily he may be deceived, and feeling in himself the temptations, the besetments, and the evils that he sees described in the word of God, and manifest in others, he will sit at times in solemn judgment upon his own case, trembling to the very centre, doubting and fearing whether it is the case with him.

IV.—I shall, therefore, as the Lord may enable me, pass on to my last and most important point, to which all I have been saying is but preliminary, and describe him whom the Lord pronounces a fruitful hearer—a child of God—one in whom the work of grace is begun, carried on, and brought to perfection.

Now if we look at this hearer, and compare his case with the preceding, we shall find certain very striking and prominent marks. It is these marks which I shall attempt now to unfold, and

thus shew the distinction between him and the three hearers whose cases we have been hitherto considering.

i The first mark of this gracious hearer is this, that he receives the word into an "honest heart." From this we gather, that the hearts of the other three hearers are not honest—that they lack that which lies at the base of all true religion—sincerity; that God, by the light of his Spirit and the teachings of his grace, has never made them upright.

This I look upon as the very first fruit of divine teaching in the soul, as in Nathanael, that it produces spiritual uprightness, godly honesty and sincerity of heart. But how is a heart thus made "honest?" We know that no heart is naturally so. The Lord never meant to say that. The Lord uses the figure of the soil. But he did not mean—he could not mean, that some have a heart naturally honest, as if exempt from the Adam fall. No, the Lord, in speaking of an "honest heart," implied that it was made so by grace.

1. Now when divine **light** comes into the soul, it shews us who God is, what sin is, what we are. And if a man never had this divine light shining into his soul, he is not an honest man. He may be a very honest man outwardly: he may be externally upright in the world, and have an abhorrence of lies and falsehood: but as regards his own state before God, the concerns of his own soul, and his dealings with God in the matter of salvation, there is no honesty in him.

There is a depth in the heart, which is covered over as with a lid, and must be so, because till the veil is taken away—the veil of ignorance, of unbelief, of self-righteousness spread over the heart—until this veil is taken away by the power of God's grace, all its dark recesses will lie covered up. These secret depths are made manifest to the child of God by the light of divine truth shining into those dens, caverns, and hidden recesses, which are thus laid naked, bare, and open to view. There may be surface sincerity, as beneath this chapel there may be deep cellars,

covered over with the flooring, so that what is going on below is not seen above.

So a man may seem very sincere, straightforward, and honest, and yet have only honesty in his face, whilst in the cellar thousands of toads, newts, and efts may be creeping about unseen. But let the light of God shine into the soul, **that** penetrates into the cellars, looks into the very depths of the heart, lays bare every secret recess. Thus, the light of God shining into the soul makes the heart honest, and nothing but this light shining into the soul out of the fulness of God can make an honest man: because in this light he sees and knows he cannot deceive or mock God, that all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom he has to do.

He may deceive his fellow-creatures, but he cannot deceive the Lord God Almighty. This will manifest itself in every secret acting of his soul before God. "Thou, God seest me!" lies at the root of all true prayer. 'Thou, God, searchest my heart; thou, God, knowest all that is in my soul; all that I have, all that I am is open before thee; I cannot escape thee.' "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there, if I take the wings of the morning, or dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" **Ps 139:8-10**. This is the effect of the light of God shining into the soul.

If, then, a man never had a ray of divine light shining into his soul, he is not an honest man really and spiritually before God. He always will be, however sincere before men, a deeply-dyed hypocrite before God, and the more profession he makes, the more deeply-dyed will be his hypocrisy.

2. But besides this, there is the **life** of God in the soul to make him honest. Light makes us see-life makes us feel what we are. As there is light to see, and life to feel, we not only see what we are—our great vileness and awful wickedness—but we feel it, mourn over and under it, groan and cry on account of it, abhor it,

and pour out our hearts in bitter complaints because of it. It is by this mysterious union of light and life coming into the soul—that we see the evil of our hearts, and feel what we are as sinners before God.

Where there is this light and life in the heart, there, and there only, will there be honesty. Now an honest man never can be before God anything but what God makes him: he has nothing but what God gives him: he knows nothing but what God teaches him. Thus he stands before God and men. He takes nothing to himself, has nothing, boasts of nothing, as he has nothing to boast of; for he cannot boast of sin, hypocrisy, wickedness; therefore as an honest man, he stands before God a poor, ruined, undone wretch: a leper from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. He often says, "Behold I am vile!" puts his mouth in the dust, and laying his hand upon his mouth feelingly acknowledges himself to be the chief of sinners, and less than the least of all saints.

Now if you have never had this as the ground-work of your religion, you are not at present manifest as a hearer in whose heart God has begun and is carrying on the work of grace. At present, it is to be feared you are a way-side, stony-ground, or thorny-ground hearer; and whatever you may be hereafter made by the light and life of God entering your soul, at present you bear very few marks of having "an honest heart."

ii The next mark is, a **"good heart."** 'A good heart!' say you; how can that be? Has any man a "good heart?" Yes; for if not why does the Lord Jesus Christ say he has? He did not make mistakes. But no man has a "good heart" by nature; the Lord Himself has settled that point. When one came to him, and said, "Good Master," what was his answer? "Why callest thou me good?"—though he was good—"there is none good but one, that is God." There is no man's heart good except as made so by the grace of God working in him to will and to do. If it has not so worked in you, you have not a "good heart."

What is a "good heart" then? As there is such a thing, let us see what it is. The figure is kept up; the heart is compared to the soil.

1. A "good heart" is a heart broken up, as good soil is broken up. We have seen the fault of the other soils. One was hard, the seed had no penetration there whatever. The second had a kind of soil, but was all mixed with stones; it was so shallow that the Lord said, there is no depth of earth: it was nearly all rock. The third had little else but thistles, thorns, and briars growing up in it. The marks of a good soil were wanting in all these. No heart, therefore, can be called good till broken up; for it is "a broken and contrite heart," in which God takes delight.

Now, compare for a moment a "good heart" or broken heart, with the "joy" that the Lord says the stony-ground hearers receive the word with. There was no depth in them; they were not broken up with convictions; had no sense or sight of their lost, undone state; no holy fear of God; no trembling at his word; no fear of being wrong, no desire to be right; yet they received the word with gladness. Now, if a man lacks a broken heart, he lacks the main evidence of being a partaker of grace; for the leadings, teachings, and dealings of God all tend to this; they all tend to break a man's heart. If the Lord deal with him in conviction, it breaks his heart; breaks up the hard, impenetrable soil he formerly possessed. If the Lord manifest mercy, kindness, love, tender favour, it breaks the heart; for it softens, melts, and humbles it. That is one mark, then, of a "good" heart—to be broken and contrite.

2. Another mark is—that it is made tender and soft. It is so in the natural soil. Look at the hard clods—nothing grows there. But a soil that crumbles and breaks to pieces, and is tender to impression—that when the rain falls, dissolves under it—when the dew distils, it enters into its most secret pores—when the wind softly blows, crumbles to pieces—that is a good soil. So with a "good heart" made so by God. When the Lord speaks, there is a softness and tenderness felt in the soul, an impression made, as upon that band of men whose hearts the Lord had touched **1Sa**

10:26. This is a very distinguishing feature of the child of God. "Because thine heart was tender," the Lord says of Josiah.

You never find this soft heart in hardened Antinomians. They have no tenderness, melting, confession, contrition before God; no softness, no yielding to impressions; no breaking down; no falling beneath the power of vital godliness as manifested in a child of God; no crumbling down of the hard heart; no self-loathing, self-abhorrence, or godly sorrow. You never see these marks in the stony-ground, in the thorny-ground, or in the wayside hearer: they are proud, obstinate, hardhearted; there is in them no real breaking down of soul and spirit before God.

Now, look at this. Perhaps some of you this morning have been trying yourselves. One fears he is but a wayside hearer after all. Another may say, 'I fear after all the profession I have made, I am nothing but a stony-ground hearer.' A third may cry, 'I have so many cares and anxieties, am so stifled with thorns, that I fear after all I am only a thorny-ground hearer.' Look a little farther. Remember that the children of God have all the temptations of others. If the stony-ground hearers have had bad marks, you have had some of the same; if the thorny-ground hearers have snares and temptations, you have similar; and when left to judge by carnal reason, you may often fear that you have nothing else.

But let us see whether we cannot find something beyond these—whether there is any honesty, sincerity, and uprightness before God; whether any breaking up of the heart, any tender, soft, melting feelings, any humility, contrition, godly sorrow, self-loathing, and self-abhorrence, which God here seems to have marked out as the feature of a "good" heart. Into this "honest and good heart," the word of truth is received. There it is lodged. This is the gospel seed-bed; there it takes root; there it springs up, and brings forth "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear."

iii The next thing said of these hearers is, that they "**keep it.**" Others do not "keep it." In the first case, the birds of the air

came, and caught it up; it was not "kept" at all. In the second case, it sprang up, and withered away—it was not kept; it dried away like grass upon the house-top. In the third case, it was suffocated, smothered, choked. But they who received it into an honest and good heart, "kept it;" not by any exertion of their own, nor because they were able to keep it any more than the others. But the gracious Lord who in the first instance was pleased to prepare their hearts to receive it, and then lodge it in the soil, himself keeps it there by his own blessed hand; as we read, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment." And, unless it is "kept" by the Lord's watering it every moment, by the dews and rains of his Spirit, by the application of his word with power, by the whole work of grace—unless the Lord thus keep alive the seed of truth that he himself has implanted in the soul, it is not "kept" at all.

There are so many temptations in their way. Sometimes sin works so powerfully as though it would suffocate and bury the crop; sometimes **temptation** entangles them, and seems to draw away all the dew from their heart; sometimes despair almost lays hold of them, and seems as though it would crush and bury all the word of life in the soul. But amidst all their trials and temptations, all their doubts and fears, all their exercises and misgivings the Lord keeps alive, by the waterings and bedewings of his grace, by the various teachings and leadings of his Spirit, that which he in his mercy and love first implanted in their souls.

iv Is the next mark in you? "Fruit?" I want you to compare these marks with what is going on in your souls; to lay down your experience side by side with them. This will prove whether you are a fruitful hearer. Upon the way-side hearer it will have no effect; it falls only on the outer ear. If you are a stony-ground hearer, it will not suit you. You want something to stir up your natural affections—to have a letter-Christ preached, and the doctrines set forth in the letter; great assurance spoken of; all the doubts, fears, and exercises of God's people cut up root and branch, and called 'working at Dung-gate!' You want your carnal mind elated with fleshly joy; your natural feelings worked upon.

You will not bring your heart, and lay it down side by side with the description of an honest and good heart. You dare not do it.

Thorny-ground hearers, too, are afraid of that. They are thinking even now of tomorrow's profit or loss, or of yesterday's business: a whole crop of thorns and thistles is springing up now to stifle any conviction. They will not bring forth their experience, lay it down, and say, 'These are the things that my soul knows.'

But the fruitful hearer, whose heart is made honest by the grace of God—in whom there is this goodness wrought—this simplicity, humility, tenderness, and trembling at God's word; this godly jealousy over himself; this desire to be right, this fear to be wrong; these sighs and cries to a heart-searching God; this looking to the Lord—he will be bringing it forth piece by piece, saying, 'I have felt **this**, I have felt **that**; I have experienced these things; I know that to be truth; whatever men say against me, whatever I say against myself, I am sure I have felt **this!**'

Some of you may be thus bringing forth your experience, and saying, 'God knows this has been going on in my soul for years; I know I have honesty and sincerity before God, if I have nothing else'. This is bringing it out, comparing it with the word of God, and the experience of the saints; and he finds that, in the midst of exercises, temptations, perplexities, trials, the work of grace, to his wonder and astonishment, has been still kept alive in the soul. Such a one stands a monument of God's preserving mercy.

Now this man "brings forth fruit." There was no fruit in the way-side hearer; no fruit to perfection in the stony-ground hearer. There might be fruit in appearance, but no fruit to perfection. But the hearer, who has received the word into an honest and a good heart "brings forth fruit." And what fruit? Why, fruit of three kinds: fruit in the **heart**, fruit in the **lip**, and fruit in the **life**.

v Let us see what these fruits are that he brings forth in the **heart**; or rather, that the Lord brings forth in him.

1. There is, first, the fruit of **faith**. This is the only man who really believes in Jesus; who believes the gospel to be glad tidings to perishing sinners; and who believes in, and accepts the doctrines of grace as sweet and suitable to his soul. This is the only man who really believes in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, in his blood, in his glorious righteousness, in his dying love, as sweet and suitable. And why does he believe it? Because it has been revealed in a measure to his soul.

Another may have heard it, and received it gladly; but there has been no special discovery or manifestation of the gospel to his heart with divine power. His head may be stuffed with doctrines; but there is no faith in his heart; no real coming unto, trusting in, or hanging upon the Lord Jesus Christ. There may be abundance of false confidence and presumption, but no real looking unto the Lord Jesus Christ out of the depths of a broken heart; no calling upon his name; no seeing him by the eye of faith; nor casting all his soul upon him as able to save to the uttermost.

2. Again, he will bring forth the fruit of **hope**; or rather, God will bring it forth in him. The light shining into his soul making his evidences clear, bringing sweet manifestations of the love of God into his heart, applying his precious promises, and shedding abroad his favour—all these things, experimentally felt within, give him gospel hope, "an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast, and entering into that within the veil." Others have no such hope. Their hope is the hope of the hypocrite that shall perish; the spiders web spun out of his own fleshly bowels; and vain hope; not a good hope through grace, anchoring in the blood, love, and obedience of Jesus.

3. And he brings forth the fruit of **love**. There are times and seasons when he can say, "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." He loves the Lord Jesus Christ; he loves the truth as it is in Jesus; he loves the people of God; he loves the work of grace wherever he sees that work manifest; and he feels a sweet union with the tried and tempted followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. He brings forth also true **humility**. He has had a sight of himself; he knows what is in man, and abhors himself. His heart is humbled by and before God.

5. He brings forth, or rather the Lord brings forth in him, the fruit of **repentance**. He sees what he is as a sinner, and truly repents. He brings forth the fruit of godly sorrow; for seeing what his sins have cost the Lord Jesus Christ, he mourns over them with a repentance not to be repented of.

6. He brings forth **spiritual-mindedness**. In the place of a carnal embracing of mere doctrines, his affections are fixed upon the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and simplicity of heart. And this produces that spiritual-mindedness which is life and peace, and delight in heavenly things.

vi He not only brings forth these things in his heart, or rather, God brings them forth in him; but he brings them forth in his **lip**. When he speaks of the things of God, he speaks of them with real feeling, with real love in his soul, and real grace in his breast; his heart teaching his mouth. If he be a minister, he will speak with power; he will not deliver truth in a hardened, presumptuous, unfeeling manner; but having life and feeling in his soul, and an inward experience of the things of God, what he speaks will be uttered with unction, dew, savour, and power; it will reach the heart, melt the spirit, and bring forth life and feeling in the hearers. And if he be a hearer, a private character, he will also bring forth fruit with his lips. His speech will be seasoned with salt. There will be a life and power in his conversation when he comes into the company of the people of God; the hearts of others will unite and melt as it were into his, and find sweet union and mutual communion.

vii Nay more, he brings forth fruit in his **life**. He is not a drunkard, nor an adulterer. When hidden and covered by darkness, he knows that, when no human eye sees him, God sees him. He will not be a slave to sin; God will deliver him. Sin shall

not have dominion over him; he may be entangled from time to time in secret lusts that work in him, but he will beseech God to subdue them, and bring him out of every snare. He will sigh and cry to be delivered from sin in all its shapes and forms. He will not be a covetous, a proud, a worldly-minded, an oppressive man. If a master, he will not oppress his servant; if a servant, he will be sincere and upright towards his master. He will not be an unkind, cruel husband at home. Before his friends, his wife, his children, he will be the same—a Christian at home, as well as a Christian abroad. Thus he will bring forth fruit in his life, as well as in his lip.

If there be no fruit in his life, depend upon it, there is no fruit in his heart: if there be no fruit in his heart, depend upon it there will be no fruit in his life. Very few professors will bear following home; very few whose lives and conversation will bear looking into: very few who are not slaves, more or less, to some sin—drunkenness, pride, uncleanness, covetousness, worldly-mindedness, tricks in business, or some deceitful practices. The children of God will indeed be tempted, entangled, and hampered, yea, fearfully hampered by sin in their soul's feelings. But he, who has made their hearts inwardly honest, will make their lives outwardly honest. God, who has implanted his precious grace in their soul, causes the word to take root in the heart, and makes them to bring forth fruit, some a hundred fold, these indeed are rare; some sixty fold, and some thirty fold.

But if they bring forth no fruit whatever; if there be no fruit in their heart, lip, or life, where shall we place them? If the preacher stand in God's counsel, he will be as God's mouth. I might this morning have amused, entertained, or deceived you; and said, if you believe the doctrines of grace you are Christians. But I dare not say so; I should not be standing up in God's name, nor be doing the work of a minister uprightly, if I were to do so; my conscience, I hope, would not let me thus flatter and deceive you.

Then, where are the fruits? We profess to be Christians, profess to be children of God; but where are the fruits? Where are the

fruits inwardly? Where are the fruits outwardly? If we have no fruits inwardly, no fruits outwardly, we may call ourselves what we please, but we shall not be what the Lord calls, fruitful children, "trees of his right hand planting."

Look into your hearts; compare your experience, and the things brought forth there from time to time, with the things plainly and clearly laid down in God's word. And if you can find the marks which I have brought forward, of the grace of God in your soul—it is an encouragement for all of you who desire to fear God. You may be lamenting that you bring forth so little fruit to God's honour and glory. But he can cause you to bring forth more fruit. He can deepen the work in his own time: and he can make and manifest you as fruitful branches in the only true Vine.

Grace in its Fountain and in its Streams

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, March 21, 1858

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."
Philemon, 25

What a mercy—a mercy beyond all expression, and indeed all conception, it is to have a religion which will take us to heaven; which will not leave us in the agony of death, but will be with us in that solemn hour, carry us in peace through the dark and gloomy valley—dark and gloomy to the flesh, and land us safe in the glorious presence of God. Now no religion either can or will do this but that which is wrought in the soul by the power of God himself. We want two things to take us to heaven; *a title to it*, and *a meetness for it*. Our only title to heaven is the blood and righteousness of the Son of God—that blood which "cleanseth from all sin," and that righteousness which "justifies us from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses." Nothing unclean or defiled can enter heaven. This is God's own testimony: "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Rev. 21:27.) How clearly do we see from this testimony who shall not and who shall enter the holy Jerusalem—that heavenly city which the glory of God ever lightens, and of which the Lamb is the everlasting light. No defiled persons can enter therein; and none but those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life; for these he "has washed from their sins in his own blood, and made them kings and priests unto God and his Father." (Rev. 1:5, 6.) Therefore they are "without fault before the throne of God." (Rev. 14:5.)

But besides this their *title*, there must be also a *meetness* for this heavenly city, according to the words of the apostle: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." (Col. 1:12.) Whilst here

below, then, we must learn to sing some notes of that joyous anthem which will issue in full, uninterrupted harmony from the hearts and lips of the redeemed in the realms above, when that glorious company will ever cry, "Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power unto the Lord our God." O what a voice will that be, "the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." (Rev. 19:1, 6, 7.) If then we are to sit down among those blessed ones who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb, not only must we be "arrayed in fine linen, clean and white, for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (Rev. 19:8, 9), but we must have had "the kingdom of God, which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17), set up in our hearts. This, then, is what I mean when I speak of a religion which will take us to heaven. It consists, as I have said, in two things: 1, a *title* to heaven; 2, a *meetness* for heaven. Without a title we could not possess it; without a meetness we could not enjoy it. The one is from the work of the Son of God in the flesh; the other from the work of God the Holy Ghost on the heart.

But now view the subject in a somewhat different light, and yet still bearing upon the same grand truth. At the close of what is called "The Sermon on the Mount," the Lord describes two different characters. The one he likens to a wise man who built his house upon a rock, and the other to a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. The man who built upon a rock built for eternity; so that when "the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house," it fell not. And why? For this simple reason; "It was founded upon a rock." But how different was the case of the foolish man, who built his house upon the sand, upon the quicksand of human merit. When "the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, it fell, and great was the fall of it." The two houses, as long as the weather was fine and fair, might look equally well, and seem to stand equally strong; but the storm

tried each by trying the foundation on which each was built. In that storm the one stood as firm as adamant; the other fell into a shapeless ruin, of which the very fragments were swept away by the rushing floods. See then to the foundation of your house, whether you are building upon Christ or upon self; are founding your hopes upon the rock, or are rearing them upon the sand.

Is not this in harmony with the language of our text? "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." To whom are these words addressed? To Philemon. And who was Philemon? We know little of him except what is recorded in that beautiful Epistle which the apostle wrote to him on behalf of his slave Onesimus, who had run away from him, but whom by the grace of God Paul had begotten in his bonds; that is, had been made, when himself a prisoner at Rome, the instrument of his conversion unto God. To this Philemon, who was most probably a minister of Christ at Colosse, and whom the apostle therefore calls "his dearly beloved and fellow labourer," he writes this epistle, closing it with the words of the text: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." It is as if he would thus sum up all that his heart could desire for his beloved Philemon. He does not wish him bodily health, family comforts, worldly prosperity, or any other of the numerous items which are generally supposed to make up the sum of human happiness. His desires and wishes for the happiness of his friend went far beyond, far above the reach of those earthly blessings which for the most part perish in the using; and as his heart dictated, his pen wrote the expression of this his one desire for his beloved brother, that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ might be with his spirit. And sure I am if we know anything of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and anything of what it is for that grace to be with our spirit, we shall join heart and soul in the apostle's prayer, and desire not only that that grace may ever be with our spirit, but be so particularly on this occasion when we are now met in his blessed name.

In considering these words, we may look at three things which seem to stand out prominently to view in them.

I.—Grace in its *fountain*: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;"

II.—Grace in its *streams*: "Be with your spirit;"

III.—Grace in its *fruits*: which though not exactly expressed in our, text, yet, as ever attending grace both in its fountain and in its streams, may well stand in close connection with it.

I.—First, then, *Grace in its fountain*.

i. As it is eminently desirable to have clear views upon every subject which we attempt to consider in the momentous things of God, and this from the very outset, that we may make straight paths for our feet, let us first examine the Scriptural meaning of the word "*grace*." I need not tell you how again and again it meets our eye in every page of the New Testament. By "*grace*," then, as a New Testament term, is meant the *pure favour* of God. This is its distinct and peculiar meaning. In whatever way then that grace may be manifested, through whatever channel it may flow, to whomsoever it may come, whatever effects it may produce, the pure favour of God is intended thereby. It may be thus compared to the "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal," seen by John in vision as "proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." (Rev. 22:1.) It is, therefore, opposed to human merit of every shape and shade, of every form, hue, and colour. Thus it stands in contradistinction to works—in such contradistinction that the one, so to speak, would destroy and annihilate the other. Is not this the apostle's argument, "And if by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." Nothing can be more plain, according to the apostle's reasoning, than that these two things are so diametrically opposed to each other that if a man were to be saved by works, grace could have no part; and if saved by grace, then works could have no part. If this, at least, be not his meaning words can have no clear or positive signification. We lay this down, then, at the very outset, as a foundation which cannot be moved, that grace signifies the pure favour of God, without

any regard to human merit, without any intermixture of anything in the creature, be it little or much, be it good or bad according to human view or intention.

ii. But having defined the meaning of the term, let us now look at grace in its *Fountain*. However far, however high we trace up this, we cannot go higher than God, nor must we go any lower. If there be a stream, there must be a fountain; and such as is the fountain, so is the stream; for, as James speaks, "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?" (James 3:11.)

Thus we find grace attributed in the word of truth to each of the Persons of the glorious Trinity. I need not tell you how often we find the expression, in the opening of well nigh all the epistles, "Grace and peace be to you from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3.) There we find grace attributed to the Father and the Son unitedly. But sometimes we find it attributed to the Father separately. Thus the Father is called "the God of all grace" (1 Pet. 5:10); and so we read of "the grace of God which is given by Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:4); of "the grace of God that bringeth salvation" (Titus 2:11); and of "the grace of God abounding unto many." (Rom. 5:15.) Similarly grace is attributed separately to the Lord Jesus Christ, as in our text, and in that well-known benediction: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost." (2 Cor. 13:14.) We also read of the "Spirit of grace" (Zech. 12:10; Heb. 10:29), from which we gather the grace of the Spirit, and of being all "by one Spirit baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13), which is a baptism by his grace. But besides grace being thus attributed to each Person of the Trinity separately, in a memorable passage in the Revelation John unites all the three Persons of the glorious Trinity as the Fountain of grace: "Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth." (Rev. 1:4, 5.)

This favour then or grace for ever dwelt in the bosom of the Three-in-One God; and as these three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are in essence but one, it dwells equally and unitedly in them all. Thus the grace of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is equal and one, because they are equal and one; for as there is no division in the Essence of the Godhead, though there is a distinction of the Persons, the grace that dwells in each distinctly dwells in all. When then I speak of the Fountain of grace, I look at it as it is in the bosom of the eternal Three-in-One God.

iii. But it was a part of the eternal purposes of God that this grace should be manifested; for the very nature of grace being pure favour, that favour must flow forth toward particular objects, that it may be, as it were, brought forth. We may compare it, perhaps, by way of illustration, to a mother's love. Every woman has the love of a mother naturally in her breast; but every woman is not a mother, and therefore in such it lies hidden. When, however, she becomes a mother, the love hitherto hidden immediately flows forth toward her infant babe. So grace ever dwelt in the bosom of God; but there was a necessity for the manifestation of that grace toward its objects, that it might be brought down from heaven to earth, and flow out as a stream from its eternal Fountain to water and enrich the sons of God. But as these had sinned and fallen, there was also a necessity that there should be a Mediator in and through whom this grace might be manifested; for though sin destroyed the image of God in which man was created, it did not destroy the grace of God, nor the purposes of his grace, but rather gave occasion for them to shine forth with brighter and clearer lustre. In order then to the manifestation of this grace, the Son of God took our nature into union with his own divine Person, that he might be a Mediator between God and man; that, to use the pathetic language of Job, he might be a daysman betwixt us, to lay his hands upon us both. (Job. 9:33.) Is there not something very beautiful in this expression? Christ, as the daysman, or Mediator, brings the two contending parties together, unites and reconciles them by taking

each in either hand. Thus, as God, the blessed Lord lays his hand upon God, and as Man lays his hand upon man, reconciling and uniting them together as the Mediator who partakes of each nature, and yet with those two natures is but one Person. The grace then of God cannot and does not flow forth except through the Mediator; for, on account of Adam's sin, grace regards us as fallen, and as needing reconciliation in order to salvation. Sinners, as sinners, can have no claim upon God; they are cut off by sin from any part or lot in a just, holy, and righteous Jehovah. But through a Mediator, through the Son of God having taken our nature into union with his own divine Person, and having in that nature shed his precious blood as an atoning sacrifice for sin, and thus redeemed the Church unto God, grace can flow freely unto us in our low estate, as through a consecrated channel. I do not myself hold what are called "purchased blessings," as if Christ by his blood bought the love of God. Christ bought the Church by his blood; but it was the love of God that sent him to buy her. Christ's coming into the world was not the cause of the love of God; but the love of God was the cause of Christ's coming into the world. (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9, 10.) Yet, without holding bought love or purchased blessings, I hold as firmly as any that there is no blessing but in Christ and through Christ; and that he was set up in the purposes of God as a Mediator that through him who now wears our nature—through him who took the flesh and blood of the children, every mercy, favour, and blessing might flow, as through a consecrated channel, to the Church of God both for time and eternity.

v. But the apostle speaks particularly of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." Having seen then the *purity* and clearness of the Fountain, we may now look at it in its *depth* and *fulness* in the Person of Christ.

1. Look first at its amazing *depth*. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ brought him down from heaven to earth; made him a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; laid upon him the iniquities of us all; took him into the gloomy garden, where he sweat great drops of blood; and nailed him to the cross, to endure all its

unparalleled agony and shame. Grace carried him from the cross into the sepulchre, rose with him from the dead, ascended up to the right hand of the Father, and is with him now, in his heart and on his lips; and from him is being continually breathed into, and communicated unto the objects of his eternal choice and love.

But this grace being so deep, is *sovereign* both in its source and in its streams. We cannot explain why it should be so; nor have we any right or reason to pry into those secrets which God has wrapped up in his eternal breast. Our posture is reverently and humbly to submit to God's word; and if he says, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," (Malachi 1:2, 3; Romans 9:13,) our wisdom is not to question and cavil at his words, but rather take the place where Paul stood. "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (Rom. 9:20.) God gives us no account of his dealings; he tells us what is his sovereign will, and there he leaves the matter unexplained; for indeed it is inexplicable. Yet if our eyes are but enlightened from above, we shall see the sovereignty of grace, not only in the Scriptures, but as a matter of daily observation. Can we not see how grace selects its objects here and there, and some of the most unlikely characters; and how these are, as the Scripture speaks, taken "one of a city, and two of a family," to bring them to Zion. Ask any one whom God has called by his grace what there was in him to deserve his favour? Will not each and all at once disclaim that there was anything in them to draw down the favour of God? and that on the contrary there was everything in them to deserve his indignation and eternal displeasure? Happy are they who have any testimony that the sovereignty of this grace has reached them, has saved them from the bottomless pit, and given them a name and a place amongst the living family of God. These will never quarrel with God's sovereignty in saving and blessing their souls when they carry the earnest of its sovereign display in their own hearts.

2. But now observe its *fulness*. The first mark of this is, that it is

free: "Being justified *freely* by his grace." And because it is free it can reach us. To illustrate this take some scriptural emblems. How free is the sun in sending forth its enlightening, warming beams; how free the clouds in discharging their watery treasures; how free the dew in falling from the face of heaven; how free the wind in blowing where it listeth. Now those are scriptural types and representatives of the free grace of God. It shines as freely as the sun; drops as freely as the rain; falls as freely as the dew; and blows as freely as the wind. But not in grace as in nature to all men. I mean not that; but all to whom it comes it comes freely. And whenever it so comes it communicates precious things with it. As the sun lights and warms, as the rain fertilises, as the dew softens, as the wind invigorates, so it is with the grace of God which comes out of the fulness of Christ. It enlightens the understanding, warms the heart, fertilises the soul, softens the spirit, and invigorates the whole new man of grace. And all this grace does freely, without charge or cost, without money or price, wanting nothing, asking nothing from us but a kindly return. The best debt to a benefactor is the debt of gratitude; the best return of kindness is the return of love; the best acknowledgment of a favour is good words and suitable deeds. The best thanks which the earth can give to the sun, rain, dew, and wind of heaven is to be fruitful—to manifest by the goodness of the crops, the goodness of what falls from heaven upon it. So it is in grace: "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me." (Psa. 50:23.) A believing, loving heart, a prayerful, thankful lip, and a holy, godly life are the best returns for grace.

3. But another blessed mark of the fulness of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is, that it is *unchanging and unchangeable*. We read of God that "with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1:17.) As he is, so is his grace. He does not love to-day and hate to-morrow; give his grace one moment and take it away the next; hang it upon conditions, suspend it upon human merit, or grant and withhold it according to creature obedience. Whom once he loves, he loves to the end; and where he has begun the good work he carries it on and finishes it to the honour of his name. We have our changes:

sometimes we are hot, sometimes cold; believing, unbelieving; hoping, fearing; doubting, rejoicing; soon cast down, easily lifted up. As poor, fickle, changeable creatures, we have our changes, and ever shall have in this time-state. But God "is in one mind and none can turn him." "His purposes shall stand and he will do all his pleasure;" for "he worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." (Ephes. 1:11.) Do we not read of Jesus that he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8)? and if he is the same must not his grace yesterday, to-day, and for ever be the same too?

II.—But having looked a little at grace in its *fountain*, we will now look at grace in its *streams*. The fountain is one thing and the stream another; yet without the fountain there could be no stream; and as is the fountain so is the stream also. The prayer of the apostle was: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be with your spirit.*" It is when his grace is with our spirit that we have grace in its *communication*: it is the coming of the stream from the fountain into our heart.

i. Now we may look at this communication, this stream of grace in its various floorings; and to make all plain and clear we will begin with the beginning.

It was then the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which in the first instance *quicken*ed our souls when dead in sin. We never could have communicated divine life to them ourselves. We were too far gone, too deeply sunk for that. As a dead man cannot raise up his own body, so a dead soul cannot communicate life to itself. It needs a divine power to do both. None but he who raiseth the dead body out of the grave can quicken the dead soul out of sin. Is not this the Scripture testimony? "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." (Eph. 2:1.) "For as the Father raised up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will." (John 5:21.) The first drop, then, so to speak, of this heavenly stream which flows out of the fulness of the Son of God, is the drop of regenerating grace. It is compared in Scripture to wind or breath as in those well-known words of the

Lord to Nicodemus: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8.) Similar language we find in that remarkable vision which Ezekiel saw in the valley of dry bones: "Then said he until me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." (Ezekiel 37:9.) Now what was the effect of the prophet's prophesying as God commanded him? "The breath came into them, and they lived;" and that this was a spiritual resurrection is plain from the words: "And ye shall know that I am the Lord when I shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live." (Ezekiel 37:10, 13, 14.) That this quickening breath of the Spirit attends the words of Jesus is manifest from his own language: "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." (John 6:63.) It is then this regenerating breath of the Lord Jesus which makes the soul alive unto himself. Then for the first time "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with our spirit." For you will observe that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is not with our carnal mind: *that* ever remains the same, a body of sin and death, flesh, corrupt flesh, "in which dwelleth no good thing," and therefore not the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. His grace is with our spirit, that "new man" of which we read that "it is after God, [that is, after the image of God] created in righteousness and true holiness." (Eph. 4:24.) This is called our "spirit," because it is born of the Spirit, as the Lord himself unfolded the solemn mystery to Nicodemus: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6.) This is no subtle, wire-drawn distinction, but a very important truth; for unless we see the difference between the two natures, the spirit and the flesh (Gal. 5:17); the law in the members and the law of the mind (Rom. 7: 23), we shall always be in bondage, as looking for holiness in the flesh. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ being thus with our spirit, it breathes from time to time upon that spirit, moves and acts in it and upon it; for there is what I may call a gracious or spiritual union between the two. Nay, it is by the

possession of this spirit that we have a spiritual union with the Lord himself; for "he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." (1 Cor. 6:17.) There is therefore something, so to speak, of the same kind and nature for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to act upon. There is in us, so far as we are born of the Spirit, a new and heavenly nature, akin to the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and thus akin to the Spirit of Christ. As then this Spirit acts upon our spirit, it moves toward him who acts upon it.

Let me point out this quickening, life-giving operation somewhat more clearly and distinctly in detail.

1. When, then, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ first breathes upon the heart, it comes as a Spirit of *conviction*; for you will bear in mind that though "there are diversities of gifts it is the same Spirit," and though "there are diversities of operations, yet it is the same God who worketh all in all." (1 Cor. 12:4, 5.) When, then, the Spirit first comes it convinces the soul of sin, of its lost, ruined condition. He shows it the majesty and justice of God in a broken law; and that it is by that law justly doomed to die, without either help or hope in self. Now, without laying down any precise or particular standard, we may say that however long, however sharp, however deep, however lasting these convictions may be, they never cease until they bring the sinner to his feet—until the Lord is pleased in some measure to manifest mercy and salvation to his heart.

2. We may add, therefore, when the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with our spirit, it is a *Spirit of light and life*; for in his light do we see light, and in his life do we feel life. Nor can we see, know, or feel anything of the grace revealed in the gospel, or our interest therein, except so far as the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with our spirit; for, through the teaching and operation of this grace, a divine and spiritual light is cast upon the Scripture, upon the way of salvation, upon the Person of Christ, on the evidences, marks, and tokens that are there given for our encouragement. There is thus a deliverance from the power of darkness, and a translation into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13); a turning from darkness to light, and from the power

of Satan unto God. (Acts 26:18.)

3. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is therefore with our spirit as a *Spirit of life*. When it comes in the first instance, it communicates what our Lord calls "the light of life." Indeed there is no true light or life without it; for till it comes with its illuminating beams and quickening breath, we are shut up in darkness and death. It therefore makes us alive unto God; brings us out of our state of death; communicates new powers to the soul, and awakens it out of that long sleep in which it had been cast by the Adam fall. And not only in its first actings, but in all its subsequent operations, it ever comes as a Spirit of life. How low we often sink; how dead our soul gets; how unable even to frame a gracious thought, or lift up a hearty cry. When thus sunk, as helpless as if we had never known any one acting of divine life, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ comes as a Spirit of life to renew the soul, to re-awaken it, to pour fresh life upon it, to draw forth the sleeping graces of the Spirit, and to make his poor, dead, and dying child once more alive unto himself. Is not this according to his own gracious promise: "Because I live ye shall live also?"

4. Again the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ comes as a *Spirit of grace and of supplications*. Whenever the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with the soul, it is in it as a Spirit of prayer; it makes as well as enables us to seek his face, pour out the heart before him, wait at his gracious feet, call upon his holy name, be asking continually for the manifestations of his mercy and love. There is no surer mark of life being in the soul than the Spirit of grace and of supplications. You may have convictions, and they be merely natural; you may have light, and that be only in your head. But if you have spiritual convictions springing out of divine light and life, they are sure to lead you to the throne of grace, for they are always attended with a Spirit of supplication, according to those words: "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them." (Jer. 31:9.)

5. But again, whenever the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with

our spirit, it is there as a spirit of real, unfeigned *humility*. We never are really humble till we have seen something of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, "who, though he was rich, for our sake became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich." (2 Cor. 8:9.) The law can never truly humble us. It may distress and alarm our minds, affright and terrify our conscience; but it cannot communicate that sweet humility of spirit which is so marked a Christian grace. Would we be really humble, be truly possessed of that sweet grace, which the lowlier it makes the soul to be the more it makes it resemble Jesus, we must see by faith who and what the Lord Jesus Christ is in himself, and what he was in the days of his flesh. We must go into the gloomy garden; we must go to the Jewish council, Pilate's judgment hall, see the crown of thorns and the bleeding back; thence go to the cross, see the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, there bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, that we may learn of him to be meek and lowly in heart. This is the death-blow of pride, for pride cannot enter the garden and Calvary. As Hart says,

"For should it dare to enter there,
'Twould soon be drowned in blood."

6. But again, where the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with our spirit, it is a Spirit of *contrition* to break the heart. The heart is hard by nature; there is no tenderness in it; no real sight or true sense of the evil of sin; no holy mourning, godly sorrow, or self-loathing, no self-abhorrence or detestation; no knowledge of sin as exceedingly sinful; its hateful nature not being discovered except to the awakened soul. But where the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with a man's spirit, it makes it contrite, breaks his heart, gives him to see the evil of sin, and to loathe it and himself for it. It is, therefore, in him a Spirit of godly sorrow, of repentance unto life, of repentance to salvation not to be repented of—what the apostle calls "being made sorry after a godly manner," [margin "according to God"] that is, according to the will of God, and therefore acceptable to him. No man ever truly repented of his sins except by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ being with his spirit. For was he not "exalted to give

repentance to Israel, and remission of sins?" And O what a mourning grace is the grace of repentance, as Hart says,

"Repenting saints the Saviour own,
And grieve for grieving him."

7. Again, when the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with our spirit, it is there as a Spirit of *confession*. It is his grace acting upon and with it which makes us confess our sins as well as feel their guilt. And is it not good to be able to confess our sins before God? When his holy eye searches the heart and looks into every secret corner, what hideous sins does he see there, and discover also to our shrinking and astonished view? This is setting our sins in the light of his countenance; for it is a spiritual sight and sense of the holiness of God, attended with a Spirit of grace and of supplications which makes a man confess the sins he has committed in thought, word, and deed—sins perhaps long since committed, long forgotten; sins reaching over many years; and especially any particular sins that may lie with great weight and power upon his conscience. Most of God's people have some particular sins, committed either before or after calling, which especially distress their mind, and lie hard and heavy upon their soul. Now as the Lord is pleased to communicate light, life, and power to their spirit, these sins they confess, mourn over, and bewail, with real grief of heart and true penitence of soul.

8. But again, the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ in its sweet streams from him the fountain of all grace is a *Spirit of revelation*. The apostle therefore prays that "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ would give unto the Ephesian saints the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him." (Ephes. 1:17.) By this there is a revelation of Christ to the soul. We can only see the Lord Jesus Christ as he is pleased to discover himself. He discovers himself by manifesting himself in his grace to our spirit; and when he thus reveals himself he makes himself to be "the chiefest among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely." His glorious Person, atoning blood, and justifying righteousness are all seen by the eye of faith when he is pleased

to make himself known to the soul; and he does thus make himself known when his grace is with our spirit. "The truth as it is in Jesus," is applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit. We cannot see the beauty of God's truth, and its divine blessedness, or our interest in it, or what it does for the soul, except he himself is pleased to communicate of his grace. But when his grace is with our spirit, it casts a beautiful light over the truth of God, and we can read the Scriptures by the same Spirit that inspired them. Then indeed and of a truth the grace of our Lord Jesus is with our spirit.

9. It is a Spirit of *love* also. And why? Because we can only love him when he is pleased to manifest his love to us. We can only go forth in fond and affectionate response towards his gracious Majesty when he is pleased to communicate of his own love to our soul. Then we love him because he first loved us. When therefore the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with our spirit, it is with our spirit as a spirit of love; for he is all love, as well as all lovely, and love coming from him as the fountain flows to us in its streams, and then flows back from us toward its Source.

10. Again, when the grace of the Lord Jesus is with our spirit, it is a Spirit of *faith*. This I should have named before, but it did not just at the moment strike my mind. We may in a certain sense believe; but we cannot believe with a spirit of faith, except the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with our spirit. There is a difference between faith and the spirit of faith. Faith always is in a believing heart; but often seems to lie asleep. It wants then animating and rousing up. But when faith is as it were thus divinely animated, then it is the spirit of faith. Thus the apostle says, "We having the same spirit of faith." (2 Cor. 4:13.) When we have then this spirit of faith it is because the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is actively with our spirit. His grace acting and moving in the heart raises up a spirit of faith there. The Spirit of truth reveals the same truth to the soul that God has revealed in his word. When, therefore, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with our spirit as a spirit of faith, the soul looks to the Person of Christ by faith, believes simply and with a child-like sincerity what

God has revealed in the word of his grace. Thus as a spirit of faith, faith enters into the truth of God as God has revealed it, embraces it, twines round it, and brings it with sweet savour and power into the heart. It is therefore like the spouse when she said, "It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me." (Song of Solomon 3:4.)

11. It is also a Spirit of *hope*, because "it hopes to the end for the grace that is to be brought at the revelation of Jesus Christ," that is, not only his present revelation, but his second coming. It is, therefore, "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil." Like Abraham, "against hope it believes in hope;" yea, hopes against despair itself, and against every gloomy, desponding, discouraging suggestion and foreboding.

12. Lastly, it is a Spirit of *love* to God's people, to his house, his servants, his ordinances, his word. It is therefore wherever it comes, wherever it dwells, a spirit of tender affection; for wherever the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with our spirit, it communicates a spirit of love and union to and with all the saints of God. This indeed is the first scriptural evidence of life: "Hereby we know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." These, then, are some of the streams of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ flowing into our spirit.

III.—Now let us look at grace in its *fruits*; for if these streams flow out of the fulness of Christ to our spirit, they will produce certain *effects*.

1. One of the first fruits is a *severance from the world*. Grace finds us in the world, wrapped up in it; indeed we have no heart or affection for anything else. Now the first effect of grace is, to separate us from the world, to show unto us what the world is, lying "in the wicked one." "Come out from among them and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing." (2 Cor. 6:17.) That is

God's word, God's express command; and what God commands he enables the soul to obey. As then Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans, and as Moses forsook the land of Egypt, so when grace calls we obey; and having once left the world, we never go back to it. I insist strongly upon this point, for I am well convinced that if a man is not separated from the world, he gives no present testimony that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with his spirit.

2. Again, wherever the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with our spirit, it makes us *know and love God's truth*. Many persons profess to be the children of God, and to know something about God, when they are mortal enemies to the truth of God. But the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ with a man's spirit always leads him into the truth of God, for it silences sooner or later all the objections that nature and reason may raise up against it. It cuts the very root of all that infidelity and unbelief of which the carnal mind is so full, and makes us willing in the day of God's power to receive his truth into a believing heart. If a man has no grace, he is always cavilling against the sovereignty of God—is always trying to set up human merit in some shape or form. But when the grace of the Lord Jesus is with our spirit as a spirit of conviction, it cuts to pieces human merit; and when this grace comes as a spirit of consolation, it gives us a love for and a submission unto the truth of God, however unpalatable to the flesh. Unless, then, a man is brought to see and receive the truth of God, we have no reason to believe the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with his spirit. A man cannot be a friend of God and an enemy of God's truth. A man cannot be a friend of Christ and an enemy of sovereign grace. A man cannot be Christ's free man unless he knows the truth, for it is the truth which alone makes free. (John 8:32.)

3. But again, whenever the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with a man's spirit, to separate him from the world, and make him love the truth of God, it will make him *bold and decided in his profession*. Until we are under some divine influence, we are always afraid of the opinion of men; afraid of our worldly

prospects being endangered: afraid we shall lose this kind friend, offend that rich relation, or lose that opening in life which seems just before us. We are thus always endeavouring to steer, as it were, our course in such a way as to please everybody and offend nobody, and, above all things, to say and do nothing which may injure our dear selves. Now perhaps whilst in this miserable state, we may embrace enough of truth to satisfy our conscience and enough of the world to satisfy our flesh. But when the truth of God is made precious to our soul by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ received into our spirit, we say, "Come what will, come what may, I will serve the Lord. Let all go: my soul is at stake. Let men do what they may; let me be stripped to the last penny, I will not give up what my conscience believes to be true. I will, as far as God enables me, stick to his truth, for I know that nothing but his truth can save my soul." Thus we are made bold, honest, and decided in our profession of God's truth. When that takes place, it raises up thousands of enemies; but in the strength of the Lord we can go through them all.

4. Again, whenever the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with our spirit, it will produce the effects of *practical obedience*. It will make us live the truth as well as know the truth and love the truth. Men who live in all manner of ungodliness make it manifest they know not the grace of God in truth. The eye of God being upon him night and day, will make a man more or less walk in the fear of God and keep God's precepts. It will bring forth in him those fruits of righteousness which are to the praise and honour and glory of God; make him live, as far as he can, to the praise of him who has bought him with his precious blood.

5. Again, it will *unite him to the family of God*. It will give him to see who are the taught of God—who they are that are under divine influence; for he feels that they are under the same heavenly teaching with himself: and this gives him a spirit of love towards them. He feels there is a family whom God loves and whom he enables by his grace to love him. He sees there is a people with whom he can spiritually sympathise and who can sympathise with him; who have the same exercises, doubts,

fears, and are at times blessed with the same spiritual and heavenly blessings. He understands what they mean when they speak of the dealings of God with their souls; and this brings about sweet communion with them; for he loves their company and feels an interest in them as members of the same blessed family.

6. It will also make him practically obedient to God's word, in all the various *duties of life*. It will make its possessor to be a good husband or a good wife; a good father or a good mother; a good son or a good daughter. The grace of the Lord Jesus with a man's spirit will act upon him so as to make him carry out in the spirit of the gospel all these practical duties.

7. It will also influence his spirit both in *public and in private*, in the Church and in the world; will subdue his sins, smooth his temper; give him meekness, gentleness, and quietness; make him hate strife, and lead him far away from the noisy, the brawling, and the contentious; for such company grieves his spirit and distresses his soul. Thus it will so act upon him as to make him walk not only in all humility and sincerity before God, but it will make him live before men so as to avoid bringing reproach upon the honour and glory of God. And it must be a poor religion call it what you will, be it high or low, Church or Chapel, Arminian or Calvinist, that cannot do this. A religion which brings forth no fruit to God or man, affords no visible evidence that God is its divine author. If God be the author of a man's religion, it will bring grace into his heart and lips, and fruits into his life, that shall make it manifest whence his religion came. It will evidence him to be a partaker of the same Spirit that was in Jesus Christ, and is and ever has been in the Church of Christ, and will show that what he professes to believe and know he has received by a divine power.

And yet with all this, we shall daily feel ourselves to be of sinners chief, and of saints less than the least. Yet as the Lord is pleased to open our eyes, we shall see more what grace is—how pure, how free, and how it all flows simply out of a Three-one God. We

shall see our sins so great, that nothing but free grace can pardon them; our backslidings so aggravated, that nothing but free grace can heal them; our hearts so hard that nothing but free grace can soften them; our path so rough that nothing but free grace can help us over it; and at last death so terrible, that nothing but the grace of God can take away its sting, and make us shout, "Victory" even in its very arms. We shall find nothing but grace can make us holy or happy either for time or eternity. Left to ourselves, we only prove more and more the vileness of our base original. Would we be watchful, prayerful, tender, humble, broken, simple, and sincere; would we have blessed views of the Lord Jesus Christ, feel his love, taste his favour, know the efficacy of his atoning blood, and be saved in him with an everlasting salvation it must be by the free communication of his grace to our souls. Thus we can no more live without the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ than the earth can live without the sun. He must shine, or we have no light; he must revive, or we have no warmth; and he must fertilise, or we bring forth no fruit. Thence time after time there is an outgoing of the single desire of the soul to the Lord Jesus Christ that his grace would be with our spirit; that this grace may be ever flowing forth into us, so as to make us new creatures, dispel all doubt and fear, break to pieces all bonds and fetters, fill us with love and humility, conform us to his suffering image, produce in us every fruit that shall redound to his praise, be with us in life and death, and land us safe in eternity.

This the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ can and will do. It brought him down from heaven to earth to do all this for his dear people; and now that he is risen from the dead and gone up on high, all grace is stored up in him in inconceivable fulness that it may be communicated to poor, needy sinners, who feel the want of it. They are all waiting upon him and looking up to him; and from time to time he drops down his grace to be with their spirit. He sees this poor child in heaviness and trouble, and drops a love drop into his heart to cheer him on his rough and thorny track. He sees another unable to communicate life and feeling to his own soul; he sends down his grace, and the lame takes the prey

and goes forth praising and blessing his holy name. He sees another in grievous distress through the hidings of his face, and doubting whether there ever was a work begun or a spark of grace in his soul; and as he smiles upon him, his doubts and fears give way, and he praises and blesses him for his manifested mercy. Thus, just as the sun rises in the east and gradually mounts up into the meridian sky, diffusing with every ray, light, warmth, and gladness; so this blessed Lord Jesus, as the Sun of righteousness, is ever dispersing the beams of his grace and the rays of his favour; and wherever those beams come, and those rays fall, there is light and life, and everything to make the soul holy and happy. Now a man would act very foolishly if, wishing to have light in his room when the sun was shining at noon-day, he should shut all the shutters, and strike a match to give him a little light for a few moments. Let us not then be so foolish as to look for happiness or comfort in our own performances when the glorious Sun of righteousness is at the right hand of God, and shining thence upon believing hearts. But when the veil is over the heart, it is like shutters in a room: there is no light to show who, what, or where Jesus is. And then need we wonder that men strike a light and make a fire, that they may "walk in the sparks of their own kindling?" But what is God's word against all such? "This shall ye have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow." (Isai. 50:11.)

But O may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ ever be with our spirit, whom he has taught and brought to believe in his name, and then we shall see and know more and more what his grace is, and what it can and will do for us, both now and for evermore. Amen and Amen.

Grace Superabounding over the Aboundings of Sin

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning, July 9, 1843

"But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 5:20, 21

The origin of evil has puzzled and baffled the acutest minds that ever existed; and no doubt it will continue to perplex and baffle the mind of man as long as the world shall endure. *How* evil in the first instance originated, and *why* God permitted it to arise in his fair creation, are mysteries unfathomable to man's finite understanding. It is of no use, therefore, for those who fear God to attempt to dive into these unfathomable mysteries, but to leave them as they stand, insoluble by creature intellect. It is sufficient for those that fear God, to know these three things respecting evil.—*First*, that "sin hath entered into the world;" and that we, as connected with our first parents, are involved in it. *Secondly*, that for those who spiritually know and experimentally groan under sin, as opened up in their consciences by the Spirit of God, there is a remedy, an all-sufficient remedy, in the mediation of God's dear Son. And *thirdly*, that all evil will be eventually overruled for the good of the church, and for Jehovah's eternal glory.

In the latter part of this chapter, the Apostle has drawn a parallel betwixt our standing in our first covenant head, and our standing in our second covenant head; and he shows the miseries that result from the one, and the blessings that flow from the other. But in exhibiting this parallel, and in drawing out this comparison, he shows how much more the benefits that spring from our union with our second covenant head overtop and surpass the miseries that flow from our union with our first covenant head; and, in fact, sums up the whole comparison in the words of the text, "But

where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

The parallel, at which I have hinted, is summed up then in the text; and we find, that there are mentioned in it *three* leading points as to our connection with our first covenant head, and *three* corresponding leading points as to our connection with our second covenant head; and that these are set over against each other. *The abounding of sin—the reign of sin—and death*, as the consequence of that reign, are the three leading miseries which result from our union with our first covenant head. *The superaboundings of grace over sin—the reign of grace—and the eventual triumphs of grace in bringing its subjects unto eternal life*, are the three leading mercies on the other side, which we derive from our connection with our second covenant head.

The subject then divides itself into two leading branches.

I.—What we derive, in the way of misery, from our union with Adam.

II.—What we derive, in the way of mercy, from our union with Christ.

We will look, with God's blessing, at these two branches in their order.

I.—The first misery, which our connection with Adam has entailed upon us, is, *The reign of sin*; for though it is not put down in the text as the first point, yet I find it more convenient to treat of it before the two others.

1. *The reign of sin*. Sin is represented by this expression as a mighty Conqueror, triumphing over all men, and prostrating the whole human race under his universal dominion. And do we not find wherever we go that such is the case? Sin, like a mighty conqueror, exercises sovereign authority over all men, from the

palace to the cottage, from the throne to the dunghill. It not only *exists*, but it *reigns* in the mind of man; and exercises supreme authority over their thoughts, words, and ways, compelling them to yield implicit submission to all its dictates.

But when do we come experimentally to know this painful truth? We come to know it, for the first time, when we come to know what sin is. And when do we come to know what sin is? We never know the real nature of sin, until it is opened up in our conscience by the Spirit of God. In the light of a broken law, and in the manifestation of God's holiness to the conscience, we learn for the first time that we are sinners before him. Now, when the Lord teaches a man that he is a sinner, he implants in him a nature which is holy as God is holy, and pure as God is pure; and therefore we are said (2 Peter 1:4) to be "partakers of the divine nature," that is, of that which is communicable of the divine nature. Now, no sooner is this "divine nature" implanted in a man's soul, than it draws forth the tyranny of sin. As long as the man was dead in sin, there was no opposition to this mighty Tyrant: all his commands were implicitly obeyed, and no resistance was offered to his will; he eagerly fulfilled the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and whatever sin bade him do, that he did gladly and cheerfully. But no sooner is the fear of God planted in the soul, a sense of sin felt in the conscience, and a manifestation of God's holiness brought with divine light and life into the heart, than the vessel of mercy begins to resist and struggle, and tries to withdraw his neck out of the yoke, which this arbitrary tyrant had fastened on him. But just in the same way as naturally, when subjects begin to rebel, the oppressor begins to multiply his terrors, and shew forth his power; so no sooner do we begin, in the fear of God, and under the workings of God's Spirit, to withdraw our necks out of this yoke, than sin, like a mighty tyrant, begins to shew forth all his hideous strength. We may raise about us what bulwarks we please; entrench ourselves with vows, promises, and resolutions; but sin, like a mighty tyrant, while the soul is under the law, batters down all its defences: for the law gives strength unto sin, according to the Apostle's words, "the strength of sin is the law." So that the more

the soul tries, while under the law, to resist sin and oppose it, the more does sin exercise its tyrannical authority to beat and batter down every bulwark and every opposition, with which we may try to resist it. Thus, then, commences a conflict, in which we are sure to be worsted, for it is God's purpose that we should be overthrown; it is his design that sin should prevail over us, and kill us outright; in order that when we are slaughtered outright by this tyrant sin, the Lord may pick us up by sovereign grace, and show us that as sin hath reigned over us, even so must grace reign. The Apostle therefore adds, "*unto death*," which is the second fruit of our union with Adam.

2. Sin is represented by this expression, not merely as a mighty monarch, who holds his subjects in implicit submission, but as carrying a sword, whereby he executes vengeance upon all rebels. He "reigns unto death." Sin reigns in the world unto death. Whence comes temporal death, but through sin? Whence spiritual death, but through sin? And whence eternal death, but through sin? Sin, therefore, reigns in the world unto death—temporal, spiritual, and eternal. But in the conscience also, when the power of sin is made known, it "reigns *unto death*;" that is, death takes place in a man's conscience, and he is brought down into the dust of death, without help, hope, or strength.

In this reign unto death, all God's people are, more or less, exercised; and until they are led by divine teaching into the mysteries of grace, it is a subject that always has and always will puzzle them. They are baffled, that do what they will, sin should still overcome them; that let them vow, promise, resolve, sin still masters them, and overpowers all their vows, promises, and resolutions. This is what baffles God's people. When they are trying to be holy, to serve God, to pray to him, and worship him acceptably, sin still keeps working in their carnal minds, bringing forth fruit unto death; and thus continually casts them down, and breaks through all their oppositions, all their strength, and all their resolutions against it.

3. But there is another word added, which is, "*the abounding of*

sin." What is the figure implied here? That sin is not merely a tyrant reigning unto death, but that it abounds and overflows; like a mighty river, which floods its banks; or, like a common sewer, choked up with filth, which finds its way through, and oozes out through every crack and crevice. So sin abounds and overflows, and makes itself manifest in every thing a man thinks, says, or does. No place is free from the intrusion of sin; not the pulpit, nor the pew, nor the Lord's table. We cannot get into the most secret retirement, but sin will be present. It will intrude itself, more or less, and abound continually, thrusting its hateful face into those seasons and moments, when a man would fain be most free from it; and when, if he could, he would have none but God alone to fill his heart. The aboundings of sin every vessel of mercy must experimentally learn and know for himself; and a most distressing thing it is for a man to learn experimentally, whose conscience is made tender, whose heart is touched by God's Spirit, and who desires to serve him acceptably, in "reverence and godly fear."

II.—But we pass on to consider these three points of comparison and parallel, which the Apostle has brought forward, to show that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

1. He speaks, then, of the *reign* of grace as opposed to the reign of sin. Does sin reign? Does it exercise arbitrary authority? Is it represented as a mighty monarch, slaughtering his thousands and his millions? Grace comes forth a mightier monarch, as reigning over the soul in opposition to, and to the deposition of this tyrant that rules in the carnal mind. And what is grace? Grace is the free favour and undeserved mercy of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, the love which the Three-one God bears to the elect family. Thus grace has special objects on which it is fixed; and it is determined to bring those special objects into the enjoyment of that love which has been eternally fixed upon them. Thus, we can only understand the reign of grace as we understand experimentally the reign of sin; and until we have felt the iron enter into our souls, and known the galling fetters that sin, the mighty tyrant, lays on us, we never can know anything

experimentally, nor rejoice in the feeling of our being delivered from this yoke by the interposition of the mightier monarch Grace. Grace then reigned in the bosom of the triune God before the foundation of the world; *there* it had its origin, *there* it began to reign. And grace reigned in the eternal Covenant, which was entered into betwixt the Three Persons of the Godhead, on behalf of the elect family. Grace reigned also in the incarnation of the Son of God, in the mediation of Jesus, in all his actings, in all his sufferings, in his cross, in his grave, in his resurrection, in his ascension, and in his present intercession at God's right hand.

But, as we have endeavoured to trace experimentally the reign of sin, so we will endeavour to trace also experimentally the reign of grace. As we know no more of sin than as it is opened up in our hearts, and laid upon our conscience; so we know no more of grace than as we are brought into a feeling and spiritual enjoyment of it. Thus, until we have been actually slaughtered by sin, until we have groaned beneath the yoke of this mighty monarch, until we have put up hundreds of cries and thousands of petitions to God to deliver us from it, until we have learned to abhor the exercise of this hateful tyrant's authority over us, and have cried unto the Lord from the depth of a broken heart to deliver us from being tyrannized over, we know nothing experimentally of the reign of grace. Now sin is opened up in the conscience of the child of God in all its minute and secret workings: it is not merely open actions, such as the world calls sin, that are laid upon the conscience of a living man; but sin, in all its secret workings, and minute actings, is opened up in his soul by the Spirit of God, and a solemn sentence of condemnation passed on it. Under this inward sense of sin, the child of God groans; he sees and feels his presumption, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness; his enmity, blasphemy, rebelliousness, fretfulness, impatience, peevishness, and evil thoughts against a holy and a good God. And as all these secret evils work in the heart of the child of God, he groans experimentally under them, and desires to be delivered from their dominion. He wants not so much the deliverance from outward sins, from which God in a great measure keeps him, as a deliverance from the inward tyranny

which sin exercises over him. Thus grace begins experimentally to reign; and it is known, in the first instance, by the opposition that it makes to sin in its inward and minute workings.

The Apostle, speaking of sin, classes it under two leading heads, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Cor. 7:1.) He divides sin into two leading branches: the filth of the flesh, and the filth of the spirit; that is, into sins which we may call carnal sins, and into sins which we call spiritual sins; carnal sins, consisting in the workings of the flesh towards the objects of the flesh; and spiritual sin: enmity, infidelity, rebellion, peevishness, and fretfulness against a good and a holy God. Thus, as sin reigns in these two distinct channels, so grace begins also to reign by checking sin in these two distinct channels. Is the heart, then, going after evil? Does the eye lust after forbidden things? Is the carnal mind panting after the world and worldly objects; and does sin seek thus to reign in the flesh? Grace begins a secret opposition to these carnal workings, by showing how hateful they are in the sight of a holy God, bringing the soul to a real honest confession of them, enabling it to cast its burden upon the Lord, and pleading with him that he would prevent it being overcome by them, and supply secret strength, that it may not be entangled and cast down. So with respect to "the filth of the spirit;" the secret enmity, rebellion, obscenity, blasphemy, and rebelliousness that the soul feels against God and godliness; grace reigns by making these things hateful, and raising up in the heart sighs, groans, and earnest petitions, that they might not break forth, but that God, by his blessed Spirit, would check them and keep them under. But as sin has reigned, so grace must much more reign. Sin, though it may long exercise its authority over us, yet meets at length with a conqueror mightier than it. Grace therefore reigns in the pardoning of those sins which the soul groans and grieves under, in healing those backslidings which it is continually committing, and covering with a robe of righteousness the continual iniquities which burst forth from the depths of the carnal mind. Thus grace is especially manifested, not merely in checking the hidden evils of the heart, but in pardoning them,

blotting them out, covering and hiding them from the face of offended justice, and casting them into the depths of the sea, where when sought for they shall no more be found.

2. But the reign of sin was "*unto death.*" Therefore, in order to find a parallel, grace must reign "*unto eternal life.*" It was the object of the mighty tyrant Sin to kill eternally all his subjects. This haughty despot is represented as trampling down all his subjects into an ever-enduring hell. But grace, as an almighty monarch of mercy and love, steps forth, so to speak, from the bosom of God, meets the arbitrary tyrant, checks him in the career of victory, and plucks the objects of eternal mercy from his cruel hands. Therefore, to meet and check him, grace must meet him on those points where he chiefly reigns. Does sin reign, for instance, in trampling down his subjects into *temporal* death? Grace meets him in this reign, by taking away the sting of death, which is sin, and hereafter raising up the bodies of those who "fall asleep in Jesus," to eternal life. Did sin again reign, in spiritually killing, in utterly paralyzing every faculty, so as to make men "dead in trespasses and sins?" Grace reigns in quickening elect souls, and breathing the life of God into them. Does sin reign in trampling down its subjects into an eternity of misery? Grace reigns against the mighty tyrant, by raising the soul up to enjoy eternal life in Christ!

Thus, grace reigns not merely in opposition to sin, but so as to undo all that sin has done, and to counteract every thing which it has brought about. It thus completes its victories, and triumphs over all the miseries and evils which sin has caused, leading captivity captive. And here is its sweetness and blessedness, here is its triumphant and omnipotent character, that it does not merely counteract sin in all its workings, but triumphs over it; it not merely meets it half way, and fights it on equal terms; not merely resists it, and by resisting checks it—it does more, for it completely overthrows it, and rescues the happy objects of God's mercy from all the miseries and all the wretchedness which sin has brought about and brought into their souls. And this is known experimentally, when grace brings the sweet enjoyment of this

divine truth into the soul, and when the blessed Spirit is pleased to lead it into a knowledge of what grace is, and persuades it of its interest in what grace has done, and what grace is still doing.

3. But the third point of comparison of which the Apostle speaks, is, the *superabounding of grace* over the abounding of sin, "where sin abounded, grace did *much more abound*." Does sin abound? Is it not continually flooding our hearts, and oozing up in filthy streams every hour? Can we live a moment without the abounding of sin? Do we speak? Sin is there. Are we silent? Sin is there. Do we hide ourselves from the world? Sin still intrudes itself. Do we go into business? There sin is still our companion. Go where we will, do what we will, still, more or less, there is the abounding of sin in the carnal mind; and O! the many sighs, groans, and tears which God's people are obliged to pour out on account of the abounding of sin in their wretched, wretched hearts. But "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." If grace merely abounded, and did not "much more abound," it would be, so to speak, like a drawn battle, like a conflict between two mighty warriors, both departing from the field claiming the victory. But grace "much more abounds;" it comes off a triumphant conqueror: it does not merely meet sin half way, and then retire from the contest; but "where sin abounded," grace, rich, matchless grace, "much more abounds," overtopping, overflowing, and superabounding over all the heights and depths of sin. For instance, is our heart (and do we not feel it to be so?) the receptacle for everything base and vile? A cage of every unclean bird? Is our imagination polluted? Is our eye continually lusting after forbidden things? Is our heart continually "hewing out cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water?" Is every thing that is base and filthy, every thing that is blasphemous and obscene, to be found in our carnal mind—working death, guilt, and condemnation in the conscience? Do what we will, do we still feel the horrid overflowings and abounding of sin? Is all that we do to keep it down, like casting a dam over a mighty river, that makes the stream flow higher and higher, until it carries away the dam itself upon its rushing waters? Does sin then abound daily and hourly, in every thought and word, in every look, in every

imagination, in every thing that we do, and every thing that we are engaged in? Sure I am, if we know our own hearts, we shall find sin abounding in every word, thought, and action. Now, if grace did not "much more abound," we might be left under the guilt and power of sin; but "where sin abounded," grace steps in, and "much more abounds." However high the tide of sin may rise, the tide of grace rises higher; however sin may overflow the carnal mind, sin is, with all its oozing filth, washed away "by the fountain once opened for sin and uncleanness," which rises high above the highest tides of sin, and washes white the blackest soul that has an interest in Christ's finished work. If it were not so, God's people must sink and utterly perish; if they did not at times feel the superaboundings of grace overtopping and overflowing the aboundings of sin, they must sink, utterly sink, in the deep waters.

Now, where sin abounds, it brings guilt into the conscience. A man cannot feel the workings of sin in him, without feeling guilt laid upon his soul, if his conscience is tender in God's fear; and thus, day by day, and sometimes hour by hour, as sin works, guilt works also. Is your eye caught by forbidden objects? Is there an adulterous look, an idolatrous desire? Guilt follows. Has an envious, revengeful thought been indulged? Guilt follows, in a greater or less degree, where the conscience is tender. Is there some rebellious, blasphemous, presumptuous rising against God? Guilt lays hold of the conscience, whenever grace has effectually laid hold of it. Is there some secret plan to exalt or raise ourselves, at the expense of another? Where the heart is tender, guilt arrests it immediately. Is there some rash and hasty word spoken in the heat of temper—some unkind expression levelled at a brother—some malicious pleasure in relating his faults? Guilt instantaneously follows, in a tender conscience. It is thus, by the workings of guilt, that we know the aboundings of sin. Men for the most part are ignorant of the inward workings of sin; but not those whose hearts are tender by God's work upon there. Often sin falls heavily on the conscience of the child of God; he does not think it a matter of little consequence, like some who stand high in a profession, but whose hearts are as hard as the nether

millstone. But where the conscience is tender in God's fear, what are called little sins will often be a heavy burden upon the soul. Therefore, as sin abounds, guilt abounds; and as sin abounds sometimes every hour, guilt will sometimes abound every hour. The more that the abounding of sin is felt in its hideous character before a heart-searching Jehovah; the more minutely that the heart is watched, the more clearly shall we see the inward workings of what is contrary to God and godliness; and the more we see of the abounding, the oozing, and the working up of sin from the depths of the carnal mind, the more will guilt and shame take possession of the soul; and in this way are opened up the superaboundings of grace over these wretched evils. The more a man knows of the mysteries of sin, the more will he know of the mystery of grace: the more experimental insight he has into the depths of the fall, the deeper acquaintance will he eventually have of the riches of sovereign grace. In order, therefore, to pluck up these blessed pearls from the bottom of the great deep, we must go down experimentally into the depths of our fallen nature; we must sink, more or less, into this unfathomable abyss, to find the pearl of great price at the bottom. To talk, therefore, of the superaboundings of grace, and know nothing of the abounding of sin; to have grace on our lips, and never have felt guilt on the conscience; to boast of what Christ has done for sinners, and know nothing of the depth of *our own* fall, and the horrible devilism of *our own* fallen nature—is but talking of things at a distance, and not speaking of things we experimentally feel and know.

But where sin has really abounded in a man's heart, and has been opened up to him by the Spirit of God, he stands as a sinner before the eyes of him with whom he has to do. He finds abounding in his heart every thing that is hateful and loathsome in the sight of a pure and a holy God. This makes him want to know something of the superaboundings of grace. And he finds to his soul's joy, that grace "much more abounds;" and that there is no depth to which there is not a corresponding height, that there can be no abounding of sin without a corresponding superabounding of grace; and O! how this exalts the sovereign

grace of God, to find that grace can and does overtop those horrible, unceasing, repeated, and aggravated iniquities, which are daily and hourly flowing out of a polluted heart.

But again. Grace also superabounds in delivering the soul from the *power of sin*, "sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." When grace pardons sin, grace also delivers from the dominion of sin. And how does grace deliver from the dominion of sin? By communicating a secret power, whereby the man is no longer the slave of his lusts and passions, and sin no longer has power to domineer over him. God never suffers his people to live and die under the power of sin; he will deliver them sooner or later from the power of evil. It is true, he always finds sin and guilt in them, and they always groan, grieve, and cry unto God on account of the aboundings of sin. But God will not suffer them to live and die under its dominion. He will deliver them from the dominion of pride, presumption, hypocrisy, and carnality. He will not suffer them to live in anything which is contrary to his holy word, but by making their consciences tender in his fear, he will "keep them from evil, that it may not grieve them."

But it is added, "through righteousness unto eternal life." It is all "through righteousness;" for it all flows through Christ's righteousness. Justice has been satisfied, therefore grace may now superabound, which, unless there were this "righteousness," it could not do. God does not pardon sin, and heal backslidings, as an indulgent parent winks at the faults and follies of his children. God indeed pardons sin and heals backslidings, but it is still "through righteousness," in consequence of the satisfaction which his dear Son has paid to justice. Satisfaction therefore, having been paid to justice, by the sacrifice of the Son of God, iniquity is blotted out, and sin put away. Grace now freely flows to the objects of mercy; and it is in this way only that grace enters into a man's soul. It flows to him through the channel of the Mediator's death, through a crucified Christ. When grace, therefore, comes into the believer's soul, through the righteousness which is in Jesus Christ, he sees that it flows

through the channels of the Saviour's agonies, groans, sweat, death, and blood. Thus, he not only finds that grace superabounds over the aboundings of sin, but that it flows through the sufferings of Christ, and comes through the blood of the Mediator: and that grace could never have so superabounded over the aboundings of sin, unless it had flowed through the meritorious sufferings of the Son of God. It therefore exalts grace in his eyes, that it should have come into his heart through this channel; it makes him see the hideousness of sin that requires such a sacrifice; it opens up the depth of the fall to see that he could only be delivered by having such a substitute; it reveals the wondrous mercy of God, that he did not spare his only begotten Son, but that he gave him up freely that he might bleed and die, in order that "grace might reign through righteousness," and that grace might superabound over the aboundings of sin, to pluck its favoured objects from the depth of the fall.

But it reigns, not only "through righteousness," but "*unto eternal life.*" It lands safe in glory all its favoured objects: whatever darkness befalls them, whatever temptations they may be labouring under, whatever difficulties trouble them, whatever burdens may oppress them; however vast the reign of sin over them, and the abounding of sin in them, grace will reign and superabound unto eternal life: it will not leave them in the conflict, neither let them die in the battle; but it will bring them off more than conquerors through him that hath loved them.

In order, then, to get at these precious blessings, to know what grace is in its reign over sin, and in its superaboundings over the aboundings of iniquity, we must be led experimentally into the depths of the fall. We must be led by God himself into the secrets of our own heart; we must be brought down into distress of mind on account of our sin, and the idolatry of our fallen nature. And when, do what we will, sin will still work, reign, and abound, and we are brought to soul-poverty, helplessness, destitution, and misery,—and cast ourselves down at the footstool of his mercy—then we begin to see and feel the reign of grace, in quickening our souls, in delivering us from the wrath to come, and in

preserving us from the dominion of evil. We begin to see then that grace superabounds over all the aboundings of sin in our evil hearts, and as it flows through the channel of the Saviour's sufferings, that it will never leave its favoured objects till it brings them into the enjoyment of eternal life. And if this does not melt and move the soul, and make a man praise and bless God, nothing will, nothing can. But until we have entered into the depths of our own iniquities, until we are led into the chambers of imagery, and brought to sigh, groan, grieve, and cry under the burden of guilt on the conscience, and the workings of secret sin in the heart—it cannot be really known. And to learn it thus, is a very different thing from learning it from books, or ministers. To learn it in the depths of a troubled heart, by God's own teaching, is a very different thing from learning it from the words of a minister, or even from the word of God itself. We can never know these things savingly and effectually, till God himself is pleased to apply them with his own blessed power, and communicate an unctuous savour of them to our hearts, that we may know the truth, and find to our soul's consolation, that the truth makes us free.

Gracious Attractions and Heavenly Banquetings

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning, May 21, 1865

"I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them." Hosea 11:4

Before I enter into the spiritual and experimental meaning of my text, I shall endeavour to show its connection not only with the context, but with the general subject of the prophecies of Hosea. The main business of a servant of Christ is to open up God's word spiritually and experimentally, for by doing this he takes forth the precious from the vile, and thus becomes as God's mouth (Jer. 15:19); he preaches the gospel, so far as it is attended with divine power, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; he rightly divides the word of truth; and he feeds the flock of slaughter. And to do these four things is the especial office which God has assigned him as a minister of the gospel, as a servant and an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul, therefore, thus exhorts Timothy: "Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." (2 Tim. 4:2.) Similarly does the same apostle lay it down as a part of the office of a bishop or overseer of the Church of God: "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." (Titus 1:9.) It is not then the mere letter of the gospel which a servant of God has to preach, but the word of truth in its spiritual and experimental meaning and power. But though this is his honoured and honourable office, he is not at liberty to affix his own fanciful meaning to this and that passage; for there is a vast difference between the mind of the Holy Ghost in the Scripture and any arbitrary or imaginary sense which we may put upon it. Mere words and especially figures often mislead men. And it is surprising what mistakes are made by preachers not adhering to two very simple rules: 1st, to be

guided by what the apostle calls "the proportion (or analogy) of faith:" "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith" (Rom. 12:6;) that is, let all our preaching be in perfect accord with the grand truths of the gospel, and with what we have been taught to receive by faith as the mind and will of God. This is the grand rule to determine the right interpretation of a passage; for divine truth must be harmonious, and therefore every meaning attached to a text which is not in harmony with the great truths of the gospel must be wrong. But, 2ndly, there is another rule, pointed out by Peter: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God;" in other words, there must be a connection between the literal and the spiritual meaning of a text; for the one is based upon the other, and if we depart from the literal meaning to affix to it an imaginary one of our own, we do not speak as the oracles of God but the fancy of man. A minister then is not at liberty to take a text, and tear and rend it from the context and from the literal meaning of the words, that he may affix to it some fanciful, mystical interpretation, distinct from the connection according to which the Holy Ghost has revealed it in the word of truth. This is not to preach the word of God but our own fancy; and though nothing may be said in the sermon contrary to the truth of God, yet it is not a spiritual and experimental interpretation of the text, but a meaning of our own.

Take, for instance, the words which I have just read: "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them." To understand the spiritual and experimental meaning of these words I must take into consideration their literal meaning, the people of whom and to whom they were spoken, and the circumstances under which they were in the first instance addressed to them. God speaks to them of a particular people for whom he did all this, and of his dealings with them as acts already done. He does not speak, as in prophetic language, of something to be done in times to come, but of something which he had done, and to a people already in existence. We may

indeed apply the words to God's dealings and doings now, and it is right that we should do so, for this, as I shall presently show, gives the passage a spiritual and experimental meaning. But to preserve us from error in so doing and thus affixing a wrong interpretation to the words, we must look at the circumstances under which, and to the people to whom they were in the first instance addressed. This is what I mean by the connection between the literal and spiritual meaning of a text.

With this clue then in our hands, let us endeavour to unravel the words before us.

First, we see that there was a people to whom the words were applicable then, or they would have been spoken in vain, and that there is a people to whom the words are applicable now; for the Bible would be of no use to us in our day and generation if it were a mere record of the past, and if we had no share in its declarations or interest in its promises. If then we can but ascertain who the people were to whom the words were addressed then, it will much guide us in our attempts to discover to whom they are addressed now.

Let us see then, if we can, who the people were to whom the Lord originally addressed them. We read in the verse preceding our text, "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them." The words of our text then were in the first instance addressed to a certain people called Ephraim. Who was Ephraim? Let us see whether we can gather up a little of the meaning of the Holy Ghost by ascertaining from the word who Ephraim was. You will recollect that Ephraim was the second son of Joseph, placed by his father before Manasseh, adopted by him as one of the Patriarchs, and eventually formed, according to Jacob's prediction, the head of a large tribe, occupying one of the finest parts of Canaan, and stretching itself across the centre of that glorious land, just above the portions of Benjamin and Judah.

But you will remember also that when Rehoboam, the son of

Solomon, succeeded to his father's throne, the ten tribes, who are sometimes called Israel, revolted from his sceptre, and that only two tribes, those of Judah and Benjamin, remained firm in their allegiance to the house of David. Now of these ten tribes Ephraim, as being the largest and most important, became the representative. But the next step taken by the house of Israel when it had broken off its allegiance from the house of David, was to choose a king of its own, Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who set up the golden calves in Dan and Bethel, to prevent the people going up to worship at Jerusalem. It was then to this revolting, rebellious people that Hosea was sent to prophesy for about sixty years; and this is the reason why in this book you find so much mention made of Ephraim and Israel—the one term being of the same import as the other, and representing alike the ten revolted tribes.

But there is a deeper meaning in the prophecies of Hosea than all this; for here we find an excellent illustration of the principle of interpretation which I laid down in the beginning of my discourse, viz., the connection that there ever is between the literal and spiritual meaning. For herein lies so much of the blessedness of the word of truth, that it is not a mere record of the past, but a word from God for the present, levelling itself at us and addressing itself to our hearts and consciences. Ephraim therefore stands as a representative, or typical character; for there are typical characters in the word of God, and Ephraim is one of these typical characters, representing a child of God in certain states.

Now let us put together a few hints that may cast a light upon Ephraim as a representative character, as a standing type of a child of God under these peculiar circumstances.

1. One leading feature—in fact, the leading feature of Ephraim was, that he had *backslidden*; and; in the case of the literal Ephraim, backslidden almost into utter apostacy. Setting up the golden calves in Dan and Bethel was an act not only of backsliding, but of apostacy from the worship of the true God at

Jerusalem; and therefore one feature of Ephraim, as a typical representative, would be having a backsliding heart, or being a backslider from God. The literal Ephraim persevered in his idolatry. God therefore gave him up at last to his apostacy, for in about sixty years from the commencement of Hosea's prophesying, Shalmaneser, after a siege of three years, took Samaria, and carried Israel away captive into Media, whence they never returned. As a people, therefore, Ephraim was irreclaimable; but doubtless among them there were secret vessels of mercy, as the Lord told Elijah, at a previous period, that he had reserved unto himself seven thousand in Israel. To them, therefore, chiefly Hosea spake, and to us through them.

2. But there is another mark of Ephraim as a representative character, bearing however much on the same point: "*Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.*" (Hosea 4:17.) This was true literally of ancient Ephraim in the worship of the calves, and in Ahab's time of Baal. But it spiritually and experimentally describes that idolatry of the heart whereby, often before we are aware, we become ensnared and entangled with our idols. Against this John warns us, as almost his last words: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:21.)

3. Another mark of Ephraim, as a typical, representative character, is *his ignorance of his own condition*: "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not." (Hosea 7:9.) He did not see how his strength was gone—devoured by the strangers whom he had fed and lodged, and who had well nigh eaten him up out of house and home. He was also becoming weak and infirm, and yet, like some foolish old men, tried to make himself out to be a young man. Every person of spiritual discernment could see the grey hairs sprinkled (as it is in the margin) upon him, and yet he was the last to see or acknowledge it himself.

4. He is said also to be "*a cake not turned.*" (Hosea 7:8.) This figure is taken from the ancient custom of baking bread, or rather

flat cakes, upon hot ashes, in which case sometimes, for want of being properly turned, one part was almost burned to a cinder and the other not baked at all. He thus resembled the Laodiceans, of whom the Lord complained that they were neither hot nor cold,—neither bread nor dough, neither one thing nor the other, not fit for the church or the world, God or the devil.

But it would take up a whole sermon merely to give you even a sketch of Ephraim as a typical character, which is not my intention, though I thought that a few hints might prepare our minds for a clearer understanding of the words before us. I shall therefore now come to my text, and show from it what God says he has done to and for Ephraim in times past, from which we may gather what God will do to Ephraim in times present. What God has done is what he still does and what he ever will do; for he is of one mind and none can turn him; his purposes will stand and he will fulfil all his good pleasure.

By way then of presenting the subject before your mind in a clear and simple manner, I shall speak,

I.—*First*, of Ephraim's *gracious attractions*: "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love."

II.—*Secondly*, of Ephraim's *divine liberation*: "And I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws."

III.—*Thirdly*, of Ephraim's *heavenly provision*: "And I laid meat unto them."

I.—I have thus given names to my divisions, to fix them more clearly and fully upon your memory; but to speak more simply, God here, recording his dealings with Ephraim, says that he *had* done these three things for him: had *drawn* him, had *liberated* him, and had *fed* him. And this is what God *will* do to his Ephraims now, for those whom Ephraim typically and spiritually represents. He will draw them, he will liberate them, and he will feed them. If we can but find and feel, prove and realise our

interest in these three heavenly blessings, what is better than being drawn into the bosom of God, being blessed with the sweet liberty of the gospel, and feeding upon the provision that God has spread before us in the gospel of his grace?

i. If you look at the verse preceding our text, you will find the Lord thus speaking: "I taught Ephraim also to go;" showing that Ephraim could not move a step except the Lord taught him to go; and that the very power whereby he moved when he was drawn, the power whereby he spoke when the yoke was taken off his jaws, and the power whereby he fed when the provision was laid before him, was all of God. "I taught also Ephraim to go, taking them by their arms." Just as a mother takes her child and teaches it to go, taking it by its arms and holding it up as it puts its little feet one before another, so does the Lord teach Ephraim to go. Would not the child fall immediately that the mother took her arms away? But as held up it can move forward. And how kindly and patiently does the mother teach the child to walk. "Now put forth this foot, now that." And how the little thing looks up and back to its mother's face, feeling its dependence, and yet encouraged to step on at her gentle voice. So the Lord teaches Ephraim to go, taking him firmly by his arms, holding him up by his almighty power, and making his strength perfect in his weakness.

ii. But now observe the words: "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." The Holy Ghost here describes the gracious drawings whereby the soul is drawn into the very bosom of God; and it corresponds with what we read in Hosea 2:14. "Therefore behold I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her." You will observe that in these gracious attractions, the Lord speaks of two ways in which he puts forth this attractive power, which I shall consider each in its place. "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." These are the two instruments, so to speak, whereby God draws into his bosom the objects of his eternal love: "The cords of a man, and the bands of love." The Scriptures speak elsewhere of this drawing; for instance, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." (Jer.

31:3.) Again, the Lord says, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." (John 12:32.) So we find the spouse in the Canticles breathing forth her prayerful desire: "Draw me, we will run after thee." (Song Sol. 1:4.) But in the two passages which I just quoted, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee;" and "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me"—we see the foundation, or rather the foundations of this gracious attraction. The first foundation is *the everlasting love of God*, the love wherewith he loved the Church from all eternity, and gave his dear Son to redeem her by his precious blood. We have the same grand and glorious truth intimated in our text, in the expression "bands of love;" for these bands of love not only signify the love which God sheds abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, whereby he draws, and, as it were, binds the soul unto himself; but the bands of his own everlasting love, whereby he has bound himself in the bonds of an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. And as this is the foundation we may look at this first.

Now if you or I have ever felt the power of God in our soul; if we have ever experienced any drawings of our heart Godward; if we have ever realised any strength, any ability, any willingness to come to the throne of grace, to pour out our hearts before God, and have had any desires, cries, sighs, longings, petitions drawn up out of our inmost spirit which have entered the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, the whole has sprung from God having loved us with an everlasting love. There never would have been a desire in our soul Godward; there never would have been a spiritual sigh or cry put into our heart; there never would have been any longing for a manifestation of the love of God to our soul, unless he had loved us with an everlasting love; for these are the drawings of his grace. And what is grace but a stream from the eternal fountain of love?

But there is another foundation of being drawn, viz., the *cross of Christ*. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." These drawings of the soul whereby it is drawn unto

God, are "the cords of a man," spoken of in our text. I think we shall find something very expressive, as very suitable in the words, for the Holy Ghost here seems to point our attention to the manhood of Christ, and direct our views to the man Christ Jesus, the Mediator between God and men.

iii. By "*the cords of a man*," I understand, then, first, the attractions of the humanity of the Lord Jesus, as made known to our soul by a divine power. God is too terrible in majesty for us to approach him out of a Mediator. There can be no intercourse between a God of such resplendent majesty, such inflexible justice, and such immaculate purity, and us defiled worms of earth, on the mere footing of Creator and creature, Sovereign and subject, Judge and criminal. There is no approach unto God, so as to plead our cause before him, or lay any petition at his feet, except through a Mediator of his own providing, and that Mediator God and man in one Person, the daysman of whom Job speaks, that can lay his hand upon us both. When then we have a view by faith of the sacred humanity of Jesus, and venture into the presence of God with a believing view of the God-Man at the right hand of the Father, as drawn to the throne of grace by faith in him as a Mediator, we are drawn with cords of a man.

But now take the words in another sense, which they will well bear: When God draws his people near unto himself, it is not done in a mechanical way. They are drawn not with cords of iron, but with the cords of a man; the idea being of something feeling, human, tender, touching; not as if God laid an iron arm upon his people to drag them to his breast, whether they wished to come or not. This would not be grace nor the work of the Spirit upon the heart. God does not so act in a way of mechanical force. We therefore read, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." (Psa. 110:3.) He touches their heart with his gracious finger, like the band of men whom he thus inclined to follow Saul (1 Sam.10:26); he communicates to their soul both faith and feeling; he melts, softens, and humbles their heart by a sense of his goodness and mercy; for it his goodness, as experimentally felt and realised, which leads to repentance. (Rom. 2: 4.) These

are "cords of a man," because they address themselves to our tenderest feelings, and entwine round our inmost spirit, so as to draw us near unto God, with all that sacred tenderness, all that sweet affection, all that loving desire, and all those gracious influences, whereby we are attracted, so to speak, unto the very bosom of God, as making himself known to us in the Person and work of his dear Son. If you have ever felt any secret and sacred drawing of your soul upward to heaven, it was not compulsion, not violence, not a mechanical constraint, but an arm of pity and compassion let down into your very heart, which, touching your inmost spirit, drew it up into the bosom of God. It was some such gracious touch as that spoken of in the Song, "My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him." (Song Sol. 5:4.) It was some view of his goodness, mercy, and love in the face of a Mediator, with some dropping into your spirit of his pity and compassion towards you, which softened, broke, and melted your heart. And under these gracious attractions, these cords of a man, the heart was drawn away from mount Sinai to mount Zion; from the terror and confusion, the smoke and bondage which the law creates, into the light, life, and liberty of the glorious gospel, so as to feel the warm beams of the Sun of Righteousness with the droppings of the rain and dew from heaven, producing a softness of heart and a melting of spirit. You were not driven onward by being flogged and scourged, but blessedly drawn with the cords of a man, which seemed to touch every tender feeling and enter into the very depths of your spirit. And why is this? Because it is as man that our blessed Lord is the Mediator: it is the man Christ Jesus, the man who groaned and sighed in the garden, the man that hung upon the cross, the man who lay in the sepulchre, who is now the man at the right hand of the Father, and yet God-Man; for it is through his humanity that we draw near unto God. As his blood, which was the blood of humanity; and as his sufferings, which were the sufferings of the humanity; and as his sacrifice, which was the sacrifice of the humanity; and as his death, which was the death of the humanity; as these are opened up with divine power, they form, so to speak, a medium whereby we may draw near unto God, without terror, without alarm, because God in

Christ manifests himself as altogether love.

iv. But with the cords of a man there come "*the bands of love.*"

When the Lord is pleased to let down a sense of his love into the heart, he puts bands round the soul, and by these cords of a man and these bands of love he draws it unto himself. But what does he draw it *from*? We have shown what he draws it unto—even to himself; but let us now see what he draws it from. Where then does he find Ephraim, and what is he as drawn by his own pen? A poor, backsliding, idolatrous, grey haired sinner; peevish, fretful, rebellious, prone to everything base and vile. But if he is to be drawn unto and into the very bosom of God through the Mediator, he must be drawn out of the state and place in which the Lord finds him, out of a worldly spirit into which he may have got, out of idolatrous affections in which he may be entangled, out of a sad course of backsliding, if not open, yet secret, in which he may have been walking; out of carnality, pride, covetousness, and self-righteousness, and a host of evils that those best know who best know their hearts. Out of these he draws them with the cords of a man and the bands of love.

But let us look, for it is time to do so, a little more closely at this point, and consider *out of what evils* they are brought; for the grace of God is not a dead, inoperative principle, but productive of living fruit. The few hints which I threw out at the beginning of my discourse to illustrate the character of Ephraim may serve to show us from what the cords of a man and the bands of love bring him.

1. You will recollect that I pointed out the leading feature of Ephraim to be that he was a *backslider*. This in fact comprehends the whole of his case; for if we backslide it is sure to be into some evil, if not all evil. Ephraim then is drawn out of his backsliding state by "the cords of a man." How tenderly, how graciously, how compassionately does the Lord speak to backsliding Israel: "Go and proclaim these words towards the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine

anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever." (Jer. 3:12.) "I am merciful, saith the Lord." There are the cords of a man; for what mercy is there except through the man Christ Jesus? How the words appeal to our tenderest feelings! And now for the "bands of love:" "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion." (Jer. 3:14.) "I am married unto you." There are the strong bands of eternal espousals. During all his backslidings the tender care of the man and the unchangeable love of the bridegroom had been watching over Ephraim; and the time is now come to draw him out of all his wanderings and departings from the living God.

2. But I also intimated that another feature in Ephraim's character was that he *was joined to idols*. This was true in the literal Ephraim, in his worshipping the golden calves, which was Israel's national sin, and the damning spot which ever cleaved to the name and memory of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, as the guilty author, until the Lord cut it off and destroyed it from the face of the earth. But it is true also of the spiritual Ephraim; for the love and worship of idols is both the cause and consequence of all backsliding. Now nothing but a more spiritual worship can dethrone the worship of an idol; and nothing but a stronger love can overpower the love of an idol; for we must love something; and if we do not love the God and Father of the Lord Jesus, we shall love some idol god of our own. Here then we see how the cords of a man and the bands of love draw the soul out of its idolatry.

3. But Ephraim also was "*a cake not turned,*" neither hot nor cold, neither bread nor dough. And is not that just the character of a backslider, fit neither for the church nor the world—a burden to himself and a plague to others? But how is he to be brought out of this Laodicean state? By the purging out of the old leaven and being made a new lump—made into a fresh cake, put again upon the coals. (1 Cor. 5:7.) The cords of a man and the bands of love must draw him out of this mongrel state, this half-burned, half-

baked, useless condition, in which he brings no glory to God nor good to his people.

4. The last point which I shall touch is the *grey hairs* that were being sprinkled upon his head and he *knew it not*. Premature old age, possessing the iniquities of his youth, which overtake and press him hard with guilt and shame, was a character stamped upon Ephraim. But how is his youth to be renewed like the eagle's? How shall his flesh, as we read in the book of Job, be fresher than a child's, and how shall he return to the days of his youth? Elihu shall answer: "He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him." These are "the cords of a man and the bands of love." "And he shall see his face with joy." There is the fruit. (Job 33:25, 26.)

But having shown how he is drawn, and *out of* what he is drawn, let us now see in *what way* he comes. Jeremiah shall tell us: "They shall come weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn." (Jer. 31:9.) Then they come with weeping and supplications, self-loathing, self-abhorrence, confession of sin, hating themselves, and hating the evils with which they have been entangled, for their language is—

"I hate the sins which made thee mourn,
And drove thee from my breast."

And yet this kind and most merciful God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ keeps drawing them on with the cords of a man and the bands of love. For now that they are awakened to see what they were and where they have been, a host of fears fills their minds. Unbelief strongly resists, and musters up every argument even against the cords which are drawing and the love which is attracting them. But the Lord still goes on drawing them out of their unbelief, their infidelity, their despondency, their gloomy doubts and fears, and almost at times the very bowels of despair. He has a firm hold of them and will never let them go until he has

drawn them, not only to his feet, but fairly and fully into his very bosom. As the riches of his tender mercy thus lovingly and effectually draw them on, am I wrong in calling these cords of a man and bands of love *gracious attractions*?

II.—But it is time to pass on to our next point: Ephraim's *divine liberation*. "I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws."

i. Ephraim had a yoke upon his jaws. What was this yoke and the necessary effects of this muzzle? These two: he could neither speak nor eat. The idea seems taken from the muzzling of the ox at the time of thrashing corn, when they trode the sheaves on the floor, which prevented the animal both from lowing and eating, a practice, by the way, which the Lord especially prohibited: "Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn." This precept was sometimes neglected, and thus the figure is used as describing Ephraim's case; for there was that yoke upon his jaws which disabled him both from speech and food.

But what yoke was this?

I. We may view it, first, as representing the *yoke of the law*—that iron yoke and heavy bondage which is put upon the jaws when the spirituality of God's law is opened in a man's conscience, and he sinks under its condemnation and curse. Whenever this yoke is laid upon a man's jaws, its certain effect will be to close his mouth; to shut it up, so that he has not a word to say why God should not send him to the lowest hell. For if the spirituality of God's law, the inflexible justice of Jehovah, and a sight and sense of our sins in the light of his countenance are once opened up in a sinner's conscience, it will most certainly stop his mouth, so that he will not have a word to say why the law should not take its full execution, and send him to that awful spot where hope never comes, which, true or false, comes in this world to all. The apostle therefore says, "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." (Rom. 3:19.) How true this is, so that a poor law-condemned sinner has not a word to say, unless it be to cry night and day, guilty, guilty, guilty before God and man.

But you will perhaps say, "Can a man get a second time under the law?" Surely he can; or why should the apostle thus exhort the Galatians before whose eyes Jesus Christ had evidently been set forth, and who "had received the Spirit" (Gal. 3:1, 2)? "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage." (Gal. 5:1.) Backsliding from God, when the guilt of it is charged upon our consciences, will bring us under the old yoke, and shut us up in legal bondage.

2. But the expression *yoke* will also bear another meaning—*the yoke of unbelief*. And O how many of God's dear family who have not perhaps gone very deep under the law, so as to feel its iron pressure upon their neck as sensibly as many do, have had the yoke of unbelief laid upon their jaws. The work of the Spirit is to convince us of unbelief, that is, convict us of its sin, and make us feel not only its guilt but its power. Has not this been the case with some of you here present? You have felt so powerfully convinced of your unbelief; it has been made so manifest in you and unto you as a living reality, as a working principle, that you are fully persuaded you could not, do what you would, raise up a single grain of faith in your own soul. You saw and felt your lost, ruined, and undone state. This was the sentence of the law in your conscience. But how were you to be delivered from it? Perhaps you could not tell; such a veil of ignorance and blindness was upon your heart. But you might have had a little light so as to see that there was salvation for a poor, lost sinner, and that this salvation was all in and through the Son of God and by faith in him. But now came the great difficulty—how you were to believe; for you were well convinced that a mere natural faith was useless here; that there was no power in it; promise for it, or deliverance by it. Now what was the effect of this wretched state of unbelief as thus sensibly felt and realised in your heart? You could not speak. What could you tell about the dealings of God

with your soul? What could you say about the mercy of God, his goodness, and your experience of it: the lovingkindness of the Lord, the blood of Christ, and what he is to those who believe on his name, when you felt yourself so destitute of that grand essential to a knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins—the grace of faith? You were therefore dumb; and when you got amongst the family of God, and one began to speak of some precious promise applied to his soul, another of a striking deliverance into the liberty of the gospel, a third of some very marked and signal answer to prayer, a fourth of his enjoyment of the love of God shed abroad in his heart, you had not a word to say, could not look up, and knew not where to hide your head. You felt cut off; unbelief seemed so tied round your mouth and so to muzzle your jaw, that you could not speak a word of anything in a way of mercy which you had received from God, though there had been times and seasons when you had been a little favoured and blessed. So when you came before the throne of grace and sought the Lord's face as a poor, vile sinner, you were almost, if not wholly dumb. Guilt had shut you up in its iron cell, and unbelief pressing you down, you had no power to pour out your heart before God. O, how sad is this, that at the very place, the only place where mercy is to be found and relief to be obtained, unbelief is often most pressing and most powerful; stopping prayer in its flow, or defiling it as it seeks to find its course. What inward condemnation this brought when you got off your knees and slunk into bed with a dismal sigh. Yet this worked for good. It cut up your lip religion. You could not talk any longer, as many do, whose religion, it is to be feared, begins and ends with talk, evaporates in words; for it lies not in their heart but upon their tongue. Whilst they talked you were silent; yet your very silence was more expressive than their fluent talk; for it showed that the hand of God was upon you which had never rested upon them. Silence has an eloquence of its own. David said, "I was dumb with silence; I held my peace even from good;" and again, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." (Psa. 39:2, 9.) "So Job's friends spake not a word unto him for seven days and seven nights, for they saw that his grief was very great." (Job 2:13.)

And as you could not speak, so *you could not feed*. You heard the gospel preached; the blood of Christ set forth; the sweet promises which are made to the people of God. Minister after minister described your case; sermon after sermon was sounded in your ears; book after book was read and re-read; hymn after hymn pondered over. And yet with all this excellent provision, the finest of the wheat, fat things full of marrow, and wine on the lees well refined, you could neither eat nor drink. And why? Because you had no faith. If your case was described, you had no faith to believe it belonged to you; **if the minister entered into the very first and last a soul, and described your experience feelings of your thousand times better than you could have done it yourself, [???** you had no faith to believe that what you felt was wrought by God in your heart. You could not indeed deny that you had experienced such and such things, but you could not believe that it was a word of grace, or anything beyond what was merely notional and natural. Thus nothing that you heard seemed to do you any good; for the power of unbelief was so pressing, that whatever was brought for your encouragement was all rejected. You had no faith to receive anything for your comfort and satisfaction, however suitable it was: the unbelief of your mind rejected all. Now was not that your case, and had you not brought yourself very much into that condition? There might have been a time with you when, as Bunyan speaks, you were "a flourishing professor;" you could talk most volubly, and talk well, it might be, of what you had tasted, felt, and handled for yourself in early days. But you fell into idolatry; your heart was joined to idols; and God said of you, "let him alone." You left your first love; you got entangled in some snare of Satan; sin became your master; guilt filled your conscience; God hid his face; and the devil muttered, "Where is thy God, and where is all thy religion?" And you had not a word to say before God or man. You could not speak, nor could you feed, for there was a yoke upon your jaws, and this completely muzzled both tongue and teeth. Now if God does not interfere for the poor soul in this case, he must live and die with the yoke upon his jaws. No man can take it off for him, and as regards

himself he is as unable to unmuzzle his mouth as a muzzled ox to work off by his lips the close-fitting gag. But God will not leave his Ephraims to live and die with the yoke upon their jaws. They shall speak, and that believingly too; and they shall feed, and that sweetly too. When then some liberating word comes attended with power from on high; when, according to the promise, the truth makes them free; when the Holy Spirit is pleased to apply some precious promise, and drop in some kind and suitable testimony; when, according to his covenant office, he takes of the things of Christ, reveals and makes him known, holds up Jesus before the eyes, and persuades them to believe in his name, raising up and drawing forth a faith in him, then there is a taking off the yoke on their jaw. This corresponds with that gracious promise in Isaiah: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing." (Isai. 10:27.) How is the yoke destroyed? Because or by means of the anointing. And what is this anointing but that sacred unction of which John speaks as "an unction from the Holy One whereby we know all things?" Under this unction, or anointing, for the word is exactly the same, the yoke is, as it were, melted and dissolved from off the jaws, dropping away under the power and influence of the sacred touch from above. Now no sooner is the yoke taken off the jaws than there is power to speak. It is with the soul almost as with Zacharias of old. For months he was dumb, as an infliction upon him for his unbelief; but when the time came for taking the yoke from off his jaws, "immediately his mouth was opened, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God." (Luke 1:20, 64.) This is putting a new song into the mouth. Now there is something to praise and bless God's holy name for. This is "turning to the people a pure language" (Zeph. 3:9), not the mixed speech of Ashdod (Nehem. 13:24), but the pure language of Canaan. You could not speak this pure language before; but having been emptied, sifted and winnowed from all your Babel speech and Ashdod jargon, and being instructed into the holy tongue, you can now speak a pure language—the language of free grace, the utterance of a believing heart. You can bless the Lord for having borne with all

your crooked ways; you can see how longsuffering, patient, and kind he has been to you—such a rebel, such an ingrate, such a backslider, such an idolater. You now wonder why he did not stretch forth his hand and cut you off as you richly deserved; for you now see, as you never saw before, into what depths of carnality you were sunk, and that out of them nothing but his grace could have delivered you. As a sense, then, of his goodness and mercy begins to drop into your heart and dissolve your soul, there is a sensible loosening of the yoke off the jaws. Unbelief gives way, and infidelity is silenced with its horrid suggestions and cruel, killing objections; despondency, gloom, and despair loose their power and relax their chilling grasp. As, then, the yoke is thus destroyed from off the neck by reason of the anointing, and a dissolving power is put forth by the word of God's grace, loosening the bands of unbelief, there is a corresponding removal of the yoke from off the jaws. Now you find unexpected liberty in prayer. There is an open throne. The way long barred out by guilt and fear seems now clear; for there is an opening made through the veil, the rent flesh of Jesus. Now you find that your prayers are not shut out; that God is not angry with you, but that he is merciful, kind and compassionate, full of tender pity, love, and sympathy. By these things you are encouraged to pray and call upon his holy name more and more earnestly and perseveringly, and find sweet liberty in so doing. By these gracious dealings coming into the heart with some liberating power, enable you to speak to his people, to tell them how good the Lord had been to your soul, how he has borne with you with such infinite longsuffering and mercy, and once more enabled you to bless and praise his holy name.

III.—Now comes our third point, and we shall find some connection in it with the preceding, which I may term *heavenly provision*: "And I laid meat unto them."

You will remember that I said when the yoke is upon the jaw, there is no speaking and no feeding. Now just look—I want you to look into your inmost heart. I want, if I can, to put my hand into your very soul and lay my finger upon some tender spots there. I

want to deal with your soul as the physician does with the body when he examines a patient. As he puts his hand on this or that spot of the chest or back, he says, "Is there any pain there?" How he searches for tender spots before and behind, that he may detect just the very place where the disease lies; and how the poor patient shrinks and winces, and sometimes almost cries out as the sore spot is at last found and touched. So I want to put my hand into your soul to search it all over and find out if I can the tender spots. And have we not all of us tender spots? I know I have a good many; some so tender that I can scarcely bear the least touch upon them. Brother sinner, brother sufferer, are you thoroughly sound? Have you no inward complaint, no tender spot, no little, or it may be large place where disease seems to have fixed itself? Let me then put my hand upon some tender spot. You have been an idolater; you have set up some idols, and perhaps many, in the secret chambers of imagery; you have been caught in some hidden snare set by Satan; you have got into the spirit of the world; your wife, children, business, occupation have been entanglements; these and other household idols have drawn aside your heart from God, and you have fallen into a very cold, barren state. Now be honest with your own conscience and say whether it be so or not. The patient, at least if he has any sense about him, tells the doctor where he feels pain. Why does he call him in or consult him except with the hope of getting good from his advice or prescriptions? To deceive him, therefore, is to injure himself; it is of no use deceiving him. Don't you then deceive yourself, for you cannot deceive the heart-searching God. And if you can but do so, look up; do not despair. There is a remedy for you: don't think your case incurable; don't view it as hopeless. The very sense and feeling of pain that you have in your heart and conscience shows there is some life there; and does not the Lord say, "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" (Jer. 8:22.) Yes, there is balm in Gilead—the balm of a Saviour's precious blood which cleanseth from all sin. Yes, there is a physician there—He of whom David speaks, "who healeth all thy diseases." The most skilful earthly physician may fail, the case being incurable; but not so with the great Physician of souls.

Then lay bare your inmost spirit before God. Have you not got into a cold, backsliding state? Has not pride, or covetousness, or worldly-mindedness laid sad hold of you? Have not these kept back your soul from profitable access to the throne? Have they not hindered you in hearing the preached word from laying hold of what might have been for your comfort? Have they not darkened your mind in reading the word, brought bondage upon your spirit before the throne of grace, shut up your mouth in conversation with God's people, and troubled your soul when sickness or death seemed to draw near? Now here is a case for the Lord, just the very case of Ephraim. And surely he will, if sought unto by prayer and supplication, take this yoke from off your jaws, will make his grace to superabound over the abounding of sin, and lay meat unto you.

But this is the point which we have now specially to consider; for the yoke being taken off the jaws, Ephraim can now feed as well as speak. There was no use laying meat before him when he could not feed upon it; but now the Lord brings the meat nigh. And what meat does he bring?

1. *The flesh and blood of his dear Son.* Did not the gracious Lord say, "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." (John 6:55.) But what an appetite there is for this precious meat and drink, when the yoke is taken off the jaws. How suitable is the blood of Christ to a guilty conscience. How adapted the sacrifice of God-Man Mediator to a poor sinner justly condemned by law and conscience. And how he feeds upon the flesh of Christ thus offered as a propitiation for sin.

2. But the invitations, the promises, the calls of mercy, the *precious truths of the everlasting gospel*, what in a word we may call the provisions of God's house, form also a large share in this heavenly banquet, which is freely spread for every hungry soul. The rich mercy is that God spreads the table, invites the guests, and himself lays the meat unto them. What free hospitality; what a cheerful welcome; for Jesus himself sits at the head of the table, saying to the guests, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea drink

abundantly, O beloved." (Song Sol. 5:1.) And lest any should think themselves unworthy, and stand trembling without, he says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." (Rev. 3:20.) When then as drawn by these gracious attractions, and loosened from our guilt, sin, and shame by the removal of the yoke, we begin to feed without fear or alarm upon the flesh and blood of the Lamb and the glorious truths of the gospel, what sweet food, what suitable provision.

And yet, though strange it may seem to be, the very persons for whom it is adapted are often the very persons who are most afraid of taking it. "O, it is too good! O, it is too blessed! I believe it is for others. But for me, such a vile, guilty wretch, to believe the blood of Christ has cleansed me from all my sins, and his righteousness has perfectly justified me, and that this blessed Redeemer bore my sins in his own body on the tree, so that I stand before God without spot or wrinkle—O, this seems too good news to be true." Thus like a humble, timorous guest at a rich man's table, who is afraid to presume, though he is told again and again that he is freely welcome, we coyly sometimes and shyly partake of, and almost put away the very meat that God lays before us. This is our infirmity; and yet bashfulness seems better than boldness, and timidity more becoming than presumption.

But it is time to draw to a close. Bear then in mind, that you will always find these three things go together, gracious attractions, divine anointings, and heavenly banquetings. When the Lord draws with the cords of a man and the bands of love, when he takes off the yoke from the jaws, and lays the meat at the feet of his repenting Ephraim, it is the same power which draws, liberates, and feeds: "Draw me, we will run after thee." But how can Ephraim run with the yoke upon his jaws? "I will run," says the Psalmist, "the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart." There is the yoke taken off. David could also say, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." (Psa. 23:5.) Yea, he could look forward and add, "Surely

goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." (Psalm 23:6.) May this be our happy experience!

I have this morning endeavoured to open up both malady and remedy—Ephraim's case and Ephraim's cure. Now we may not all have exactly sunk into Ephraim's state, but we must all know something of both sides of the question, both of sin and salvation. We must know something of our own inability to run, that we may know what it is for the Lord to draw. We must know something of our incapability to break off the yoke, that the Lord may have the honour and the privilege of breaking it off for us. And we must know our own inability to feed upon the provisions of God's house, before we can taste the sweetness of them, and sit as acceptable guests at the heavenly banquet.

Now who of you in this large congregation this morning can set to your seal that these things are true? But I am well convinced if there be here those who can testify that these things are true, they must be those who have known both sides of the question, the important question of life and death. They must have known creature helplessness and almighty power, bondage under the law and liberty under the gospel, the helplessness of man to draw, liberate, or feed himself, and the sovereign grace of God in putting round his heart the cords of a man and the bands of love, in liberating him from a galling yoke, and feeding him with the bread of life.

Gracious Dealings and Perverse Requitals

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, August 30, 1863

"In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them." Isaiah 63:9, 10

This chapter opens in a very remarkable manner. A glorious Personage is seen advancing as from a distance upon the scene, who bears himself with noble carriage, and moves onward in princely majesty. To bring the whole scene more vividly before our eyes, the Church is represented as struck with astonishment at his stately appearance, and asking as if aloud, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength."

This glorious Personage, then, is represented as "coming from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah. Edom, or as it is sometimes called Idumea, lay to the south of Judea, and was inhabited by the descendants of Esau. These being inveterate foes to the children of Judah, became types of the enemies of the Church. Bozrah was a large city in the land of Edom, and therefore typical of the chief seat of the Church's enemies. This mighty Man of war, therefore, is represented as coming from the chief seat of the Church's foes, and with dyed garments from their most important city.

He is also "glorious in his apparel," as becomes a conquering King; and appears "travelling," or, as the word properly means, "bending back his head," as if towering aloft, "in the greatness of his strength."

As, then, the Church asks the question, "Who," and what he is, this glorious Personage condescends to answer her inquiry. "I"—Oh that glorious "I!" what volumes are contained in it! for it indicates that the speaker is no less than the great and glorious "I AM"—"I that *speak in righteousness.*" Is not that, too, a proof of who and what he is? For who speaks in righteousness but he, every one of whose words is true, and whose voice is the voice of authority and power? But he adds another description of himself, which at once reveals who he is, in words that seem to thrill through the very soul, "*Mighty to save.*" How can we then doubt that Jesus is here? Who but he could take such language into his lips?

But, as if emboldened by his gracious answer, the Church asks him another question, for she observed that he was clothed in "dyed garments." "Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine vat?" She could not exactly understand why he came before her in these garments so richly stained, so deeply dyed, as if, according to the custom in the East, he had been treading grapes in the wine vat, and had become sprinkled all over with their ruddy juice. But in the same princely majesty and with the same condescending kindness as that in which he had answered her previous question, he replies, "I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them," so it reads in our version, but it should have been rendered in the past tense, I *have trodden* them in my anger, and trampled them in my fury; and their blood has been sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my raiment." "For," he adds, "the day of vengeance was in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed was come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me."

But now the question arises in the mind, to what part of the Redeemer's work and office does this princely appearance refer? What is mystically and spiritually intended by his appearing to the

Church in garments dyed with blood? Does it mean, as I believe most of the commentators interpret it, his first appearance in the flesh, when he bare our sins in his own body on the tree; when he was bathed with bloody sweat in Gethsemane's garden, and when his sacred body was mystically and spiritually, if not actually, drenched in blood as he hung upon the cross? Or has it a reference to his second coming, when he will execute vengeance upon his enemies, and though not literally, yet in a mystical sense, will stain his raiment with their blood? According to the strict connection of the passage, I should say that the latter is the mind and meaning of the Holy Ghost; but I think that, without doing violence to the whole bearing of the chapter, we may well believe that the blessed Spirit has brought before the Church of God here the two appearances of the Lord, not to the exclusion of one, but to the inclusion of both. The Holy Spirit often connects events which, separated by distance of time, are still intimately connected in themselves; as, for instance, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Lord's second coming. (Matt. 24.) So he connects in this chapter the coming of the Lord to save and the coming of the Lord to judge, for in each is the salvation of the Church. Thus his very first words in describing himself as "speaking in righteousness" fitly point to our Lord's first coming as God's anointed Prophet; and surely, as a suffering and sacrificing High Priest, he is "mighty to save," and therefore is fitly dressed in garments dyed in blood—his own blood that he shed upon the cross. But our Lord's first appearance in grace opened a way for his second coming in glory. We find, therefore, the Scripture ever representing that at his appearing the second time he will not only come, "without sin, unto the salvation" of his friends, but also to the destruction of his enemies. Thus we find the apostle speaking, "And to you who are troubled rest with us; when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints and to be admired in all them that believe." (2 Thess. 1:7, 8, 10.) You will observe also that the reason of the connection of the first and second coming of the Lord rests upon this, that each part of the

Lord's work, first, in redemption, when he died upon the cross, and secondly, in manifestation, when he comes a second time without sin unto salvation, was equally a deliverance of the Church: first, by blood, secondly, by power; first, to put away her sins by the sacrifice of himself when he died upon the cross, and thus save her in soul; and secondly, by his second coming, to raise up the sleeping dust, and thus save her in body. The Holy Spirit has therefore connected the two appearings of the Son of God, and here presents him before our eyes both as our suffering High Priest and as our victorious King.

The Church, then, having received this gracious explanation from the Lord's lips, feels encouraged to recount his mercies: "I will mention the loving kindness of the Lord, and the praise of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving kindness." She gives then a reason why the Lord has shown such mercy and loving kindness toward the house of Israel: "For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour." Then follow the words of the text, in which, without further introduction, we may observe, I think, four distinct points, which I shall, with God's help and blessing, lay before you this morning.

1.—*First*, the *gracious dealings* of the Lord with his people; of which you will find, if I mistake not, four distinct instances here brought forward:—1. *Participation*: "In all their affliction he was afflicted." 2. *Redemption*: "In love and in his pity he redeemed them." 3. *Salvation*: "And the angel of his presence saved them." 4. *Support*: "He bare them and carried them all the days of old."

II.—*Secondly*, you will observe the *perverse requitals* which this people, so highly favoured, rendered to the Lord: "But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit."

III.—*Thirdly*, what was the *consequence* of their base requitals in rebelling and vexing his holy Spirit: that "he was turned to be

their enemy, and he fought against them."

IV.—*Fourthly*, which is not in the text, but may be gathered up from the preceding verse—The Lord's *gracious return*: "Surely they are my people, children that will not lie; so he was their Saviour."

I.—"*In all their affliction he was afflicted.*" These words at once carry our thoughts to our blessed Lord as bearing a part in all the afflictions of his Church and people; for the words are not only very expressive in force, but very comprehensive in meaning. "In all their affliction he was afflicted." Take these words as they stand. Give them their fullest import; and shall we dare to limit them? Should we not, in so doing, "limit the Holy One of Israel?" But take them as they stand in all the strength and fulness of their meaning, and you cannot find a single affliction which the Church of God ever has endured or ever will endure which is not embraced in their comprehensive arms. If ever then by diligent searching you can put your finger upon any one affliction of the saints of God in which the Lord was not afflicted, you must take that word "all" out of the text and put "some," or "many," in its place. We will then take the words in the fulness of their strength, and examine how "in all the affliction" of his people the Lord "was afflicted." And I think we may lay it down as certain from the Scriptures of truth that he was afflicted in all their affliction in two distinct ways: first, by actual *participation*; secondly, by sensible *sympathy*. Let us look at both of these points separately.

i. First, then, our gracious Lord shared in the afflictions of his people by *actual participation* of them. The positive declaration, "in all their affliction he was afflicted," would not have been true, or only partially so, unless the Lord, the same Lord who came with dyed garments from Edom, were, by suffering, an actual partaker of their afflictions. But do you not see how this involves the necessity of an incarnate God, that is, God manifest in the flesh? for in order that the Lord might be a partaker of all the afflictions of Zion, he must take upon himself a nature which could suffer affliction. God cannot be afflicted; Deity cannot

suffer; sorrow cannot intertwine itself around the divine Essence of him who inhabiteth eternity. If, then, our blessed Lord was to be afflicted in, and with all the afflictions of his people, he must assume a nature which could be afflicted, and yet be in the closest and most intimate union with his Deity, so that his Person might be one. In our blessed Lord it was not *two Persons*, two distinct Persons, of which one suffered and the other did not suffer, but two natures in one Person. Two Persons would have made our Lord to be two distinct individuals. It was then in his human nature that the Lord suffered.

But let us examine this point a little more closely, for it is full of vital and blessed truth; and we shall see that there were several circumstances which made our Lord not only to partake of the afflictions of his people, but added in a peculiar way to the intensity of his sufferings under them.

1. Affliction is always rendered more painful *by contrast*. A poor man does not feel poverty as a rich man would feel it, if he were suddenly brought into precisely the same circumstances. The dress, lodging, fare, hard work, and scanty wages, a life of toil, sickness and old age without any but the meanest parish provision—such every-day experience of the poor would kill the rich in the first days of their apprenticeship. An invalid confined for many years to a sick couch does not feel illness as a strong man feels it when in the heyday of youth and health he is laid, by a sudden stroke, upon the bed of affliction. We may then certainly assume that contrast adds very much to the weight of affliction. Now apply this to our blessed Lord before he came to do the will of God, and view him by the eye of faith in the courts of bliss, enjoying the sweetest communion with his heavenly Father, in whose bosom as his eternal Son he ever lay, and with the Holy Ghost, with whom, as a Person in the sacred Trinity, he is one in the Unity of the Divine Essence. See him as daily his Father's delight, rejoicing always before him (Prov. 8:30); as ever worshipped by adoring angels, and filling heaven with his beauty and glory. Now view him as assuming our nature into union with his own divine Person, and see the contrast. What an exchange!

The bosom of the Father for the manger of Bethlehem; the worship of angels for the lowing of oxen; the enjoyment of the glories of heaven for companionship with the infirmities—sinless, we know, but still the weaknesses incident to a suffering humanity. Still follow him with the eye of faith through every phase and circumstance of suffering, till you see the bloody sweat of Gethsemane and the agonies of Calvary, and trace in each and all the contrast which so deepened and intensified the woe. The Father's smile, the Father's frown; the Father's love, the Father's anger; the rivers of joy above, the floods of wrath below; once heaven, now hell; the glory with the Father before the world was, the darkened sky, the heaving earth, the racked body, the tortured soul. Who but he could so have suffered? Who but he so endured? Who but he by suffering so perfected?

2. But consider as another reason why the blessed Lord not only in all the affliction of his people was afflicted, but more so than any of them could possibly be, that his pure and holy humanity was of an organisation which peculiarly felt suffering. We see this in nature. Persons of very tender frames and naturally delicate organisation, whose bodies or minds, nerves or feelings, are more than usually acute and sensitive, feel suffering much more poignantly and deeply than those whose sensibilities are naturally coarser and blunter, and as it were constitutionally tempered for rougher and harder work. Grievs and troubles under which one person would sink, another will endure with the greatest equanimity. The very sight of the knife will almost kill one patient, when another will bear the cutting off of his leg without a groan. It is better for some that their natural feelings should not be too sensitive: that their mental fibre should not be of too fine a grain.

But look at our blessed Lord in this point of view: His body and soul were perfectly holy; nor was his pure humanity framed by natural generation, but by the immediate operation and supernatural overshadowing of the Holy Ghost. *Our* bodies and souls are blunted and hardened by original sin. Our minds are coarse, our bodies of clay; rough is the mould, gross the

material; earthen the pitcher, vile the contents. But pure was that "holy thing," that sacred humanity conceived in the womb of Mary; therefore we may justly believe of the tenderest and most exquisite sensibility to suffering. I cannot enlarge; I merely throw out the hint; but if you will view the Lord as "bruised" and "put to grief," and see his tender heart suffering in proportion to the exquisite sensibility of his sacred body and holy soul, you will have some matter of contemplation when you think of his afflictions and temptations.

3. But now look at our Lord's afflictions under another point of view; consider their *universality*. Taking the words of our text in their fullest extent, and with one exception which I shall presently mention, we may safely say that there is not an affliction which his people can suffer of which he had not an intimate personal experience. Is *poverty* an affliction? Who so poor as he who could say, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head?" (Matt. 8:20.) Is it open *scorn* or secret *contempt*? Who so contemned as he who was despised and rejected of men (Isa. 53:3), and who could say, "But I am a worm, and not man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people?" Is it *treachery*? Who so betrayed as he, by one of his own disciples, and that by a traitor's kiss? Is it *hunger* or *thirst* or *nakedness*? Our Lord suffered all three. He hungered in the wilderness; thirsted by Samaria's well; was stripped of his clothing when he hung upon the cross. Or is it *spiritual* affliction, which of all is the severest? How the law discharged all its curses into his breast! How he endured its severest penalty when he was made a curse for us, and hung as a criminal upon the tree! Is the *wrath* of God in itself a very hell? Has it internally if not externally crucified thousands of the afflicted saints of the Most High? Is one drop of the wrath of God falling, so to speak, in a sinner's cup so bitter that he can scarcely live under it? But what is that one drop to the whole cup of God's wrath poured out full of mixture, which our blessed Lord drank to the very dregs? Does affliction consist in the *hiding of God's face*? Who endured that like our blessed Lord in that solemn hour when, as if appalled by the sight of its suffering

Creator, the sun veiled his face, earth heaved and rocked to her centre, and the very dead came out of their graves, as if they had heard the same voice which called up Lazarus now crying aloud in dolorous accents, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Does affliction consist in the *temptations of Satan*? Who, though "harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," suffered as the gracious Lord did from the temptations of Satan in the lonely wilderness, when faint with hunger after forty days' fast? Was he not "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin?" (Heb. 4:15.) So take the whole range of afflictions which may befall a child of God, and cause him trouble and sorrow, and still our text is true: "In all their affliction he was afflicted."

ii. But our gracious Lord endured affliction not only by participation, but by *sympathy*. I have already hinted that I should have to name one exception to our Lord's enduring personally every kind of affliction. There was one peculiar affliction that he could not suffer: I mean bodily sickness, which is a large portion of the cup of sorrow drunk by many choice saints of God. His holy body could and did suffer pain, and that to an exquisite degree, but was not capable of sickness, for that springs from mortality and disease, neither of which infected the sacred humanity of Jesus; but he bore our sickness by sympathy, by imputation. This is clearly and beautifully expressed by the evangelist: "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." (Matt. 8:17.) Sympathy, we know, when the feelings are very tender, the tie close, and the affections strong, enables us to feel the afflictions of others almost as much as, and in some cases perhaps, more than our own; for they may feel a support under them with which we may not be favoured. The sufferings of those who are near and dear to us touch our heart; their sorrows melt our feelings; so that we experimentally know that we can feel affliction by sympathy when we feel it not by actual participation. You are a warm-hearted, tender mother; you have an only child, a dear little boy, suddenly seized with croup; and there he lies gasping for breath, and dying by inches on your lap. What anguish rends your heart as you see his dear little face blacked and distorted, and hear that peculiar cry which has

already been the death knell of your other children! But *you* are not personally suffering; there is no croup in *your* throat. *You* are not gasping for breath as if every one were your last, and as if you could burst through windows and walls to get one draught of pure air. But O what heart-breaking work to witness all this in the dear child! Thus, there is suffering by sympathy, which may be as intense as suffering by participation. And is not sympathy proportionate to love? Little love, little sympathy; much love, much sympathy. Is it not also proportionate to tenderness of feeling? Hard, unfeeling hearts, coarse, brutal natures do not, cannot sympathise with human suffering. Is it not also proportionate to nearness of tie, propinquity of blood or oneness of heart? Look at this in our blessed Lord. Who so full of love; who so tender in pity; who so near to his people by participation of the same flesh and blood, and by oneness of the same Spirit? What tender sympathy melted his heart! How he wept at the tomb of Lazarus! What pity he felt for the widow at Nain, when he saw her only son borne upon the bier! How he compassionated the suffering multitude in the wilderness when they had been three days and had nothing to eat. (Matt. 15:32.) How he dropped the sympathising tear over Jerusalem: "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." (Luke 19:42.)

1. And observe some peculiar features of the Lord's sympathy. As existing in our bosom, sympathy is a very mixed feeling. Sin has not only blunted our sensibilities, but, by its poison, infused into us that almost fiendish feeling which a keen observer of human nature so satirically describes when he says that "in the calamities of our friends there is something which does not altogether displease us;" in other words, to speak more bluntly, there is even sometimes a malignant pleasure in the heart of man in seeing others suffer. Why? Because selfishness secretly whispers, "What a good thing it is that it is not *you!*" Thus sin has given us the malice of a fiend when we should have the pity of an angel. But the sympathy of our blessed Lord was *holy*, for he was holy; *pure*, for he was pure; *perfect*, for he was perfect.

2. Again, we may sympathise with the afflictions of the people of God, but our sympathy is *variable* in time, measure, and degree. Indeed, from the very constitution of our minds and bodies, we could not bear the strain of sympathy long, nor to a very intense degree. The weak cord would snap if drawn too tight, or kept at full stretch too long. But our Lord's sympathy with his afflicted people is, like himself, "without the shadow of a turn."

3. Again, we may sympathise with a few individuals of the Lord's family personally known to and loved by us; but our gracious Lord sympathises with *all* his Church; with the widow dropping her tears over her departed husband; with the "tears of such as are oppressed and who have no comforter;" with the tempted saint under the fiery darts of Satan; with the condemned sinner under a broken law; with those who are suffering under the hidings of God's countenance; in a word, with all his afflicted followers who, through much tribulation, are entering into the kingdom of God. Is it not then true that the Lord's present sympathy is as universal as his past participation?

But what a view this universality and depth of sympathy gives us into the very heart of Christ! How it takes the veil, so to speak, off his gracious bosom and lets us look at his heart within, as his heart without might have been seen beating through his ribs when he hung upon the cross, all stripped and bare, a spectacle to men and angels!

ii. But I now pass on to another gracious dealing of the Lord with his people, which I have named under the head "*Redemption:*" "*In his love and in his pity he redeemed them.*"

The sympathy of our Lord with his afflicted people was not, as too often is our case, barren, inoperative, inefficacious. You may often sympathise, and that very deeply, with the afflicted, but be utterly unable to give them the least relief. The poor mother whose case I was just now picturing, with a child dying on her lap of croup, can sympathise deeply with the dear sufferer, but

cannot relieve it. You may sit by the widow's couch, see the big tears drop, and hear her deep-drawn sighs over her departed husband, but you cannot give him back to her arms. You may visit a beloved friend on a sick bed, and deeply feel for him as you see the cold drops of death standing upon his forehead, and would gladly snatch him from the grave; but you are as powerless as he is in the presence of the last enemy. But it was not so with the gracious Lord. He had power as well as pity; strength as well as love; and it was love and pity in his heart, blended with power in his hands, which made him "mighty to save," invested him with the character and gave him the qualifications of a Redeemer. Look, then, at these two qualifications of a Redeemer—love and pity as unfolded in our text, and see how beautifully and blessedly they were blended in our gracious Lord, as the Redeemer of Israel.

1. Look at *love* first. We cannot understand, except in very small measure, what the love of God is. The apostle therefore prays for the Ephesian believers, that they may be "able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." The word "comprehend" there, I must remark, does not mean to "understand" so much as to "apprehend," that is, "embrace," for this love may be apprehended, but it cannot be comprehended; it may be believed in, but it cannot be understood; it may be felt, but cannot be explained; embraced, but not described. Do we not read that it "passeth knowledge?" When, therefore, we speak of the love of Christ, we cannot look into the depths of his eternal love, as ever dwelling in the bosom of the Redeemer, as we might gaze down to the very bottom of a clear brook; but we seem rather to stand on the brink of a mighty river, or of an unfathomable ocean. In fact, we are lost when we seek to grasp it with our finite faculties.

But when we consider man in his fallen state, we are more amazed still at this stupendous love. What was there in man to love, especially as we view him sunk into, and involved in the horrid depths of the fall? View him even apart from the fall. In

Paradise, as he came forth from the creating hand of the Almighty, and ask yourself what was there in him to love, even as he stood in all the innocency of his pure humanity? Nothing, absolutely nothing, when we compare him with his divine Maker. God saw the work of his hands that it was "very good." But it might draw out his approbation, and still not demand or deserve his love. But as sinlessness could not deserve, so sinfulness could not hinder, the flow of love. Love sought and made its own channel. Look at a noble river—the Rhine or the Rhone. It gushes forth from the mountain side unasked for by any, but it finds or makes its own channel; and as it flows it fertilises every land to which it comes. Fertile lands do not make the river flow to them by force of some innate attraction, but the river makes them fertile, especially in eastern countries, by flowing to and over them. What would Egypt be without the Nile? A desert. But do its rich fields draw the annual inundation, or does the annual inundation make the fields rich? So it is with the love of God in Christ to fallen man. The love of God was not drawn forth by the goodness, nor repelled by the badness of man; nor did it ask whom it should visit, as if it sought the consent or cooperation of the creature. Sovereignty and freeness are most unmistakeably both stamped upon it; for it flowed in his origin as freely forth, as the river which John saw in vision, "clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." (Rev. 22:1.) O what love! how "strong as death!" O the heights and depths, lengths and breadths of that love, of which our Lord himself said: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love." (John 15:9.) And again, in those wondrous words before which we seem to stand as if mute with holy astonishment: "And hast loved them as thou hast loved me." (John 17:23.)

2. But, besides this love, as especially manifested in the work of redemption, there was "*pity*," which gave to it a peculiar tenderness, and made it, if possible, still more suitable to man's fallen state. God loves angels, but he does not pity them. As ever standing in the presence of God, and always beholding his face (Luke 1:19; Matt. 18:10), they need no compassion from his gracious bosom, for they ever live in the sunshine of his favour.

God loves glorified souls, "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23), but he does not pity them, for they are in the enjoyment of heavenly bliss. But he pities poor fallen man; for man is in a very pitiable condition. Sin has laid him low, very low, defaced the image of God, in which he was created, and filled him with every vile and loathsome abomination. This naturally loathsome condition of man is beautifully represented in Ezekiel 16, where the Church is brought before our eyes under the figure of a new-born babe, abandoned by its unnatural mother, and "cast out in the open field to the loathing of its person in the day that it was born." "None eye," we read, "pitied thee to have compassion on thee." The babe did not know its own pitiable state, nor see or feel its own loathsome condition, as it lay polluted in its own blood; but the Lord saw and pitied, for "he is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James 5:11), and "his compassions fail not." (Lam. 3:22.)

But our text says, "In his love and in his pity he redeemed them;" representing the union of love and pity in the bosom of the Redeemer. Thus love and pity seem to resemble two pure streams, which, gushing out of the Redeemer's bosom, met together in one full river, and flowed down to Paradise, there to swell in a superabounding tide of grace over man's sin, and to be revealed in the first promise given after the fall to our first parents. Did not love and pity similarly meet over the outcast babe? "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love." (Ezek. 16:8.) And bear in mind this love and pity are not like ours—mingled with infirmity, subject to interruption, often partial, and sometimes mistaken. It was pure love, it was pure pity, which flowed from the heart of the Redeemer, unmingled with the least infirmity; as wise as it was strong, as unerring as it was holy. It was *Godlike*: "I am God and not man" (Hosea 11:9); and *infinite*, for, like every other divine attribute, it shares in all the perfections of Deity. It was therefore love as infinite as God could feel, and pity as great as could fill the bosom of the glorious "I AM." This love was therefore so vast as to embrace all the Church of God, and this pity so great as to reach down to every member of the mystical

body of Christ, as seen sunk in the Adam fall into the lowest depths of sin and misery. But were this love and pity in the heart of Christ mere *feelings*? They manifested themselves in *acts*, as the Lord represents himself, in the case of the outcast babe, stooping to perform for it the tenderest yet lowest offices. Our love and pity often lead to nothing; they begin and end in *feelings*, or evaporate in the mere mockery of words, like James's self-sparing almoners, with their, "Be ye warmed and filled." (James 2:16.) But the Lord's love and pity led to acts, and especially to that mighty act of *redemption*: "In his love and pity he redeemed them." This brings us to the work of redemption.

But what is *redemption*? What does it imply? In these great truths it is good to catch the leading idea which runs through the whole doctrine—the key note which dominates the whole air. The leading idea, then, of redemption is this, that those who need to be redeemed are in a state of slavery from which they cannot free themselves. A redeemer, then, is one who can set them free either by price or by power. As a Redeemer, Jesus did both. He bought his people with a price, and delivered them by his power. By the Adam fall we became bond slaves to sin. An Israelite might sell himself to a stranger, though not to one of his own brethren. (Lev. 25:47.) So Ahab is said to have "sold himself to work wickedness." (1 Kings 21:20, 25.) In this sense, Adam, our head and representative, when perfectly free, sold himself to do evil, and as we were then in his loins, he being our federal head, sold us also into captivity. But in the law of Moses, provision was made for an Israelite who had sold himself. One of his brethren, or any nigh of kin might redeem him. This points to the Goel or Redeemer, the next of kin, and to the price which was to be paid, that the slave might go free, called "the price of redemption." (Lev. 25:51.) This price could not be small, whether we consider how many had to be redeemed, or the awful depths of sin and misery from which they had to be released. Nor could man do anything himself to pay the debt. For the Israelite who sold himself might also redeem himself, "if he were able." (Lev. 25:49.) Ah! if he were able; but we are not able. How deep the debt none can tell except those who in some measure have felt

the burden of sin. But though these may seem to see and feel a little of the mighty debt, even they have very dim apprehensions of what the debt is in all its awful magnitude; for as debtors in those days, if they could not themselves pay them, were sold to pay their debts, as we find exemplified in the parable of the servant who owed his lord ten thousand talents, the idea of the payment of a debt became included in the term redemption. Thus viewed, God is the creditor; the Law is his demand of the debt; and eternal death the penalty of non-payment. View, then, the debt in all its vastness: the horrid crimes, the dreadful sins, the aggravated iniquities of the whole body of the elect, all which as so many huge claims demanded by indignant Justice, were to be paid for, or the debtors could not go free.

But debt and payment must bear some mutual proportion, be what is called "commensurate," for a little sum cannot pay a large debt. Now nothing shows us the vastness of the debt incurred by the Church so much as the greatness of the price paid to redeem it; for if debt and payment must be commensurate, then the greater the sum paid the vaster the debt. "Ye are bought with a price;" for redemption not only pays the debt, but makes the redeemed the property of the Redeemer. But what was the price? Nothing less than the atoning blood of the Son of God, and therefore having all the virtue and validity of Deity stamped upon it; for he who shed it was God as well as man. Thus, though it was the blood of the Lord's pure humanity, yet all the validity of Deity was in it, for as the Lord had but one Person, though two natures, the blood-shedding was one, the sacrifice one, the merit one, for the Person was one; and thus, though Christ suffered as man, he merited as God. This made the blood of the Lamb an efficacious price, for it derived its value from the Deity of the Person who gave it, and freely, voluntarily shed it, as a propitiation for sin. Thus it is the payment of a debt which God will never require again; and the entire removal of a curse which will never fall upon the head of the redeemed from among men. It is a full and final discharge of all law charges and all demands of justice. O what redemption! God devised it; his dear Son executed it; the Holy Ghost applies it. Blessed scheme; blessed

execution; blessed application.

iii. But we now come to another gracious dealing—*Salvation*. I have rather inverted the exact order of the words of the text, because redemption, as a work and in the economy of grace, comes before salvation. "*The angel of his presence saved them.*" The Son of God, as coming forth from his Father's presence to redeem and save the Church, is called here the Angel of his presence." The word "Angel" does not always mean a created angel—one of those bright and glorious beings who stand before the eternal throne. In Revelation, for instance, the pastor of a church is called "the angel" of that church, as, "Unto the angel of the church at Smyrna write." (Rev. 2:8.) The word translated, "angel," means literally, both in Greek and Hebrew, "messenger." Thus our blessed Lord is called by Malachi, "the messenger of the Covenant" (Mal. 3:1), the word translated "messenger" there being just the same as is rendered elsewhere "angel," as "Mine Angel shall go before thee." (Exod. 32:34.)

But in our text the blessed Lord is called "the Angel of God's presence," or of his "face," as the word literally means. I understand by the expression mainly four things:—1. That the Lord Jesus Christ, as his eternal Son, *was ever* in God's presence; 2, That as the "Angel," or "messenger of the Covenant," *he came forth from* God's presence; 3, That he *introduces* his people *into* God's presence; 4, That he *reveals* and manifests to them the Father's *sensible* presence. But let me open these points a little more fully and distinctly.

1. First, then, our blessed Lord, as the eternal Son of God, was, from all eternity, in the presence of God as no created angels could be. **Angel, as pure Intelligences [or perhaps, Angels, as pure intelligences...]** see God's face as a gracious favour; but they do not behold it from all eternity, nor by inherent right, as does the Son of God who ever lay in his bosom.

2. From that presence he came as "the Angel of the Covenant." "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world." (John 16:28.) "These have known that thou hast sent me." (John

17:2.5.) He is "the Angel of God's face," as Jacob said of the man with whom he wrestled, "I have seen God face to face" (Gen. 32:30); for as his eternal Son, he is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his Person. Thus, "he that hath seen him, hath seen the Father;" for "he and the Father are one." (John 10:30-14:9.) He is "the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4), and "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Col. 2:9.)

3. But the Lord Jesus is also "the Angel of God's presence," as introducing redeemed sinners into his presence. None can come into God's presence except through the angel of his presence—the God-man mediator; for "through him," (and through him alone), "we have access by one Spirit unto the Father." (Eph. 2:18.) In the ancient Persian Court, as we find from the book of Esther (1:14), only a very few persons, as "the seven princes of Persia and Media, who sat the first in the kingdom," were allowed to see the face of the King. The privilege was almost as much restricted in the Jewish court, which made Absalom say, "Now, therefore, let me see the king's face, and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me," as if he could not live without it. (2 Sam. 14:32.) Even in our Court, none can come into the presence of the Queen unless specially introduced. So, spiritually, none can see the face of God except introduced into his presence by his dear Son.

4. And, again, he alone manifests God's presence to the soul, for the Lord said to Moses when he promised that his Angel should go before him, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest," as if where his Angel was, there was his presence. (Ex. 32:34-33:14.)

Thus hence we see how the Lord Jesus is "the Angel of God's presence;" and as he was eternally in his presence, so he came forth from that presence to do the work appointed, which was to save: for "the Angel of his presence saved them;" and as such he was "mighty to save." Those, then, were the words that he claimed for himself as descriptive of his character and work, when the church asked him who he was. "I that speak in righteousness,

mighty to save." He came forth then in order to save; and depend upon it, if he came forth from God's presence as the Angel of his presence on purpose to save, he would never enter that presence again until he had saved. If a King send an ambassador to perform a certain office, he cannot return until he has discharged it. So with our blessed Lord: he did not go back into his Father's presence until he had done the work entrusted to his hands to perform. As he himself said, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do;" and again, with expiring breath, "It is finished." (John 17:4; 19:30.)

And O how blessed it is to see that the Angel of his presence *saves, fully, perfectly, eternally saves*. Salvation is not in man—in the creature; in our own words or our own works; in our own goodness or our own badness. But salvation is in the Son of God. "Who *hath* saved us," already saved us, by his blood and righteousness upon earth (2 Tim. 1:9); and "able to save to the uttermost," by the manifestation of it from heaven. (Heb. 7:25.) O glorious sight! to view by the eye of faith the angel of God's presence coming forth from the courts of bliss, and by his obedience, by his blood-shedding, his meritorious sacrifice and death, saving the Church of God with an everlasting salvation.

But this salvation, so glorious and so effectual, must reach our heart; it must come down into our soul, as the Angel of the Covenant came down from the presence of the Father. But how does it come? By the manifested presence of God: for the Angel of his presence saves. When, then, the Angel of his presence manifests that presence to the soul; when that same Jesus who died upon the cross enters the heart in his love, and blood, and power, then he saves us by the manifestation of his presence as the Christ of God. Thus the Angel of his presence saves not only actually and meritoriously by his finished work upon the cross, but saves feelingly and experimentally by the presence of God which he brings into the soul.

Has he saved you? Ask yourself that question. Has the Angel of his presence come into your breast to bring salvation? Now we

only know salvation by the blessed Lord coming into our heart in his presence, in some gracious discovery of his blood, of his obedience, and dying love. When he thus manifests himself, then we see him and know him. Our gracious Lord, therefore, said to his disciples, "But ye see me; because I live ye shall live also." (John 14:19.) He then who has seen the Lord by faith, and felt his presence by power, is a saved man; for the Angel of his presence has saved him not only actually by the blood of the cross, but experimentally in his own heart.

iv. "He *bare* them, and *carried* them all the days of old." Now comes the *fourth* gracious dealing of the Lord with his people—*Support*. We may thus, I think, interpret the words: "He *bare* them out of Egypt," and "*carried*" them in, and through the wilderness into the promised rest. These two things comprehend every blessing in a way of gracious support, and are in fact the fruit of redemption and of the manifestation of salvation.

1. "He *bare* them" out of Egypt. This is beautifully expressed in the words, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself." (Exod. 19:4.) The idea is of snatching them out of Egypt as an eagle would snatch her young away from the hands of the spoiler of her nest, and bear them away and aloft on her outstretched wings. Separation from idolatry, from bondage, from a state of degradation and abject slavery, is the leading idea of bringing the people out of Egypt, and this for the express purpose that they might be the Lord's people—a peculiar people. So, spiritually, the Lord bears us out of a worse Egypt by his Almighty power. Has he brought you out of the worse than Egyptian bondage of "serving divers lusts and pleasures?" Has he given you some deliverance from the world and the spirit of it, and brought you to himself by the power of his grace? Has he borne you up out of sin—its open commission, its secret practice, its inward indulgence, and broken in some measure the love and the power of it? Has he borne you not only out of the grosser iniquities of Egypt, but its more refined and specious sins, such as creature idolatry, love of art and science, lip-service, self-righteousness, and mocking God by

superstition, tradition, and vain ceremony? Has he borne you, as on eagles' wings, out of all "the idols of Egypt?" for it was a land teeming with idolatry, and therefore an apt emblem of this idol-making, idol-loving world.

2. But "he *carried* them all the days of old." He did not merely bear them out of Egypt, but carried them into, and through, and out of the great and terrible wilderness. Thus, like a tender Father, he carried and supported them, gave them manna to eat and brought water out of the rock for them to drink, when, but for his gracious power, they would have dropped out of his arms, and died in the wilderness almost at their first entrance into it. Now do you take a review of similar gracious dealings with yourself? Look at these things in the light of your own experience, and see how far they bear upon the path in which you have been personally and experimentally led. Look back and see how the Lord has borne and carried you all the days of old—what tenderness, kindness, love, and mercy he has ever shown you. To read this in the light of our own experience is to see our personal interest in the gracious dealings of a covenant God.

II.—But I now pass on to take a view of the *requitals*—what I have called "the *perverse requitals*," with which the children of Israel, types and figures of the saints of God, repaid the Lord for all his gracious dealings with them. "They rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit." O what not only perverse, but base requitals! O what a cruel, provoking recompense for his favours! O how deeply died in sin must they have been so to requite the Lord for his gracious and merciful dealings towards them!

1. "*They rebelled.*" This is just what we do, for there is no use blaming them. Let us take it to ourselves. But how do we rebel? By word or action? By both, but mainly by action, and chiefly by choosing our own way instead of the Lord's way. Rebellion does not consist, as some suppose, merely in angry feelings or unbecoming words; it often consists more in conduct than in expressions. Some think that they have no rebellion against the Almighty because they are quiet, placid people. But with all their

quietness, this placid people can quietly choose their own way and will instead of the Lord's. Then they are rebels. To prefer our own will to the Lord's will, and to set up our own profit, pleasure, or inclination as our guide and rule instead of the precepts of the gospel and the holy commands of God,—this is rebellion. It does not consist merely in fretful thoughts, peevish expressions, and murmuring minds, but in actions, whereby we depart from the right ways of the Lord. What was Saul's rebellion, which was "as the sin of witchcraft?" Rejecting the word of the Lord; disobedience to the expressed will of God. (1 Sam. 15:23.) Tried by this standard, very many are guilty of rebellion, out of whose lips a rebellious word has never passed. They rebel by their actions. This, then, is what the Lord took such notice of: that all his pity and love and mercy toward his people of old did not constrain them to live to his praise, or walk in his fear; but though he had done so much for them, still they were disobedient children, who set up their own pleasures, their own aims, their own desires, in opposition to the right ways and right will of the Lord.

2. And by so rebelling, they "*vexed*," or, as the word rather means, "grieved," "his holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit was grieved and pained, so to speak, so far as God can be pained, by their rebellion and disobedience, their determined disposition to have their own way, come what would. This obstinacy in ill-doing, this stubbornness and self-will, grieved and vexed God's holy Spirit, who would have them to be tender, obedient and submissive. These two features we see stamped upon their whole history. They vexed him also by neglecting his admonitions, by giving no heed to his gracious warnings, by despising his precepts, and by setting at nought his wise directions. Thus by their slighting, neglecting, and hardening their heart against the wise admonitions and gracious instructions of the Spirit in the word, they grieved and vexed God's holy Spirit. I am not going to answer the cavils of cavilling minds as how far God the Spirit can be grieved or vexed. I take God's word as God has revealed it. I read there, "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." (Eph. 4:30.) I believe

therefore, on the authority of God's word, that God the Spirit can be grieved; and so here I read, that they vexed his holy Spirit. I therefore take God's word, and believe that the holy Spirit may be vexed. I admit there is a difficulty in it, but if you can explain every difficulty in God's word, I cannot. I am content to believe what I cannot explain, and receive what I cannot comprehend.

But what is the consequence of vexing the Holy Spirit? He withdraws his gracious influences; he leaves the soul to reap what it has sowed; and as it sows thorns, it reaps briars; as it sows weeds, it reaps thistles; as it sows to the flesh, of the flesh it reaps corruption.

III.—But we will now consider our third point, what the Lord in consequence was *provoked* to do, for "God is not mocked." "He was turned to be their *enemy* and he *fought* against them." We see all through the history of the children of Israel, that, notwithstanding all the goodness, love, and mercy of God toward them, they were always rebelling and vexing his holy Spirit. Then we see that the Lord turned to be their enemy and fought against them, from their coming out of Egypt till the destruction of Jerusalem. In this, as in many other points, they were a typical people; for as the apostle says, "All these things happened unto them for ensamples," or "types," as the margin reads. (1 Cor.10:11.) In their case the Lord became their *actual* enemy and destroyed them, for they were judged as individuals, though as a people they were types. But the Lord never *really* turns to be the enemy of those to whom he is eternally a friend; for there cannot be real enmity in the bosom of God against any of his people. "Fury is not in me" (Isa. 27:4); "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3), are his own words; and where there is no fury but everlasting love, there can be no enmity. But he acts toward them as if he were their enemy. Provoked by their conduct, he displays himself to them, not as a kind Father and friend, but as one whom they had themselves compelled to change all the current of his goodness toward them, and to act as if he were their open and avowed enemy, that they might feel, deeply and bitterly feel, the consequences of their disobedience.

His hand often goes out against them in *providence*. Thus the Lord sometimes afflicts the body and sometimes the substance; for some of whom we would hope well often show a sad covetous spirit, ever grasping all they can, seeking to rise in the world, and apparently esteeming nothing so much as adding to their store. The Lord will often smite such in their tenderest point—their darling money, making holes in their money-bag through severe and unexpected losses and cross providences. (Haggai 1:6.) Others he smites in their families—that tender spot. Or he may turn to be their enemy, as God raised up Jeroboam to be the enemy of Solomon, by stirring up cruel and bitter enemies from various quarters against them. Nay, he may even turn the hearts of his own people—that most cutting stroke of all, against them, so that, instead of loving them, they may even doubt their religion; and instead of holding them fast and firm in their arms, almost shake them out of their lap as if they were deceivers and hypocrites. In this, and many other ways, which I cannot now enter into, the Lord fights against his rebellious people.

Now if they have any right teachings, any truly gracious feelings, this one thing will prove it—whether they fall under God's afflicting hand, or whether they rebel more and more against him. In the case of the Lord's people who rebel and vex his Holy Spirit and he turns to be their enemy, they are brought down sooner or later into repentance at his feet. They hear the rod and who hath appointed it; they confess their sin, they forsake it, and they find mercy. (Micah 6:9; Prov. 28:13.) This opens a way for the Lord to return, as he says, "I will return, and have compassion on them" (Jer. 12:15), which brings us to our *fourth* and last point—the Lord's *gracious return* to his people.

IV.—This is not indeed exactly in the text, but may be gathered from the verse preceding it, where the Lord says, "Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour." And if "their Saviour," a complete Saviour, which he would not be, were he their real or perpetual enemy.

But do look at two points, which seem so peculiarly and blessedly to stamp them as distinct from all other people.

1. First, hear the Lord himself say, "Surely, they are *my* people." "After all, be they what they may in the eyes of others, and even in spite of all their rebellion, and my turning to be their enemy—still, still they are my people." *That* is conclusive. That settles the point. It is like the clinching words of a father after you have been telling him all the faults of one of his children, "He is my child." This closes up all. "I am grieved and vexed," he adds, "at what you tell me; but I am still his father, and cannot, will not cast him off."

2. But observe also what I may call the *saving clause*, which describes their character, and how the Lord marks and approves of his grace in the heart. Though they rebelled and vexed his holy Spirit, still they were children who would not lie. Mark how the Lord put his hand upon that holy principle which he had himself implanted in their bosom—the principle of not lying, the sacred germ of integrity and truth. "So he was their Saviour." Thus, though they had rebelled and vexed his holy Spirit, and he had turned to be their enemy and fought against them, yet there were in him relentings of heart; for "he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he that put his holy Spirit within him?" The holy Spirit within them was the reason that they did not lie. Thus, as partakers of his holy Spirit, the Lord represents himself as looking upon them with pity; in his own time and way condescending to return, advancing in his dyed garments from Bozrah to their help, and, as such, "glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength." Instead, then, of coming to destroy, he comes to save. When they were looking at his garments dyed in blood and expecting next to be trampled in the wine-press of his wrath, he comes with words of grace in his mouth and deliverance in his hands. "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." As speaking in righteousness, all his words are true—founded in righteousness and revealing righteousness; and, as mighty to

save, he saves them from all their destructions, to make to himself an "everlasting name," that heaven and earth might be filled with his glory.

THE GROANING CAPTIVE'S DELIVERANCE AND RESOLUTION

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, Hampstead Road, London, on Lord's Day Evening, July 25th, 1847

"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." Romans 7:24, 25

What a mercy it is for the Church of God that the Apostle Paul was inspired by the Holy Ghost to leave upon record his own experience! And not merely to leave of it a scanty fragment, but to draw it out in that complete manner which we find in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. What a relief it has been to thousands of God's suffering and sorrowing family! What a light it has cast upon the perplexities and intricacies of their path! What a breast of consolation has it been in all ages to God's tried and tempted people, and doubtless will be to the end of time!

The verses that I have read are, as it were, a summing up of the experience traced out in the chapter, and we may notice three points as connected with them:

I. *The cry* that sin and guilt pressed out of the Apostle's bosom: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

II. *The deliverance* that he obtained: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

III. *The resolution* that he came to in his own conscience: "So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

The experience of the Apostle here is so pointed and so decisive that those who are ignorant of it in their own souls, have made every attempt possible to subvert it. Some, for instance, have said that Paul did not mean "himself," though he uses the pronoun "I" again and again. Others have said "that it was the conflict in the Apostle's bosom between nature and conscience, before the Lord called him by His grace;" and yet he speaks all the way through in the present tense, thus shewing that it was a present conflict he was describing. Others have said "that it was a conflict under the law, before he had received a gospel deliverance." And yet, in the very teeth of this, he says: "O wretched man that I am!" not that "I was." "I find then a law," not "I found"; evidently shewing a conflict going on within at the very time he penned this epistle. The real source of all these perversions of the Apostle's meaning is ignorance of a work of grace in the soul. Being conscious that they have themselves no such experience, and that if these things be true they are wrong altogether, they use every means to subvert it utterly.

I. But what made the Apostle *cry* out so feelingly, so piteously: "O wretched man that I am!"? There were three things that forced this cry out of his bosom.

1. *A knowledge of the breadth and spirituality of God's law.* This, we find, he declares in vers. 9, 10: "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died: and the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death." The entrance of God's law in its breadth and spirituality cursed and condemned him. Seeing and feeling his condemnation thereby, guilt forced this piteous cry out of his bosom. Before he was spiritually and experimentally acquainted with the condemnation of the law in his conscience, he was "alive"; that is, he was pleased with his own righteousness, his own duties, his own performances. He did not see that God required truth in the inward parts; he did not know the purity and holiness of the divine character; he did not feel that the law curses for every transgression in thought, as well as in word and deed. The chambers of imagery, with all the hideous monsters

lurking there, were not uncovered; the veil was not taken off his heart; light had not shone into his soul; life had not come into his conscience; and the Spirit of God had not begun His convincing operations within. For want, therefore, of this inward work in his soul, he was alive, because he had never been killed. Now the spirituality and breadth of the law must be felt in every quickened sinner's conscience, more or less. How long he shall be under it, or how deep he shall wade in trouble on account of it, God has not defined, and we cannot. But the effect of the law must be known in every saved sinner's conscience, and that is guilt; "for by the law is the knowledge of sin." If I have never felt the guilt of sin in my conscience; if I have never felt trouble of soul on account of sin; if convictions have never pierced my heart; what can I know, what can I desire to know of a bleeding Immanuel? What is His pardoning love, what His atoning blood, what His rich mercy, what His superabounding grace to unwounded sinners? Thus, just in proportion as guilt works in the conscience, do we at first long after, and then know, prize and enjoy the mystery of atoning blood and dying love.

2. But there was another cause that produced this piteous cry out of the Apostle's soul, and that was the *revival of sin*. There was not merely the feeling of guilt on account of sin past, but there was also the revival and the rankling of sin present. Sin, before the law entered with power into his conscience, lay dormant in him; it was like a viper in the winter—it was there with all its venom, but it was torpid. A man dead in sin, or dead in a profession, is carried down the stream of sin smoothly and insensibly, and like a heavily laden vessel borne along by the tide, he floats so quietly with the stream that he scarcely knows where he is going. Thus, while we were dead in sin, the inward tide of nature's corruption floated us so along into everything evil, that the secret workings of sin were not discerned. Then we were altogether under its power and dominion. But when the law revives sin by putting life into it, quickens it out of its torpid state, awakens the rattle-snake, and it begins to hiss in a man's mind, then he grieves and groans on account of the workings of present sin more if possible than he did from the guilt of past sin.

What is our heaviest trial? I have my trials; and so have you, if you are God's children. We all have our peculiar trials: trials in body, trials in circumstances, trials in the family, trials in the mind; various trials we have each to pass through. But are any of our trials equal to what we feel from indwelling sin? Is it not your daily experience (it is more or less mine) to go groaning and sighing before the Lord on account of the working of sin in our carnal mind? Is it not our heaviest burden to have sin so striving for the mastery; that such base lusts are seeking perpetually to captivate our affections; that such evil desires are ever struggling for the victory in our bosom; that such pride and infidelity, and other abounding corruptions, are perpetually struggling, like a volcano in our breast, to get full vent, and desolate our souls? I am well convinced from soul experience that when sin is felt in its rankling workings in a tender conscience it will bow a man's head; it will make him at times burdened in his soul and distressed in his mind. His daily experience will be, more or less, hanging his head before the Lord, sighing and groaning, and bowed down by the corruptions that work in him, and so powerfully strive for the mastery. And what makes us feel this? The fear of God in a tender conscience. Some men can live, they say, above the world, the flesh, and the devil. Sin is no burden to them; their corruptions cause them no pain; their pride, their presumption, their covetousness, their lewdness, all the workings of depraved nature never draw a tear from their eye, nor force a sob from their heart. Why? Because they lack the fear of God in a tender conscience. Just in proportion to the depth of godly fear, and to the tenderness of conscience before God, will sin be inwardly perceived, inwardly felt, and inwardly mourned and groaned under.

3. But there was another cause that made the Apostle cry out so piteously, "O wretched man that I am!" and that was *the inward conflict*. He describes that conflict in the words, "For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." What a picture of that which passes in a godly man's bosom! that he has in him two distinct principles, two different natures: one holy, heavenly, spiritual, panting after the Lord,

finding the things of God its element; and yet in the same bosom a principle totally corrupt, thoroughly and entirely depraved, perpetually striving against the holy principle within, continually lusting after evil, opposed to every leading of the Spirit of God in the soul, and seeking nothing so much as, at any cost and any price, to gratify its filthy desires! Now must there not be a feeling of misery in a man's bosom to have these two armies perpetually fighting; that when he desires to do good, evil is present with him; when he would be holy, heavenly-minded, tender-hearted, loving, and seeking God's glory, enjoying sweet communion with a Three-One Jehovah, there is a base, sensual, earthly heart perpetually at work, infusing its baneful poison into every thought, counteracting every desire, and dragging him from the heaven to which he would mount down to the very hell of carnality and filth? Why, surely if there be a holy, heavenly principle in a man's bosom (and such there is in every quickened sinner's heart) that knows, fears, loves, and delights in God; and yet to find that in him which is altogether opposed to the mind of Christ, and lusts after that which he hates with a perfect hatred—must there not be sorrow and grief in that man's bosom to feel such a perpetual and unceasing conflict?

Now, these feelings which the Apostle groaned under are experienced by all the quickened family. Blessed then be the name of God Most High, that He inspired him to trace out and leave upon record his experience, that we might derive comfort and relief from it. What should we otherwise have thought? We should have reasoned thus: "Here is an Apostle perfectly holy, perpetually heavenly-minded, having nothing but the image of Christ in him, continually living to the Lord's glory, and unceasingly enjoying communion with Him!" We should have viewed him as a perfect saint, if he had not told us what he was; and then, having viewed him as a perfect saint, we should have turned our desponding eyes into our own bosom, and seen such an awful contrast, that we should despair of ever being saved at all! But seeing the soul conflict which the Apostle passed through, and feeling a measure of the same in our own bosom, it encourages, supports, and leads the soul on to believe that this is

the way in which the saints are called to travel, however rough, rugged, and perplexing it may be to them.

Be assured, then, if you have never cried out from the depths of your soul, "O wretched man that I am!" you are dead in sin, or dead in a profession. If internal guilt, misery, and condemnation never forced that cry from your bosom, depend upon it, the life and power of God is not in your soul. But if there has been, and still continues, from time to time, this cry in your breast, forced out of it by the pressure of sin and guilt, there is in it a testimony that the same Lord who taught Paul is teaching you.

What is your experience before the Lord in private? Never mind your Sunday religion; that can be put on and put off like a Sunday coat. But what is your private experience? What says your solitary chamber? what, your fire-side? what, your heart, in the quiet depths of it, in solemn moments? Is there ever a piteous cry forced by guilt, shame, and sorrow out of your bosom, "O wretched man that I am!"? It is something to be brought to feel this, that we are wretched. There is hope for such, there is help for such; there is a testimony that the Spirit of God is at work in such a conscience, that the Lord Himself is dealing with such souls.

But the Apostle, mark you, was not contented (who can be contented?) with a cry and a groan. Look at the sufferer in a hospital. Is he contented with groaning on his painful bed? Look at the martyr to raging fever. Is he satisfied with the fever that burns up his limbs, and the anxious tossings of his body from side to side? No. Does he not want health and cure? Does he not want something to be done for and in him? So spiritually. To be satisfied with merely saying, "O wretched man that I am!" looks more like the experience of a hypocrite than the godly experience of a quickened soul. We shall want to be brought out of it; we shall want the Lord to appear; we shall want some manifestation of His grace; we shall want some testimony of His favour in our hearts; we shall want some deliverance out of it by the Lord's own outstretched hand, and His bare right arm.

If, then, the Lord the Spirit has implanted that piteous cry in your soul, "O wretched man that I am!" this will follow as a necessary consequence: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" What, then, was it that so pained this holy Apostle? It was the body of death that he carried in him; that moving mass of corruption; that Behemoth raising up his ponderous flanks in his soul, and trampling down all that was good and gracious in his heart. I have read that the idea is taken from a practice of the Romans of tying a dead body to a living one. And O! what must have been the sickening sensation of ever feeling the cold corpse close to the warm flesh; to wake, say, in the night, and feel the dead body tied around the living one, and clasping it in its cold arms! What a sensation of horror and disgust must the living feel from such a punishment!

Now look at it spiritually. Your new man is warm toward God. There are holy affections springing up; there are panting desires flowing forth; there are tender sighs, and longings and languishings after the Son of God in His beauty. And then, linked to it, there is a carnal, torpid, sensual, dead, earthly heart, perpetually surrounding it with its cold, clammy embrace, communicating its deathly torpidity to the soul. Would we pray, would we pour the heart forth in warm desires? The cold paw of this body of sin and death quenches that rising desire! Would we believe, and go forth in the sweet actings of living faith toward a crucified Jesus? Would we in the secret chambers of our heart earnestly seek His face? The cold, clammy embrace of the body of sin and death chills it all, continually impeding every upward movement of the spirit, and clogging and fettering every desire of the heavenly nature.

Now, the inward conflict produced by these exercises and perplexities forces out this cry: "'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' Where shall I look to for deliverance? From what quarter can it come? Shall I look to the law? Oh, no; that curses and condemns me, because I am continually breaking it. Can I look to friends? They may pity and sympathise, but they

cannot remove the body of sin and death; it is too fast linked on for them to remove. Shall I go to ministers of truth? I may hear what they say with approbation, but there is something more wanted to remove this chilling embrace of the body of sin and death. Shall I look to the Scriptures? They contain the remedy, but I want that remedy to be sweetly applied: 'Who then shall deliver me?' What refuge can I look to? Whither can I go, or whither shall I turn? From what quarter can help or deliverance come?" See the embarrassment! view the perplexity of an exercised soul! looking here, and looking there; turning to the right hand, and turning to the left. Yet from one quarter only can deliverance come. And thus, when the Apostle was brought here, when he was sunk down to a low spot and anxiously turning his eyes to every quarter to see whence deliverance could come, God blessed his soul with a view of His precious Son. God the Spirit wrought in his heart that living faith whereby he saw Jesus, and whereby there was a communication of the blood and love of the Lamb to his conscience. And that leads me to the second part of the subject.

II. *"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."* Now what did he thank God for? Shall I be missing the Apostle's mind, think you, if I say that he had reason to thank God for his conflict? I do not mean to say that was altogether his mind here. He thanked God for his victory, I readily and cheerfully admit; but had he not reason also to thank God for the previous conflict? Is not previous conflict a subject for praise? Had he not learned lessons in that conflict which could not have been taught him in any other way? You have felt guilt. Was not that guilt a mercy? You have felt condemnation. Was not that sense of condemnation a mercy? You have been purged out of an empty profession. Was not that a mercy? You have had the chaff of self-righteousness and false faith fanned away by the strong north wind of the Spirit. Was not that a mercy? You have sunk so low in your soul that none but God Himself could deliver you. Was not that a mercy? Surely it is. Whatever prepares the soul for mercy, must be mercy; whatever fits the soul for the reception of Jesus must be a mercy; whatever winnows away the dust and chaff of self must be mercy, for it

prepares the soul for a blessed Immanuel. Then we have reason to thank God for every feeling of guilt we have passed through, for every temptation we have been perplexed with, for every tear of contrition that has trickled down our cheek, for every sob of sorrow that has heaved from our bosom. For every feeling of misery, guilt and wretchedness, we have reason to bless His name; for our choicest mercies spring out of them, and our richest blessings are only blessings just so far as these painful exercises have prepared the soul for the enjoyment of them.

But no doubt the mind of the Apostle was chiefly directed to thank God for the gift of His dear Son: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Now, if you have followed me in my attempt to unfold the cause of the Apostle's cry, you will see there were three things that produced it. There was: 1. *the condemnation of the law*; 2. *the revival of sin*; and 3. *the internal conflict between nature and grace*. Now, when he thanks God through Jesus Christ, he thanks Him for having provided a remedy for each and all in the Person, work and mediation of His only-begotten Son.

1. Look at the *guilt of sin*. How can we be delivered from the guilt of sin, the curse of the law, its holy condemnation, and its thundering vengeance? By no other way than by the blood of the Lamb, that precious blood which "cleanseth from all sin," that only propitiation, that wondrous sacrifice which the Son of God offered on Calvary's tree. There is no other way to obtain pardon; there is no other way to find peace; there is no other mode of enjoying reconciliation with God; there is no other way by which the law's thunderings are to be silenced, the curse removed, and the condemnation blotted out. The peace-speaking blood of Immanuel in the conscience is the only remedy for the soul that knows painfully the curse of the law, and the condemnation produced by it.

2. And so with respect to the *revival of sin*. What does the revival of sin teach us? Does it not teach us this (as the Apostle says, Rom. 5:21): "Where sin abounded, grace did much more

abound." How am I to know the superaboundings of grace—the lengths, breadths, depths and heights of dying love? Must I not know them by finding painfully and personally the abounding of sin? Then, just in proportion as I am daily led into a knowledge of the depth of the Fall; as I feel the workings of sin in my carnal mind, and find how it abounds in me; just in that proportion only can I know, and value when I know, the superaboundings of grace. It is a mercy, therefore, to know the workings of sin in our hearts. Men may cast their contemptuous reflection on what they call "corruption." But I am sure of this, that in order to prize grace and value Jesus, to love Him as "the chiefest among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely," we must know personally and painfully the abounding of sin and corruption in our carnal mind. The greater the sinner, the greater the saint; the deeper the fall, the higher the recovery; the more painful the sensations of guilt that the conscience experiences, the more is the balmy blood of Immanuel prized. So that not to know corruption in its painful workings, is not to know pardon, peace, or the superaboundings of sovereign grace.

3. So with respect to the *internal conflict*. The Apostle saw "there was no condemnation to them that were in Christ Jesus"; that though they were tried and tempted, though they were harassed and exercised, though an unceasing conflict took place in their bosom, yet they were not to be condemned for it, for they were interested in the love and blood of the Lamb.

III. But this leads me to *the solemn resolution* that Paul came to. Just observe, he had experienced two things in his soul. He had experienced the curse of the law and the blessing of the gospel; the abounding of sin and the superaboundings of grace; the knowledge of himself and the knowledge of Christ. Now, the knowledge of these two things brought him, in his conscience, to this solemn resolution: "So then, with my mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." Does the Apostle mean by these words to justify sin? Does he intend to say that he was now settled at his ease? That he had a corrupt nature which loved sin, and therefore might sometimes gratify that; and had a

divine and holy nature which loved holiness, and therefore might some times indulge that? That he was sitting at ease in his armchair, comfortably "established" (as it is called), and did not trouble himself about the workings of sin in his old man, but quietly attended to the workings of the Spirit in the new? I cannot think so; I do not believe that the words contain an expression of contentment. They are rather this: a feeling in his soul that there was no alteration to be obtained in this life with respect to the conflict he had to endure; that he never was to expect to rise beyond a warfare; that as long as he lived below there would be in him a body of sin and death—the law of sin working in his members and warring continually against the law of his mind. But it was not a settling down upon his lees; it was not a mere resting upon the doctrine of the old man and the new; it was not a throwing away of the arms of spiritual warfare. Not so; but it was a coming to this solemn conclusion in his mind: "I have two warring principles within me." He did not know it clearly before. It was then opened up to him; light shone into his soul, and brought him to see that his old man never would be any better; and therefore that he with his flesh would serve the law of sin, though with his mind he would serve the law of God.

Now let us look at these two things. The "mind" here means the new nature, that holy principle which God the Spirit implants in a man's heart. With this we serve the law of God. This new man is holy, heavenly, pure, and spiritual, delighting in God, panting and seeking after communion with Jesus. It bears injuries, submits to unkind treatment, puts its mouth in the dust, and possesses a measure of conformity to Christ's image. Thus the Apostle says, "I myself—I, Paul—viewed as a Christian, as a believer in Jesus—I, with my mind, with my new nature, with that holy, heavenly principle which God has implanted in my breast, serve the law of God. I acknowledge the Word of God to be my rule and guide. I desire to know His will, and to do it. I seek to obey Him in all things; I strive to please, to honour, and to glorify Him. His will is my will, His commands are my commands, and what He leads me into, that I gladly perform." Now, this is just the spirit and bent of a gracious man's "mind" of his new nature. Praise, prayer,

spiritual-mindedness, love to God's saints, desire to walk in godly fear; this is the being, the element of the new man. With this mind, or new man, a believer serves the law of God. All feelings of holy reverence and godly fear; all the actings of faith, hope and love; all contrition and humility; all self-loathing and abhorrence; all desires to know God, to please Him, and to enjoy Him; everything spiritual, everything gracious, dwells in the new man. And thus we at times feel (do we not?) heavenly things our element, spiritual things our chief joy, the blood of the Lamb our greatest delight, and the Word of God the rule of our obedience. Thus "with the mind we serve the law of God."

But as long as we live in the body we have another principle, quite distinct from it, which the Apostle here calls the "flesh"—our fallen corrupt nature, our depraved heart, which ever was and ever will be a sink of iniquity, a sewer, a charnel-house of corruption and incurable depravity. Now, "with our flesh"—with this corrupt nature—"we serve the law of sin;" not gladly, that is another matter. The Apostle does not say that he serves "sin," but that he serves "the law of sin." These are different things. To serve "sin," and to serve "the law of sin," are very different matters. The internal principle is one thing, external acts are another. The lustings of your heart unto evil, and putting into practice those lusts, are two very different things. Sin working in your heart, and sin acted in your body, are quite distinct. The Apostle does not say he serves sin. If we are the servants of sin, we are the children of wrath. "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." But still we "serve the law of sin," though we do not serve sin itself. The "law of sin" is that internal principle of sin in the bosom (if I may use the expression), "the spirit of sin," that subtle principle that is perpetually at work, seeking to regain its ancient mastery. Every infidel thought, every blasphemous imagination, every vile idea, every lewd desire, every covetous wish, every rising of pride, every movement of inward hypocrisy, every going out of love to the world, every secret exaltation of self (and who does not painfully know these inward workings?), are a part of the "law of sin." This law works in the carnal mind, subtilly insinuating itself into every crevice, and is a law to our flesh, constraining it, as a

law constrains obedience to its authority, working in our carnal mind in the same intricate way as the blessed Spirit works in the new man of grace.

And this we shall serve to our dying day. But is servitude a pleasure? Does the slave hug his chain? The poor African torn from his native land, and transported across the Atlantic, is he pleased with the hold of the slave-ship? Is he not pining after light and liberty? So spiritually. Does the Apostle mean that it was his happiness, his pleasure, his delight, to serve the law of sin? Does he so mean to distinguish the two principles as to say, "I can be happy with God in a chapel to-day, and happy with the Devil in a pot-house to-morrow"? Does he mean to say, "I can live in an atmosphere of spirituality one moment, and plunge into a brothel the next"? No; there is no such spirit in it. When he says, "I serve the law of sin," he speaks of himself as one entangled contrary to his own wishes; torn, like a poor African, from hearth and home, taken captive by sin and Satan, and chained in the hold of the slave-ship, an unwilling captive, a groaning prisoner, who would fain get free, and yet finds the subtle spirit of internal sin and corruption perpetually seeking to regain the mastery over him.

Be assured of this, if you can serve sin without sorrow, you have not the Spirit of Christ in you; you are still "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." If the gratification of your secret lusts cost you no pain; if the workings of your base nature never force a tear from your eye, or a groan from your bosom, depend upon it you are not where Paul was. Servitude is a galling fetter. The iron chain of slavery often enters into the soul, and we never can be happy until we are delivered from the galling yoke. So that the Apostle, in making this solemn resolution, "With the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin," does not mean for a single moment to encourage licentiousness. He does not hold out that we may live in sin, and gratify our lusts, and yet be manifestly the children of God. Look at the sixth chapter of Romans, where the whole bent of this argument is against being under the power of sin. But what he

means is this: that as long as he is upon earth he will have a body of sin and death; as long as he is in the flesh he will know the painful workings of corruption; and he submits to it, looking forward to that happy day when the corrupt body shall drop into the dust, and the soul shall enter into unspeakable bliss, reserved for the family of God.

I would ask in all sincerity (and may God in mercy apply it to your consciences), what you and I know of this experience? Why is it in the Bible? Why has God left it upon record? Is it not that we may try ourselves by it, and thus be brought to the test? Let us look at the experience of the Apostle, and see if we know it. Look at the three points; God enable you to see whether you know them experimentally.

1. What do you know of being a poor, wretched, guilty, miserable sinner? This is the first thing to be learnt in Christ's school. You cannot overstep that. You may as well try to read without learning the alphabet, as think you can know Christ without knowing guilt and condemnation. Then what do you know of this step? "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" You say you do know it. Blessed are you if God the Spirit has wrought this experience only in your soul! It will lead on to better things. It will end in brighter things. We must, in Christ's school, begin with the lowest form, and then be led on, step by step, and line by line, to learn the lessons which the Spirit of God teaches all the ransomed family.

2. But can you get a step further: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord"? No sweet testimony? no precious deliverance? no gracious intimations? no marks of heavenly favour? no love to Jesus? Has His name never been precious to you? the savour of it never "like the ointment poured forth"? What! is the Son of God without form and comeliness to you? When you see Him, is there no beauty in Him that you should desire Him? What! no pantings after His sweet presence? no longings after His manifested favour? no cries to feel the power of His atoning blood? no secret pantings in your soul after the discovery of His mercy and grace?

Now, if you know something of this experience, you can say with the Apostle, in a measure: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." There is a door of escape open. There is a way of refuge from misery, guilt and condemnation. There is a way—the Lord of life and glory, the Mediator between God and man, the Great High Priest over the house of God, He who is able to save unto the uttermost, the ever-living Intercessor, the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. What! no faith in Him? no desires after Him? Surely, surely, if God the Spirit is your teacher, there is this going on in the quiet depths of your conscience.

3. Then you will have to come to this resolution: "With the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." "I desire to know His will, and to do it, to submit, to His righteous dealings with me, to walk in the light of His countenance, and live under the shinings of His favour. And yet, in all, with all, and in the midst of all, I find and feel a contrary nature, a vile heart of unbelief; proud, hypocritical, presumptuous, covetous; a lustful eye, perpetually captivating my affections, ensnaring my soul, and inflicting cruel wounds in my heart and conscience." And yet you must bear the burden, endure the load, and look forward to the day of your deliverance. Nay, God in mercy overrules these painful exercises for the good of His people. Where would be your humility, where would be your self-loathing, where would be your contrition, brokenness, and godly fear? where would be your shame of face and abasement of soul before a holy God, if you did not carry within you these painful testimonies that you are the very chief of sinners, and less than the least of all saints? Why, you would be throwing stones at everyone from your own little hill of holiness. Therefore, let men say what they will, and let presumptuous professors shoot out arrows of bitter scorn against it, we have reason to thank God for the knowledge of our corruption; we have reason to bless His name that He has humbled us by showing it; and we have reason to thank Him that He has shed that light into our souls, and given that life in our conscience, whereby sin is, in a measure, ever brought to light, mourned over, hated, and repented of. Thus we shall walk softly before God all our days "in the bitterness of our soul," and thus

be neither swallowed up by despair on the one hand, nor inflated with presumption on the other. To walk so is to walk safely. We then come to this solemn resolution: "I with my mind serve the law of God—that is my element—yet with the flesh I have painfully to serve the law of sin—and that is my misery. To serve the law of God is my joy; to serve the law of sin is my sorrow. To serve the law of God in my soul is my heaven; to serve the law of sin in my members is a bitter relic of hell." Yet all is necessary to make the soul watchful and humble, and teach it the superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of sin; to keep us little and low in our own esteem, and lay us prostrate at the foot of the cross, "being determined to know nothing, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

GROWING UP INTO CHRIST IN ALL THINGS

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning, August 3rd, 1856

"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." Ephesians 4:14, 15

In the Church of God there is unity, but not uniformity. In nature, especially in the works of creation, we see something similar. In creating the world, the great Creator seems to have prescribed for Himself certain patterns—types as they are called by naturalists—in conformity to which He has moulded the works of His hands. This type or pattern we may compare to the circumference of a circle which bounds (so to speak) God's idea; but within that circle He works in an infinite variety. The human countenance, the trees of the field, the flowers of the garden, the birds that fly in the air, the animals that walk on the ground, the very fish that swim in the sea, are all constructed each according to a certain leading type; but within that bounding circle there is an infinite variety of colour, shape, size, and form.

So it is in the dominion of grace. The Spirit of God works according to a certain outline; for there are certain grand distinguishing features of His divine operation upon the soul; but within that circle He works in various ways. He does not cut all lines to the same depth, nor even trace the patterns in exactly the same form. Look at a turner at work; there is his lathe, and there his cutting tool. Every design is cut by the same tool, and the machine worked by the same treadle; yet what infinite variety in the execution of the patterns, and how visible in each the directing mind of the artificer!

So with the work of God upon the soul. It is the same Spirit who

teaches all the election of grace, and He works by the same Word of truth, which is the cutting tool, if I may use the expression, to trace the image of Christ on the heart; and yet what a variety of experience is there in the Church of God! Can we find two Christians whose experience in all points agrees? And yet what a unity of feeling, what a oneness of heart, what a mingling of spirit, stamps all who are taught of God as really one! In this astonishing blending of the greatest variety with the greatest unity it is that we discover the hand of God, and thus trace consummate beauty and infinite wisdom.

This unity and yet variety are beautifully traced out in the chapter before us (Eph. 4). "The unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" is the great thing we are called upon to endeavour to keep. And this "unity of the Spirit" results from this, that "there is one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all." But though there is this blessed oneness of body, spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and Father, not an equal measure of grace, and therefore not an equal measure of experience, knowledge, or gifts, is bestowed on all. "But unto every one of us," adds the Apostle, "is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." This leads him to show whence Christ derived these gifts, what is their nature, and for what purpose they are bestowed.

I mention these things, because our text is so closely connected with them that we cannot well understand it unless this connection is seen. Carrying out, then, this connection, we may remark that there are three things that bear upon our text, and viewed spiritually may serve to cast a divine light upon it.

1. We are to view by the eye of faith the Lord Jesus Christ raised up from the dead by the power of the Father, and seated at God's right hand.
2. In seeing Him as seated at God's right hand, we are to view Him as having received from the Father a divine plenitude, an

overflowing fulness of gifts; as we read, "When He ascended up on high He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." It is in the Psalm from which the apostle quotes (Psalm 68:18): "received gifts for men." Before He gave He received them, and received that He might give them. A store, an inexhaustible store, of gifts and graces was entrusted to, and deposited in Him, as the risen Head of the Church. They were laid up by the hand of the Father in Him, as we read (Col. 1:19): "For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." The Church is therefore said to be "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (or things) in Christ;" and John tells us that "of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." We are then to view Him as sending these gifts down, as was shown in an especial manner on the day of Pentecost. And though we have now no Pentecostal effusion, or the same measure and depth of spiritual gifts and graces as was then manifested, the Holy Ghost has not ceased to work in the Church of God. The Lord Jesus, at the right hand of the Father, still continues to shed His gifts and graces upon the souls of men, still is what He was then, and will be, till He has gathered into His bosom the last vessel of mercy; for "He is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

3. But there is a third feature connected with the text which it is very desirable to notice, that the gifts spoken of are especially ministerial gifts, as we find the Apostle laying down very plainly in the 11th verse: "He gave some apostles;" these were the most eminent servants of Christ, of whom there were but few in number; and these endowed with gifts to plant churches and govern them generally, with especial authority from the Lord Himself. "And some prophets;" or preachers, men not invested with the high and peculiar office of an apostle, but endowed with preaching gifts whereby they were able to edify the Church. "And some evangelists;" men who were not suited for a settled, permanent ministry; not adapted to preside over a church or people, from an absence of the proper qualifications of wisdom and firmness, or from a want of spiritual flow of matter to season their preaching with a necessary variety; but still blessed with ministerial gifts, adapting them to go from place to place

preaching the simple elements of gospel truth, and their ministry blessed to the conviction of sinners and the calling in of the scattered sheep. "And some pastors;" men endowed with sufficient wisdom and ability to hold a permanent, settled situation, fitted to govern as well as feed the church committed to their care; not only able to preach the gospel with power and unction, but qualified to rule and guide the brethren with all Christian wisdom as well as affection and love. And others "teachers"; not able perhaps to preside over churches as "pastors," nor endowed with sufficient ability to go forth as "prophets," or even as "evangelists," but still able to drop a word of instruction from time to time in a small way and in a limited sphere, and thus be teachers of those who are willing to learn. Thus each man of these several ranks and orders was simply what the Lord made him; none able to boast, but each filling up that post to which the Church's risen Head had assigned him; and as long as each kept his place, blessed in his deed.

But the Apostle tells us also why these gifts were given. He says it is "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." He thus plainly teaches us that the Lord Jesus at the right hand of the Father sends these gifts down, raises up these men, furnishes them each with his several ability, and plants them at their different posts to bring about three ends: 1. "for the perfecting of the saints;" that is, that the saints of God may be matured and established in the truth and in the divine life; 2. "for the work of the ministry;" that is, that the ministry of the Word in all its various branches—whether doctrine, or reproof, or correction, or instruction in righteousness, whether to convince or console, throw down or build up—might be fully carried out; and 3. "for the edifying of the body of Christ," that the saints of God, forming the mystical body of Jesus, might be built up on their most holy faith, "till we all come"—that is, either collectively as a body or individually as members—"in the unity of the faith"—there being but "one faith"—"and of the knowledge of the Son of God"—through an experimental acquaintance with Him—"unto a perfect man"—that is, grown up and matured—"unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"—such a measure of stature as the fulness of

Christ gives to make a man complete in every good word and work.

These preliminary observations may introduce us to the subject before us. "That we henceforth," says this blessed man of God, "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" (or as it is in the margin, "being sincere") "in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ."

In attempting, with God's blessing, to open up these words, I shall direct your attention:

I. To that *state of religious childhood*, out of which we are by divine grace to be brought: "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."

II. Secondly, to *the means which God employs to bring us out of this childish state*, namely, "speaking the truth," or adopting, as I intend to do, the marginal reading, "being sincere in love."

III. And thirdly, to *the result of these means*: "That we may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ."

I. The blessed Spirit has selected the figure of a little child and used it in various ways, but chiefly in two: i. He has selected certain features in a child which we may call favourable qualities, though still connected with the very imperfection of childhood; and He has used these favourable qualities as emblems of a certain state of soul spiritually corresponding with them. Again, He has taken certain (what shall we call them?) unfavourable qualities in the child, and used them as figures of instability, weakness and imperfection in the divine life. And yet the foundation of the figure in both aspects is the same; the natural tenderness, immaturity, and want of growth, which is visible in

the child. Let me explain myself a little more clearly and distinctly. 1. First observe the favourable qualities which the Holy Ghost has used as emblems of certain distinctive features of divine teaching. A child is naturally simple. The tenderness of its ideas preserves it from duplicity of speech or conduct. The Holy Spirit takes this quality, and uses it as an emblem of that spiritual simplicity and godly sincerity of which He is the author. We must become simple as little children. Again, the child is inexperienced, ignorant of many things which it has afterwards to learn, and the innate consciousness of this renders it teachable. So the child of God is teachable, willing to learn, to gather spiritual instruction where he can. The child again is humble. It knows little or nothing of worldly distinctions; the child of a peer will play with the child of a peasant as readily as with one of its own class. This external, visible humility is made a figure of that spiritual humility which clothes, or should clothe a child of God. The Lord Himself has used the figure of a little child in this point of view as simple, teachable, and humble, when He declared, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3).

2. But, on the other hand, there are things in a child of nature which are representatives of what is to be avoided in a child of grace. A child is inexperienced, unacquainted with the world, with business, with any serious or useful occupation, with the art and craft of men, with the way in which the battle of life is fought and won. So in grace. There is a state and stage in the divine life through which everyone passes, in which he has little experience of himself, of the evils of his heart, of the dreadful nature of sin, of the strength of temptation, of the power and subtlety of his unwearied foe; and, on the other hand, little experience of the abounding grace of Christ, of the efficacy of His atoning blood, and the manifestations of His dying love.

Again, a child is weak. Mind and body alike are naturally and necessarily feeble from its being a transition state, and neither having yet grown into their intended maturity. We can bear with this in childhood. Their very weaknesses, especially in our own

children, are engaging; their very want of maturity, like a rose-bud, or a lamb at play, has something beautiful about it. But we should not wish our children to be lambs and rose-buds all their lives. We should not like them to be dwarfs, lest haply they degenerate into idiots. We expect them, as years pass on, to grow out of this state. Were they always children, we should infer the presence of some disease. We should say there was something fundamentally wrong in their constitution, which stunted and starved their growth.

So in heavenly things. It is pleasing to see the work of grace in its first commencement on the soul. The doubts, the fears, the earnestness, the zeal, the simplicity of those in whom the Spirit of God is first at work is a sight beautiful to witness, and when seen in any near and dear to us unspeakably heart-gladdening; but we expect them to grow out of this weakness and feebleness, so as in due time to attain to a ripeness and maturity in the life of God, and not be children all their days.

Another feature of childhood is to be changeable, vacillating, pleased with a toy one day and throwing it aside the next; not knowing its own mind, but flitting like a butterfly from flower to flower. This fickle, unstable, changeable mood of a child, the blessed Spirit uses as an emblem of a similar state of mind too often visible in the professing Church of Christ.

Reproving and condemning this childish instability, he bids us "henceforth be no more children." It was well enough to be children once, for in grace as in nature none are born men, and during spiritual as during natural childhood childish ways are borne with; but we are not to be children all our days, ever vacillating, unstable, undecided, carried away by every impulse, and moved by every breath, ignorant and inexperienced, knowing little of ourselves, and less of the Lord's mercy and love. There is a growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are, therefore, by divine teaching, to grow out of childhood into manhood, to forget those things which are behind and reach forth unto those things which are before, and thus attain to some

ripeness in the life of God.

ii. But the Apostle shews not merely the weakness of a state of childhood, but the dangers to which this state is exposed: "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." He rather changes the figure here; for his heart was so full of the things of God, that like a workman with a number of tools before him, who drops the one in his hand and catches up another more suitable for a particular part of his work, he drops one figure to take up another more adapted to convey his meaning. He does not carry out the figure of childhood, but at once adopts another—that of a ship in a storm. How unstable is a ship at sea, how tossed up and down by every wave, and driven to and fro by every wind, especially if there be not much ballast in the hold! Whilst then we are in a childish, immature state in the divine life, we are like a ship at sea with little ballast, tossed to and fro by every wind that blows. Now that is a very dangerous position, because if the ship have not a good amount of ballast in the hold, it is liable to be capsized, founder, and go down in the deep waters. Not that the child of God can or will go down in the deep waters; his soul, his immortal soul cannot be lost. The ship itself may not founder, yet much of the cargo may be lost, the passengers get wetted, and their clothes and goods spoiled. So we, from instability and inexperience, like a lightly ballasted ship in a stormy sea, may, without losing our souls, lose much of our comfort and peace; and if we escape drowning, may not escape a thorough good wetting.

But there is something striking in the expression, "tossed to and fro." Here, on one side, is an iron-bound coast, full of rocks; and on the other, the raging sea. Now the ship may be sometimes tossed "to"—approach the iron-bound coast, and be in imminent danger of being dashed to pieces—and then a contrary wind may suddenly carry it away "from" the rocks, and drive it out half a wreck into the wild, stormy ocean. So in divine matters. Here on one side are rocks—deadly heresies, dangerous speculations, fundamental errors upon grand cardinal points: the Trinity, the Sonship of Christ, the personality and work of the Holy Ghost.

Errors of this sort are as sunken rocks lying abreast of the homeward track. Suddenly a wind comes from some preacher or author that catches the sails of an unstable ship, and drives it headlong to these sunken rocks, for errors and heresies thickly line the spiritual coast. But just as the vessel is coming upon the rocks, a land breeze springs up, a gust of despair or some sudden fear and terror, and away it goes right into the boundless sea. Many even of the saints of God, when not established in the truth, are thus "tossed to and fro"; driven sometimes almost upon the rocks of destructive error, and thence hurled back into a stormy sea, where terror stands on the deck, and despair rides upon the wave. How many, who one would hope fear God, are thus tossed to and fro! They wander from chapel to chapel, from minister to minister, from book to book, and can scarcely tell who are right and who are wrong, who are the servants of God and who the servants of pride and self; sometimes taken with this man and then with that man; lifted up and carried about with every new scheme and every fresh doctrine that wears an air of plausibility; hurled sometimes well nigh on the shoals of error, and then driven away to sea without compass or pilot. How many are thus "carried about" all round the compass, "with every wind of doctrine"! No minister can long please them; no people long satisfy them; no doctrine long hold them. They change their place of worship as worldly people their watering place, and love new faces and new voices as much as seaside visitors love new sights and new seas.

iii. But the Apostle adds a remarkable expression: "By the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." He opens a wonderful depth here. It strikes me sometimes with astonishment when I read the Epistles, to see that in those early days, when the power of Christ was so manifest, and men had to carry their lives in their hands, there were such errors and heresies in the Church. Yet I see the wisdom of God in permitting it. There were then men of God, such as the apostles, who could point them out and write down the truth, the living truth of God, under the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and thus set up a certain standard, and fix

unerring landmarks for the Church of Christ for all time.

This tossing to and fro results, the Apostle says, from "the sleight of men." The original here is exceedingly expressive, or I would not mention it. The word translated "sleight" means literally, cheating at dice; the allusion being to the practice of gamblers loading the dice to obtain a favourable throw. I never saw it done myself, but I speak from what I have read. The dice are rightly marked and rightly thrown, but being loaded on one side, they always come up in favour of the cheat who throws them. So errors and heresies resemble loaded dice. They look all right, properly marked with texts and passages, and the minister or writer seems to throw them fully and fairly down before the people. And yet, like loaded dice, there is jugglery and deception at the bottom. As in sleight of hand, things are made to appear what they are not, so jugglers and cheats in religion deceive people by a show of piety and holiness, under the cover of which they hide the most destructive errors. Books, apparently very religious, but filled with infidelity, lie on every railway stall; Jesuits, male and female, creep into families and schools as tutors and governesses, masters and mistresses, to entangle the young with Popish wiles; Puseyites, with the Church of England in their mouth, and the Church of Rome in their heart, steal from house to house undermining all Protestant principles. The friends of truth are asleep, and the enemies awake; simple souls are caught, but still the game goes on. Yet of all gamblers, religious gamblers are the worst, for the throw is for eternity, and the soul is at stake.

iv. But the Apostle uses another expression of great pith and power: "cunning craftiness." The word means literally, "the unprincipled conduct of a designing wretch, who will do any thing to gain his ends." Such is the nature of error, that when once a man's mind becomes thoroughly imbued with it, he cannot rest, but as he propagates it. The man who holds error is sure to be ten times firmer in that error than many a child of God is in truth. Amazing, too, is the "cunning craftiness" of these erroneous men, "whereby they lie in wait to deceive." Though so deeply fixed in

their errors, yet there is in them an instinctive consciousness that their views will not bear the light, and that the verdict of God's people is against them. "The righteous is as bold as a lion," but they are as crafty as a serpent. They therefore lie in wait, "as a serpent by the way, as an adder in the path." David describes them well. "He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages; in the secret places doth he murder the innocent; his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly, as a lion in his den. He lieth in wait to catch the poor; he doth catch the poor when he draweth him into his net" (Psalm 10:8, 9). Their delight is to catch some simple-hearted child of God, and under a show of deep experience, or wonderful manifestation, instil their poisonous errors into his ear and heart. Thus "they lie in wait to deceive," or, as the words may be rendered, they pursue a systematic plan of deception, laying schemes to entrap the unwary, and are never so much pleased as when they can beguile an unstable soul into their net.

II. Now, how are we to be preserved from these dangers? If we remain always children, we shall not only be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, but run imminent hazard of being juggled into error by these dicers in religion, entrapped into some heresy by these crafty deceivers. A child playing with a gambler has small chance of winning; an unstable soul arguing with a crafty heretic is more likely to be beaten than to beat. What, then, is our safeguard? To be "sincere in love." I adopt, you will perceive, the marginal reading. It is more literal, and throws more light upon the passage. We have not a word in our language to convey the exact meaning. If I might coin a word for a moment, I would render it "truthing it"; that is, being truthful throughout—not merely truthful in speech, but in heart and life. "To speak the truth" is but the fruit; to be truthful or sincere is to possess the root. Nor is it the truthful lip, but the truthful heart that preserves from the sleight of men and the cunning craftiness of unprincipled deceivers. Sincerity lies at the root of all gracious profession. If a man be not sincere he is nothing. God makes a man sincere by planting His truth in his heart; and whenever God does make a man sincere, the truth which He has implanted will

grow. Truth does not lie in a man's soul dead and motionless, like a stone in Gower Street; it is a living, active, expansive principle. If the truth be in the soul it will be ever pushing out error, because the two principles cannot exist together; and as Isaac thrust out Ishmael, and Jacob proved stronger than Esau, so will simplicity and godly sincerity be ever mightier than craft and deception. The truth of God in the heart will not wither and die, but will be shined upon by the sun of righteousness, and sunned into fruitfulness by the smiles of God; and as truth becomes day by day more and more precious, so will error and evil become day by day more and more hateful. A sincere soul stands "girt about with truth," and truth forms its shield and buckler.

But how does this Christian sincerity prove the soul's safeguard from error? By putting it ever on the watch tower, looking out and looking up for the teaching of God and the light of His countenance. A soul made spiritually sincere takes nothing upon trust, requires the seal of God on all it receives, and the witness of the Spirit to all that it feels. As a modest female is preserved by her modesty from the very approach of the seducer, her retiring sensitiveness forming her truest, her most impenetrable protection, so the very sincerity of an honest soul is its best safeguard from error. He who is sincere sees the rocks ahead, on which others concerning faith make shipwreck; and being well ballasted with temptations, afflictions and trials, he is not easily tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine. His desire to be right keeps him right; his fear to be wrong preserves him from wrong. Knowing the worth of his soul, he will not sit down with religious dicers and gamblers to stake it upon the throw of their loaded dice; and as he walks warily and cautiously, he is not easily bitten by the adder in the hedge, or caught by the cunning craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive. The light of God in his soul makes him see; the life of God in his heart makes him feel; the fear of God in his conscience makes him honest; the love of God in his affections makes him love; and all this gives truth that firm place in him that there is no room for error. The Apostle adds, therefore, "in love." It is not enough to be "sincere"; we must be "sincere in love." Mark that. It is not

receiving God's truth as a certain orderly system; it is not furnishing our heads with a sound doctrinal creed and compact Calvinistic scheme which will avail us in the trying hour; but it is to have the truth of God brought into our soul by a divine power, and realising such unutterable sweetness in it as communicates a firm abiding love, both to the truth itself, and to Him of whom it testifies and from whom it comes. It is thus we are made "sincere in love." The fear of God creates the sincerity, the application of the truth with power creates the love to it. And when we are thus made "sincere in love," we are brought out of the childish state in which we are carried about with every wind of doctrine, and in danger of being entrapped by the cunning craft of every deceiver. We know the truth, love the truth, and become established in the truth.

The soul's best, truest safeguard is love. The Apostle tells us why men "perish in all deceivableness of unrighteousness." It is because "they receive not the love of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:10). They fall into error because they never really loved the truth which they professed. The truth, when known by Divine teaching, makes free not only from guilt and bondage, but also from evil and error. Once love the truth, and error never more can have a place in your heart.

III. But I was to show you what would be *the end and blessed result*: "That we may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ." We have to grow up into Christ, and we cannot do this except we grow out of self. Self, sin, and the world are three deadly enemies to growth in Christ. Where self-righteousness or self-indulgence, self-conceit or self-dependence, or in whatever other form self may come, it is a deadly enemy to growth in grace.

There are two things we must ever be afraid of, error and evil. As the truth of God gets possession of your soul it displaces error and subdues evil. We learn to abhor them, and cannot willingly take such wretches into our bosom. Truth is like a person naturally clean and nice in his person, dress, and habits; he

cannot endure anything that is not clean also. Error and evil are like the filthy tramp, never so happy as in his dirt; scissors and soap his intense abhorrence. As then truth is loved, error is hated; as Christ is made precious, sin is abhorred. Thus, by the love of truth, the soul grows out of self in all its manifold forms, and becomes conformed, in its measure, to the image of its blessed Master. He is now no more a child, tossed to and fro, but a man in Christ. He stands firm in the gospel of Christ, because he has received the love of the truth, and the truth has made him free. It has been applied to his heart with divine power. He has tasted, felt and handled its sweetness and blessedness. Self sinks, error is spurned, evil is abhorred, the world—at least as to its alluring charms—forsaken, an experimental knowledge is obtained of the Son of God, and thus he grows up into Christ in all things in faith, in hope, in love, in union and communion, in obedience and in conformity.

Here we see the blessedness of a Gospel ministry; for if you read the connection of the text you will clearly see that it is closely associated with the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, the edifying of the body of Christ. Those, therefore, who despise a Gospel ministry, only write themselves down ignorant. No child of God who has ever been blessed under a Gospel ministry can despise it. It is, in the hands of God, a means of building up the Church, and by its instrumentality the Holy Spirit brings the saints out of their childish state into the maturity of the Christian life.

The great want of to-day is a Gospel ministry of this nature. We want men who can preach the Gospel as it was preached in days of old, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; and owing to this, in a measure, it is that many of God's dear saints are tossed to and fro all their days.

This growth we may view as threefold: 1. The growth of the mystical body of Christ considered as a whole. The body of Christ may be considered incomplete until all the members are brought out into their decreed position. "In Thy book all My members

were written when as yet there was none of them." The members were written in the book of life before one of them came into actual being; but until those that are lying in the womb of time come forth into actual and spiritual manifestation, the body lacks a part of its full completion. The accession, therefore, of every regenerated soul to the Church of Christ is an accession to its growth. As a building grows by the addition of stone after stone, so the continual addition of living stones makes the spiritual building grow "unto a holy temple in the Lord."

2. Another growth is the growth of a Gospel church; and this growth is twofold—the growth from without, by the goodly addition of godly members; and the growth from within, by the goodly increase of godly fruit. And these usually go together. A decaying church dies gradually in the branches, from the necessary bereavements it sustains and the non-addition of godly members; and dies gradually at the same time at the root by the decay of the life of God within. The two things go together. A church dying at the root pushes forth no fresh branches, and gradually becomes a withered trunk; whilst a church with life in the root is ever pushing forth living branches.

3. The third growth is of the believer individually, when he goes forth and grows up as a calf of the stall.

Blessed is it when the body of Christ as a whole—a Gospel church as an integral part of that whole and individual believers as members of Christ, are thus growing up into Him in all things—in knowledge, in faith, in love, in obedience, and in conformity to His image and example. Blessed is it when they grow in humility, godly fear, deadness to the world, submission to His Word and will, separation from evil, spirituality of mind, brokenness of heart, contrition of spirit, love and liberality to the saints, simplicity and godly sincerity, prayerfulness and watchfulness; in a word, in every Christian fruit and heavenly grace. To grow up into Christ in all things is the sum and substance of vital godliness.

I have spoken feebly and imperfectly, for there is a depth of truth in this passage which I feel to exhaust all my powers to speak of adequately. I have, therefore, merely given you a few fragmentary thoughts, though I have been purposely brief on the last head, as hoping to pursue the subject this evening. But may the Lord bless them to your souls, supply all my deficiency, and lead you into the truth for yourselves. Meditate upon these things. Pray that the Lord would establish them in your heart and conscience, that you may see the blessedness and beauty of them, and be led by the Spirit of God, who alone can lead you into all truth. The Lord give His blessing, and crown with His own heavenly dew and sacred unction what has been spoken in His Name.

THE HEART'S DESIRE OF EVERY LIVING SOUL

Preached on Lord's Day Evening, June 28, 1840, at Zoar chapel,
Great alie Street

"Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people; oh! visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance." Psalm 106:4, 5

There is a blessed unity of Spirit, that runs through the whole of God's Word, as well as through the experience of God's people. And it is a sweet encouragement and a blessed consolation to the family of God, to find their feelings, thoughts, desires, groans, sighs, and tears, all faithfully recorded in the Word of God. In fact, there is no state of soul into which we may be brought, no trial which we may have to pass through, no temptation which we may have to encounter, no difficulty we may have to grapple with, that is not provided for in the Word of God; and there is no breathing of the soul, no desire of the heart, no sighing of a contrite spirit, which we do not find equally traced out in the Word of Jehovah, as experienced by his saints of old. And this makes the Scriptures such a wonderful book; that when the blessed Spirit is pleased to open up the spiritual and experimental parts of God's Word, he shows us how suitable and how applicable they are to our souls, and thus he makes the Word of God to be food indeed to our hearts.

"Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people; oh! visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine Inheritance."

All God's people, sooner or later, are brought to this point—to see that God has a "**people**," a "peculiar people," a people separate from the world, a people whom he has "formed for himself, that they should show forth his praise." Election, sooner or later, is riveted in the hearts of God's people. And a man that lives and

dies at enmity against this blessed doctrine, lives and dies in his sins; and if he dies in that enmity, he will be damned in that enmity. Every child of God is brought, sooner or later, to see that God has a people; and the longing desire of every living soul is to be manifested as one of that people. There are no cavillings against election, after God has broken a man down to nothing. There may be many cavillings against it, until we are stripped of all; but when a man is stripped of all, made a beggar, a bankrupt, a pauper, a poor needy insolvent, with a huge debt, and nothing wherewith to pay, then election is made manifest in that man's conscience; because he feels that unless God has chosen him from eternity, he will never see his face in glory.

"Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people." There is a "**favour**," then, that God "bears to his people." And what sort of "favour" is this? It is **eternal** favour. He never had anything else but favour to them: he loved them from eternity; his heart, his affections were eternally fixed upon them. And this is that favour, which every living soul wants to have manifested; he wants to have the **eternal** favour of God made manifest to his conscience. Again; this favour of God is **discriminating** favour. It is fixed upon some and not upon others. And this discriminating favour every quickened soul longs to experience. He does not want to have merely the general providential mercies of God, but he wants to have special tokens of his discriminating favours to his soul. He knows there are but few on whom this favour is conferred; he knows that God has discriminated certain persons, and fixed his favour upon them; and what he wants to experience is this discriminating favour made manifest in his heart and conscience. Again; this "favour" he wants to have **shed abroad in his heart**, and thus personally and experimentally made known. It does not satisfy him to read in the Word of God that he has a people, that he bears a favour to that people, that he loves that people; these doctrines, however glorious, will never satisfy a living soul, as long as they are in the mere letter of the Word; he wants to have them applied to his heart, to have them sweetly revealed within, and

thus he prays with the psalmist, "Remember me with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people."

And what makes him earnestly long that God should "remember him with this favour?" Because he is a wretch without it; because he is a beggar without it; because he is damned without it. Every living soul is brought to this—that unless "favour" is revealed in his heart by the Holy Ghost, he shall die and be damned; he must go to that place where hope never enters; and therefore the longing cry of every quickened soul is to experience this personal, special, eternal, discriminating favour shed abroad in his heart—sweetly applied and revealed to his soul. The man that is brought here has "seen an end of all perfection;" he has found God's law to be "exceeding broad;" he has been brought in guilty; he has put his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope; he has been stripped of every rag of righteousness, he has had all his strength, wisdom, and power, entirely taken from him; he has stood shivering before God, a naked wretch without a single covering to shield him from the piercing eye of him, whose eyes are as a flame of fire; he has found the inability and the helplessness of the creature to do him any good; he has tasted and felt to his conscience, that no arm of flesh **still less his own** can deliver him from his feelings, or can do him that good which his soul is earnestly panting after.

He wants to be "**remembered**." He wants to taste the **eternal** favour of God that God should "remember him," that he should not pass him by, that he should not overlook him; that he should remember him in the time of necessity, in the time of suffering, in the time of trial, in the time of difficulty, in the time of temptation. He desires then to be "**remembered** with the favour that God bears to his people."

Now, God listens to this cry. Wherever he has implanted this desire, he bows down his ear and grants it. Sooner or later "favour" comes; sooner or later "favour" is revealed; and it melts the heart into humility, gratitude, love, and praise. This favour may be only a drop; but a drop is sufficient to make itself felt. It

may be only a crumb; but a crumb is enough to satisfy the soul whilst the crumb lasts. And wherever this "favour" has been shed abroad in the heart, it draws the soul upwards to God; it makes a man a new creature; it solemnizes, spiritualizes, and ravishes his heart, and makes him to know that God is gracious.

"Oh; visit me with thy salvation." You see how fond the Psalmist is of the word "**thy**," "remember me with the favour that thou bearest unto **thy** people; Oh! visit me with **thy** salvation." He wants the word "thy;" that is, something connected with God—something that comes immediately from God. This is that which every living soul is panting after; he wants something from God in a direct way—something let into the soul from above—something manifested and shed abroad in the heart from God himself. And what he especially wants is God's salvation; "Oh! visit me with thy salvation."

What is "**God's salvation**?" It is a salvation from death and hell; a salvation from doubts and fears; a salvation from guilt and condemnation; a salvation from wrath without, and wrath within. It is a salvation long as eternity; a salvation that is what it professes to be—"salvation"—saving the soul from all that it dreads, and all that it fears.

But how is a man brought and taught to want to be "**visited with**" this salvation? **Ps 106:4** He must know something first of condemnation. Salvation only suits the condemned. "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost;" and therefore salvation only suits the lost. A man must be lost—utterly lost—before he can prize God's salvation. And how is he lost? By losing all his religion, losing all his righteousness, losing all his strength, losing all his confidence, losing all his hopes, losing all that is of the flesh; losing it by its being taken from him, and stripped away by the hand of God. A man who is brought into this state of utter beggary and complete bankruptcy—to be nothing, to have nothing, to know nothing—he is the man, who in the midnight watches, in his lonely hours, by his fireside, and at times, well nigh night and day, is crying, groaning, begging,

suings, seeking, and praying after the manifestation of God's salvation to his soul. "Oh! visit me with thy salvation." He wants a visit from God; he wants that God would visit him—come and dwell with him, take up his abode in his heart, discover himself to him, manifest and reveal himself, sit down with him, eat with him, walk in him, and dwell in him as his God. And a living soul can be satisfied with nothing short of this. He must have a visit. It profits him little to read in the Word of God what God did to his saints of old; the mere letter of the Scripture profits him little; he wants something **for himself**, he wants something that shall do **his** soul good; he wants something that shall cheer him, refresh him, comfort him, bless him, profit him, remove his burdens, and settle his soul into peace. And therefore he wants a visitation—that the presence and the power, the mercy, and the love of God, should visit his soul.

Now this God at times sweetly gives. If he never meant to give it he would never raise up desires after it; he would never give us liberty to pour out our hearts before him, that we might receive it from him. And, therefore, at times he visits our poor hearts with some sense of this great salvation. And when he visits the soul with his salvation, it is enough. The soul wants no more than salvation. For where salvation comes, the "things that accompany salvation" come in with it! And what are these things? A tender conscience, a broken heart, a contrite spirit, a filial fear of God, a desire to be right, a fear to be wrong, consistency of life, uprightness of conversation, cleaving to that which is good, a fleeing from that which is evil. God has no Antinomians in his family—that is, in the bad sense of the word; he has no loose, licentious, reckless characters, who "continue in sin that grace may abound." A living soul may fall, and fall foully; but he cannot live in sin. Sin is a hell to him—a hell in his conscience; and "who can dwell with everlasting burnings?" Who will not "flee from the wrath to come!" And therefore if there be any professor of religion or professor of high doctrines, who lives in sin, that man is no child of God; he is a child of the devil, a double-dyed, treble-distilled hypocrite. He has not the fear of Jehovah to his heart; for he puts his fear in their hearts, that they may depart

from evil. And therefore continued inconsistency, a life of reckless inconsistency, a walk of careless hardened inconsistency, is not compatible with the grace of God to the heart; for he writes his laws in the hearts of his people, and puts his precepts and truths into their minds, that they may obey them and follow them, and be ruled and governed by them. So that let a man talk as he pleases about the Christ of God, he knows nothing about the Christ of God, if he knows not that which accompanies the Christ of God. If presumption is stamped upon him, he knows not the Christ of God; for the Christ of God and hardened presumption in its reigning power can never co-exist in the same heart. If he lives in known sin, without guilt or shame, he knows not the Christ of God; for the Christ of God "was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil." If he lives in continual hardness of heart, searedness of conscience, perpetual barrenness of frame, without any softening, humbling, melting, or tenderness, he is devoid of the Spirit of God. Not but that we have long seasons of barrenness; not but that we have all occasion, who know anything aright, to mourn over our deadness, and coldness, and slothfulness; but, thanks be to God! it is not always so with us; there are refreshing times, reviving times, strengthening times, praying times, and prayer-answering times, and these bring the soul out of that barrenness, and coldness, and deadness, to which some of us walk so much. But for a man to be barren year after year—he is like the parched heath in the wilderness, rather than "the field that the Lord hath blessed." No; the Spirit of God will do his work in the hearts of God's people. He will, more or less, make them fruitful; he will more or less shed abroad his blessed influences within, and that will make them new creatures.

Now, after we have had a taste of salvation we lose it; the sweetness, the dew, the unction, the power thereof evaporate, and leave our hearts dead and dry. But we cannot rest here. We cannot go back to this past experience, and say—"I enjoyed this so many years ago, I have never enjoyed it since, but I have no doubt of my state, nevertheless." This is not the feeling of a living soul. It is true he cannot get it; it is true, he has no more power

to produce it, not one drop of it, than he has power to create a world; but the same Spirit which brought it in, brings the sigh after it from his soul; the same Spirit which first communicated it to him, raises up pantings after it, and makes him restless, discontented, dissatisfied, and miserable without it. Look now at your daily warfare; look at what passes from time to time in your soul. Can you do comfortably without God, from one year to another? Then you are dead in sin. Can you do comfortably without some access to private prayer, for months together? Then you are dead in a profession. Can you talk glibly about religion, and for weeks and months, and perhaps years, never have a sigh, nor a cry nor a groan, nor a tear? Then you are "twice dead, plucked up by the roots. God's people are an afflicted people; for he hath "chosen them in the furnace of affliction." God's people are a tried people, for he "trieth the righteous," and "they are all righteous." God's people are a praying people, for he pours out upon them the spirit of grace and of supplications." God's people are a hungering and thirsting people, for "blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness." God's people offer "spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to him through Jesus Christ" and they belong to the "circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." Well, all these things "accompany salvation." Tenderness of conscience, filial fear, humility of soul, brokenness of heart, love to the brethren, consistency of life—these things are not salvation, but they accompany salvation. "We are persuaded," says the apostle, "better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak; for God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love." The soul, then, that is really taught of God, is, from time to time **I am not saying perpetually or continually, but it is from time to time**, longing after the visitations of God's salvation; and especially in trying seasons, when sickness comes, when death stares him in the face, when providential trials arise, when guilt stings, when condemnation presses as a heavy burden, when doubts and fears rise to the mind, when Satan harasses, when guilt wounds. In these trying seasons, the really quickened soul is saying, "Oh! visit me with

thy salvation." It wants a visit; it wants a love drop; it wants a testimony from God, to cheer it, refresh it, strengthen it, rejoice it.

Now, hast thou ever in thy life put up this prayer? I do not say, the **words**; look at thy **heart**. Hast thou ever, in the depths of sorrow and trouble, when "deep called unto deep at the noise of God's water-spouts"—to the secret watches of the night, when there was no eye to see and no ear to hear but God's—didst thou ever pour out this prayer? not the words, perhaps, but that which the words convey—"Oh! visit me with thy salvation." And have you wrestled with God, well nigh for the hour together, that he would thus visit your souls? If you have not, you never had it. "For all these things will I be inquired of by the house of Israel;" "seek and ye shall find;" and therefore there is a seeking, before there is a finding. Many persons are glad to talk about salvation, who are very unwilling to walk in the way to obtain it; they are very glad to hear about Jesus and the salvation of Jesus, but they do not like to hear of the internal work, whereby God strips and empties a man, and prepares him for the manifestation of his salvation. But this is that, which a living soul wants to hear. He wants to have the work traced out; he wants to have his experience brought to light; he wants to find whether the finger of God has touched his conscience; he wants to have the steps of the Holy One traced out in his soul; and he says—Has God done this? am I a quickened character? Is the work genuine? Did I begin with God, or did God begin with me? How was it? And what has been done since? And how glad he is, and what joy comes into his heart, if the spirit of God bears witness that the work is sound, genuine, and real! It makes his very heart dance for joy within him, when he has the witness of the Spirit with his spirit that he is a child of God, and shall have a mansion beyond the skies, when he shall be free from the body of sin and death, and see him whom he loves face to face.

"That I may see the good of thy chosen; that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation; that I may glory with thine inheritance."

"That I may see the good of thy chosen." There is a certain "good," then, that belongs to God's chosen family. And what is that "good," but every blessing which the Author of good bestows upon them? "There is none good save one, that is God;" and his gifts are "good gifts" and "perfect gifts," and "come down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." God confers "good" upon his chosen. Let us see what some of these good things are. It is a "good" thing, then, to have a tender conscience; that is, a good gift of God—a conscience made tender, a conscience made to feel sin, little sins as they are commonly called, heart sins, sins of thought, sins of speculation, sins of imagination, sins continually working up from the bottom of a sinful heart. To have a conscience to feel it, and grieve on account of it, and mourn and sigh and cry on account of the daily workings of an evil heart—that is a good thing; it is a "good gift;" and none but God can give this tender heart. And, again, to have a conscience purged and sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb, to have guilt removed from it, filth cleansed away, condemnation taken off, and simplicity, and humility, and godly sincerity, implanted, so as to have a single eye to God's glory—this is a "good" thing. Again, to have earnest breathings and longings after God's favour—this is a "good" thing; to find nothing can really satisfy us but God, and nothing can give us peace but his peace, and nothing can make us happy but his happiness, and nothing can make us really satisfied but his favour; this is a "good" gift, that God gives to his chosen. To depart from evil, to be separate from the world, to have sweet communion with him, to be privileged and enabled to pour out our hearts before him, tell him our wants, burdens, difficulties, temptations, and trials—this is a "good" thing. To find God has an ear to hear us, a heart to feel for us, and a hand to relieve us—this is a "good" thing.

Now, God's people want to "**see**" this good. "That I may see the good of thy chosen." They want to see it with their own eyes, feel it with their own hands, hear it with their own ears, enjoy it with their own hearts. "That I may see the good of thy chosen;" so as to be ravished with it, delighted with it, comforted with it, blessed by it; so as to see my unworthy name in the book of life; so as to

feel streams of goodness encircling, watering, delighting, and refreshing my soul; so as to taste it, and feed upon it, and enjoy it, and find it to be like honey and the honey-comb; so as to derive a solid satisfaction from it, and to taste in it a "peace which passeth all understanding." This is the "good" of God's chosen; to be "satisfied with favour, and full of the goodness of the Lord." "Oh! taste and see that he is good;" to know that he is good, gracious, and kind; to know that he is on our side; that he will not suffer any to set upon us to harm us, and that "no weapon formed against us shall prosper;" to know that all his perfections are arrayed on our behalf—his strength, his wisdom, his power, his faithfulness, his love; to feel that "all things" are for us, and that therefore nothing can be against us. This is to "see the good of God's chosen." To see it, the veil being taken from our eyes; to see it, our eyes being "anointed with eye-salve," so as to look into it, and see the depths of it, and view the beauty of it; that our eyes may pierce into the secret recesses of this goodness, and drink into it, and be sweetly enlarged, blessed, and filled with it.

This is to "see the good of God's chosen;" not as Balaam, who "saw him, not nigh," but "afar off," and merely saw him with the eye of prophecy, the eye of judgment, the eye of speculation, the eye of fancy, but to see him with the appropriating eye of faith and affection, when it sees the object, realises the object, and embraces the object. When you see a person that you love, you gaze upon his features, and as you gaze affection kindles; your eye drinks into that which kindles the affections of your soul; some aged parent it may be, whose venerable features you love to look upon, some dear wife whose countenance beams affection, some child, weak and tender perhaps, and yet whose lineaments are engraved upon your heart, and as you see this beloved object, your eye is scarcely satisfied with looking, but through seeing it, all the affections of your heart are drawn forth and enkindled. This is a different thing from seeing a stranger, from looking at a picture of some unknown person, from seeing a statue. Such is the difference between seeing things in the letter of God's word, with the eye of judgment and the eye of

speculation, and seeing them with the eye of faith—that eye which has been "anointed with eye-salve," that eye from which the veil has been taken away. And therefore Jesus said to his people—"The world seeth me no more, but **ye see me**; because I live, ye shall live also." "He that doeth evil hath not **seen** God." There is a seeing of him, that is invisible; as one of old, "by faith endured, seeing him who is invisible." To "see the good of God's chosen," then, is not that of which the Lord spake, saying, "Ye shall see the prophets in the kingdom of heaven, and you yourselves thrust out;" it is not like seeing people sitting at a banquet, and you standing on the other side of the lattice, as the nuns in a convent see their relations, and cannot come near to them, but are separated and cut off from them. No; this is not the way a living soul wants to "see the good of God's chosen;" but he wants to see it in himself, feel it in himself, know it in himself, and enjoy it in himself. Nothing but thus seeing it can ever satisfy him. And if he sees it thus here, he will see it and drink it in with his eyes hereafter. "That I may see the good of thy chosen."

Now, did you ever see any good to God's chosen? Oh! "how goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!" Did you ever see what good God has blessed his people with, and how good it is to be one of them? All God's people see that there is a "good" in God's chosen family, peculiar to them, and **that** they sigh and long for.

But some will say, Had David never seen it when he penned this Psalm? Aye, surely, he had seen it. But did he not want to see it again? Yes; he had lost the sight of it, the sweet vision of it had retired, the old veil had come back, his eyes were dim, he wanted fresh "eye-salve." So with us; we have seen, we trust, at times, "the good of God's chosen," have felt our affections drawn towards them, and drawn up towards God, and have said, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." That was to enjoy the sweet foretastes of heaven. But all these sweet foretastes became clouded; fogs and mists rested upon them, and hid them from our eye. Fresh sin

brought fresh guilt, and darkness, and deadness, and doubts, and temptations, and fears, and besetments, came on, of various kinds; and all these beclouded our sight. But we cannot forget the past; we cannot forget the solemn moments when we walked with God and talked with God, nor the sweet feelings that his presence enkindled. However dark, however dead, however disconsolate, however tried, harassed, and tempted, we cannot forget that. And having "seen the good of God's chosen," we want to see again the good sight, to taste again that heavenly banquet. "That I may see the good of thy chosen."

"That I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation." "Now what is **the gladness of God's nation?**" To be saved "without money and without price;" to be saved by grace—free, rich, sovereign, distinguishing grace, without one atom of work, without one grain of creature merit, without anything of the flesh. This is "the gladness of God's nation;" to rejoice in free grace, grace superabounding over the aboundings of sin, grace reigning triumphant over the dreadful evils of our heart. It is grace that "gladdens" a man's heart. Oh! sweet grace, blessed grace! when it meets our case and reaches our souls. Oh! what a help, what a strength, what a rest for a poor toiling, striving, labouring soul, to find that grace has done all the work, to feel that grace has triumphed in the Cross of Christ, to find that nothing is required, nothing is wanted, nothing is to be done. It is a full and perfect, complete and finished work. Oh! sweet sound to a poor, striving, toiling, labouring, working, guilty, and condemned soul. Oh! sweet relief to a heavily burdened conscience, that groans under sin night and day. Oh! sweet tidings to one toiling and tugging at the oar of the law, striving to bring the boat safe to the shore, and driven back with every wave and wind. Oh! sweet sound for a backslider, who has "started aside" from God, "like a broken bow," and brought guilt and wrath into his soul. Oh! sweet sound for every despairing son and daughter of the King of Kings. Oh! sweet sound for every weary pilgrim, for every worn-out soldier, for every tempest-tossed mariner, drifting upon the seas without home and without harbour. Sweet sound! to rest in Christ, and in Christ alone, and find salvation in him, "without money and without price;" nothing to pay, he having paid all; nothing to do,

he having done all; nothing to work, he having finished the work, and brought in everlasting righteousness, to clothe and shield the naked guilty soul. Oh! sweet sound, when it reaches the heart? and touches the conscience, and is shed blessedly abroad in the soul.

This is "the gladness of God's nation;" this makes their heart glad, that the work is finished, that the warfare is accomplished, that the Church of God "hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins;" this is the comforting sound, wherewith God "comforts his people;" this makes the nation glad, and their heart to leap and dance for joy. Has **your** heart never leaped at the sound?—only for a moment? Has grace never sounded sweetly in your soul, and made your very heart dance within you? If it has, you know what is "the gladness of God's nation." Oh! they are not glad because they have done their duty, because they have said their prayers, because they have read their Bible, because they have come to chapel regularly, because they are members of a Gospel Church, because they have lived consistently, because they bear an unblemished character; but they are glad because they are saved by grace, grace superabounding over their abounding sins. This makes them glad; and nothing but this can make them glad.

Now, the living soul wants to rejoice in this gladness—"That I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation." How "**rejoice**?" By being a partaker thereof. But we read that there is such a thing, as seeing all this, and being ourselves shut out. God says, "his servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit." **Isa 65:14** Now, what a cutting thought this is to a poor tried and tempted soul—to see grace, and yet feel not to have it, to see it at a distance, and not be able to grasp it, to see it in others, and not see it in himself; to know who are right, who "are the people," who are the ministers, what is the way, and yet, through doubts and fears, difficulties, temptations, and trials, not to see clearly his own interest therein. Aye, there are many of God's poor children, that know what truth is, that love to hear it, that know who are the

people, that can see grace in them, and yet see no grace in themselves. But all such want to "rejoice in the gladness of God's nation." "Oh!" they say, "that it might reach me, that it might visit me, that it might come into my heart, that I might bathe in it and drink into it, and enjoy it, and realize it, and know it, in myself and for myself." The Psalmist, you see, had similar feelings. Some of you are cutting yourselves off, and saying—"I cannot see grace in myself; I can see grace in this person, I can see grace in that person, I know who are right, but I cannot trace those feelings in myself that I want to feel." Well, David was here. Why did he say, "That I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation," if he were at that time rejoicing? Why did he pray to rejoice, if he were in the act of enjoyment? It shows clearly, that at that time he was not enjoying it. If he had been enjoying it, he would not be praying to enjoy it; the words show that he was at that time without the enjoyment. He was in darkness, and wanted light; he was in deadness, and wanted life; he was in sorrow, and wanted joy; he was in a poor doubting, desponding way, and wanted to be brought out of it, to "rejoice in the gladness of God's nation."

"That I may glory with thine inheritance." Now, the Church is Christ's **inheritance**. He purchased it by his own blood. He went into captivity for it, and has redeemed it by pouring out his precious blood for it.

This inheritance **glories**; "That I may glory with thine inheritance." And in whom does it glory? It glories in its covenant head. It does not glory in itself—in its pious self, righteous self, strong self, religious self; "let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me." "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." The glory of the Church is to glory in her covenant head—to glory in Christ, and in Christ alone; to glory in his strength, love, blood, grace, and righteousness; and to glory in it, herself being covered with shame. None can glory in Christ, until he is stripped of his own glory. There is no putting the crown

of glory on the head of self and on the head of the Mediator. There is no saying, "I have procured this by my own strength," and putting the crown upon that head. There is no saying, "I have obtained this by my own exertions," and putting the crown upon those exertions. No; a man, to glory in Christ, must be covered with shame and confusion. He must be abased in his feelings; he must have his mouth in the dust; he must loathe himself in dust and ashes before God; he must see and feel himself to be the chief of sinners, and "less than the least of all saints;" he must know and feel himself to be a wretch indeed. And then, when he lies in the dust of abasement, if a sight of the dear Redeemer's glory catches his eye and inflames his heart, he glories in him, and in him alone, and all the "inheritance" of God glory in him. He can glory in nothing else, and his highest attainment is to place all the glory of salvation, from first to last, simply upon his head, to whom that glory belongs.

Now, these are the feelings of a living soul. Are they yours? "Oh!" he says, "Lord remember me with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people; oh! visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance." Did your heart ever long to be one of them? Have you found that by all your strivings and exertions you could not put yourself into the number? Has all hope been cut off? And then, when all was dark and all was gloomy, and all was full of bitterness, confusion, and sorrow, were you taken up out of the dust and out of the dunghill, and made to sit among princes, and to inherit the throne of glory, and found these things sweetly revealed to your soul? You know something of the matter. "The secret of the Lord is with you, and he has shown you his covenant."

But some, perhaps, cannot get as far as this. They can get to desires, but they cannot get to answers; they can get to seeking, but they cannot get to finding; they can get to knocking, but they cannot get to the opened door; they can get to guilt, but they cannot get to pardon; they can get to bondage, but they cannot get to liberty. Well, but you are in the road. It is a mercy to be in

the way. Abraham's servant was in the way, when he was brought into the house of his master's brethren. It is a mercy to be in the way. It is a mercy to have the fear of God in your heart as "the beginning of wisdom." It is a mercy to have a conscience made tender by his blessed Spirit. It is a mercy to be weary of yourself. It is a mercy to be out of conceit and out of love with your own righteousness. It is a mercy to be seeking and suing for the sweet manifestations of the Son of God.

Now, I must make the standard low **that is to say, as low as I conscientiously can**, to take in all the quickened family. Never mind what your head is stored with; that is of little consequence; look to what is passing in your heart. There is the place to look; see what is going on there. Never mind what you know in your head. Just see what the foundation is. Is the foundation sound? If that is sound, all is sound. Now, what is the foundation? The fear of God. Is that in your soul? That is the foundation; for it is "the beginning of wisdom." And how is the fear of God manifested? It is "a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death." Then if you have the fear of God, you have a fountain of life, and you depart from evil. This fountain of life goes out in prayers, supplications, sighs, groans, pantings, and longings. This fountain bubbles up, so as to bring your soul into the presence of Jehovah. This fountain is continually bringing some living thing up out of your heart—**for it is a fountain of life**—some living prayer, some living desire, some living groan, some living feeling, something alive and living, something at work and working, in your soul. And it has caused you to depart from evil—to depart from evil doctrines, to depart from evil practices, to depart from evil worldlings, and to depart from evil professors—and it has brought you in simplicity and godly sincerity to seek Christ, and him alone, and to say with the martyr of old, "None but Christ, none but Christ!" And he that thus seeks shall find; for the Lord has said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

The Heavenly and Earthly Witnesses

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Thursday Evening, March 10, 1859

(A Posthumous Sermon)

"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one." 1 John 5:7, 8

The doctrine of the *Trinity* does not rest upon any one isolated text such as this; but it is a ray of light that illuminates the whole book of God from *Genesis* to *Revelation*. In fact without it the word of God would cease to be what it is—an inspired book. Without this, instead of its pages being full of light and life, they would be full of darkness and confusion. Only take away the doctrine of the *Trinity* out of God's word, and you would have no redemption, no pardon of sin, no justification, no sanctification, and you would have no salvation, and a revelation that does not proclaim all these blessings, what is it worth? It is of just as much value as the *Koran* of the Mahometan or the *Shaster* of the Hindoo. Almost immediately in the opening of divine revelation we find an intimation of the Trinity, when God in the creation of man said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." But as I said before we have not merely one or two or twenty passages to refer to; but it shines as a light through the whole. Therefore do not suppose that the Bible only enforces the doctrine of the Trinity in these expressive words, "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." The apostle seems as if he would collect in this verse a grand testimony of revelation, as if he would gather into one mass what covered the whole of the inspired book. And then he goes on to show that not only are there these three heavenly witnesses, all which in nature, essence, glory and power are one; but that there are three

witnesses also upon earth, for this forms a part of the same grand truth, and these witnesses are,—the spirit, the water, and the blood; and as the heavenly witnesses are one, so these agree in one. As the heavenly witnesses are one in essence, nature, glory and power; so these, although they are not one in the sense, yet they all agree in one in power, in harmony, in testimony.

In opening up these words, therefore, I shall, as the Lord may enable me, follow out the division of our text as it naturally presents itself and show—

I.—First, *Who and what are these heavenly witnesses, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and though they are three distinct persons, yet are they one self-existent "I Am."*

II.—And secondly, as the Lord may enable, point out *the three earthly witnesses, the spirit, water, and blood, and point out how these three agree in one.*

I need hardly occupy your time this evening with showing you how the Father is God; for none who have any acquaintance with the letter of truth, and much less they who have any experimental knowledge of the only true God by some manifestation of his power and glory, can doubt that the Father is God. For, how can we pray unto him, confess our sins unto him, fear his great name, desire to serve him, dread to offend him, unless we carry about with us a living evidence that he is the great and glorious Jehovah, who scans every thought, hears every word, and is privy to every action. This is the very foundation of religion, the very element of vital godliness, the commencement of religion:—the knowledge of the only true God, the great and glorious Jehovah, with the works of whose giant hand we are surrounded on every side. Well, the man who is dead in his sins, or in an empty profession of religion, has no knowledge of this only true God, no holy reverence towards, or godly fear of the sacred majesty of heaven, nor does he bear about in his breast the consciousness that God is looking down,

and reading every thought of his heart, hearing every word of his tongue, and is cognizant of every action of his hands; nor is he aware that he is continually sinning against him. He has no sense of his terrible majesty, no apprehension of his heart-searching presence, no desire to walk before him in the light of his countenance, nor any dread lest he should sin against him, nor has he any sense of his justly deserved doom. But grace brings these things into a man's heart, and communicates that life divine whereby these grand verities are felt and experienced. But our text, and not only our text, but the grand current of revelation, the whole teaching of the Spirit of God in the word declares that the Word, the second person in the glorious trinity is God also. To blot out the Deity of Christ, is to blot the sun out of the sky. What would be the effect of annihilating the orb of day? What would earth be then? What, but a second chaos? So in a sense, if Christ be not God, you are taking away out of the church the Son of righteousness, and annihilating all life and all salvation, and leaving the church and the world in misery and confusion. I doubt not but that your reasoning mind may have been exercised with this grand mystery, that Christ the babe at Bethlehem, he who expired between two thieves on Calvary's cross, should be the true self-existent God. But take away the Deity of Christ, and what hope could we have of being saved? What virtue would there be in his blood? As I have thought and said sometimes, if the Lord Jesus Christ be not God, his blood could no more save my soul nor purge away my guilty crimes, than the blood of one of the thieves; for if he be not the God-Man, what merit is there or can there be in that blood? But because he is God, one with the Father in essence and power, infinite merit is stamped upon that blood; for that invests it with such merit, and gives it such power, to purge the conscience from filth, and guilt, and dead works to serve the living God. Look at the millions of sins this blood has washed away, and look at the millions it is washing away and will continue to wash away, sin of every kind, crimes of the deepest dye, such as murders, adulteries, blasphemies, and all the horrid crimes that the people of God could be guilty of. Now, how could all these aggravated crimes that have so debased human nature and all these

multiplied by the millions of saints who have committed them, I say, how could all these be washed away except the blood that cleanseth them from all sin be invested with all the merit of Godhead? Could you trust your soul to anything less? When the law condemns, when conscience speaks loudly in your breast and your sins rise up like spectres before your vision, when the storms are gathered, and the dark clouds lowering, and it appears as though the lightnings which flash across the heavens would dash you into perdition, what then can give you a hope in God's mercy except atoning blood? and how could this blood have power to effect this except the Deity itself were stamped upon it; so that we are driven as it were by the necessity of the case to say that the blood to save and purge the conscience must be no less than the blood of him who was God. But, can God shed blood, or suffer or die? No; he cannot. But the man, the human nature shed the blood, the human nature suffered, the human nature offered the sacrifice; Deity being united with it invested the manhood and the acts of that manhood with all their meritorious efficacy. For as the Queen's head put upon the sovereign gives it the value of a sovereign, so the Deity being stamped upon the Lord Jesus Christ gave validity to every word of his lips, every act of his hands and every sigh of his soul. Here then it is that we can trust our soul. Here is the merit through which millions of redeemed souls are saved, and through which they have entered the courts of heaven, and this is their song, "Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." (Rev. 5:13.) This is the song; these are the anthems that fill the arches of heaven. Again, you must die; the cold sweats of death must gather upon your forehead; your sins may stand out in bold relief against you. How can you face that solemn hour except you have an interest in the atoning blood of the Lamb? and how can that avail unless all the authority of Godhead be stamped upon it. Therefore take away the Deity of Christ and you take away the hope of the church. It is not a dry doctrine—an elementary truth: it gives life and power to every testimony of God. You want a robe of righteousness to justify you; for what is your own? Filth, rags—a cobweb garment. Look at it piece by piece. You cannot

keep from sin for five minutes. You cannot offer up a single prayer except some sin be mingled in it. What can you do to work out a robe of righteousness? Your works are all defiled with sin. You might as well go to court with a beggar's coat on and think you are fit to dine with the Queen in that torn robe as to think of standing before God in the patchwork rags of your own righteousness. You must have on the wedding garment which Christ has woven. But how could the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ be available to work out so many white garments except it be the obedience of him who is God? Here is the beauty and blessedness of the justifying robe—he that ordained it was God. Though man's fingers wove the robe, yet it was Deity that sustained them. So he brought in a robe of righteousness in which thousands of justified sinners stand accepted before God in the Beloved. Again: how can you pray to him except he is God? Do you ever pray to Jesus? It may be you have been puzzled at times as to which of the three persons in the glorious Trinity you are to address in prayer. Did not Stephen pray to him in his dying moments when he said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit?" and do we not read that Saul when at Damascus prayed to Jesus? We have an old letter, which has been preserved from the ancient times, where the writer—an heathen—complains that the Christians pray to Christ as *God*. But how could they pray to Christ unless Christ be God? How could he hear our prayers, and the prayers of the saints all over the world at the same moment, if he were not God as well as man. You cannot pray to Christ unless he is a God to hear, and how can you cast yourself into his arms except he is divine? How can you embrace him as your only hope unless you feel he is looking upon you, and hearing the breathings of your soul? You will find that every action of your soul proves that he is God. Without it there is no faith, nor hope, nor love, nor any other of the graces of the Spirit. And thus, sometimes, when exercised about the Deity of Christ, you will be driven to anchor in it. For take it away, and your soul is lost. And sometimes you may be drawn out by a sweet touch of his finger to embrace it as the revelation of God to the soul.

And then look at the Deity of the Holy Ghost. We want a God to

work in us as well as for us, to enter into our hearts, to give us heavenly affections. The soul is so deeply sunk in sin that nothing but God can communicate life to it. We need the Spirit as a spirit of prayer and supplication, a revealer of Christ, an instructor, an intercessor. So that the child of God has a distinct view in his soul of the three persons in the glorious Godhead. He knows the Father by the sweet shedding abroad of his love; he knows the Son by the application of his blood; and he knows the Spirit by the inward witness that the Spirit of God bears; for if he strive in you, pray in you, and breathe salvation in your heart, in all these things he is his own witness. And yet you know by the same divine teaching that these three persons are one. Can there be three Gods? The grand foundation of all true religion hinges here. There is but one God. We cannot have two conflicting Gods. There can be but one God, and yet there is a *trinity* of persons. So that we bow cheerfully and believingly to the blessed truth that, "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, as Christ is here called, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one." Now a man cannot be saved unless he believe this; because unless he knows these things by internal teaching and testimony he has no sanctification, and, therefore, no salvation.

But I pass on to the three earthly witnesses, and these are spoken of in these words, "And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one." Where are they? Upon earth. Do we see them? Are they in the air? Are they to be found in the sky, or in the hedges, or on the earth? No, no. That is not their place, They have no home there. Where then is their dwelling place? In the hearts of the saints. These three witnesses are in the heart of the believer, and it is there that they bear their witness. It is there their witness agrees, and you must have these three earthly witnesses that you may believe the heavenly witnesses, for the earthly witnesses are but the echo of the heavenly witnesses. They are a testimony within that is but a response to the testimony without. They are a voice in the believer's breast. They are but an echo of the triune God in the soul.

Let us look at these three witnesses as distinct.

i. First there is the spirit. By the spirit here I don't understand the Holy Ghost, because if I were to do so I should confuse the earthly witnesses with the heavenly. But by the spirit I understand, that new nature of which the Holy Spirit is the Creator and Operator. As we read in Christ's own words, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6.) The spirit then here is not the Holy Ghost as a distinct person in the glorious *trinity*, but that new nature which the Apostle Peter calls the "divine nature" (2 Peter 1:14), and again "the new man" which is born of God, raised up by the power of the Holy Ghost, and is lodged in a man's heart. This spirit, then, is that new man of grace that the Holy Ghost produces by his own almighty power, and raises up in the heart of a child of God, and upon which he produces his holy influences. Here is the distinction between the professor or profane man and the saint born of God. The professor or profane man may have an enlightened intellect, be a member of a gospel church, do many things that a saint of God does, and yet be altogether destitute of that spirit that the Holy Ghost raises up in the heart of a saint. But the child of God—the soul that has experienced the heavenly birth—carries in his bosom an unsinning principle; for that which is born of God sinneth not. (1 John 5:18.) He carries in his bosom a pure, holy, and spiritual principle; which is not contaminated by the lust of the flesh. Though it is surrounded by it it is not injured. A sister of mine lost a diamond ring among some strawberry plants once, and although she looked very carefully at the time could not find it. She went to the strawberry plants a year afterwards and found this diamond ring uninjured, and as bright as on the day it fell there. So in a spiritual point of view, with the spirit you carry in your bosom, although it is overwhelmed and covered over with all the horrid filth and obscenity of your base and depraved nature, yet it shines forth like the diamond in the dunghill. It may be hidden from your eyes: you may not be able to see its lustre, you cannot see how it shines forth; but bring it out, let the sun shine upon it, and you

will see how it gives out its colours like the rainbow in the rays of the sun. Have you not been surprised that the most horrid feelings have worked in your bosom? Have you not been astonished at times to think you should have been so base? But at other times there have been holy desires and heavenly longings, and with all your baseness that spirit which the Lord has given is not polluted. Here the child of God is often deceived. He thinks that he shall get purer and purer, holier and holier every day he lives, and after a while he will have no lusts—no base thoughts, no filthy imaginations—but by degrees he shall get sanctified to purity and holiness. Instead of this he finds sin works in him more than ever, and his lusts and passions are ever plunging his soul into filth and ungodliness. But after a time the Lord is pleased to show him there is a new nature—a new man of grace in his bosom—and that the one has no communion with the other, and he begins to feel he is possessed of that new nature by the fruits and effects it brings forth.

ii. Then, secondly, there is the water, and this water is, I believe, the influence and operation of the Holy Ghost upon the hearts of man—upon his new nature. John saw, when the Redeemer's side was pierced with the thrust of the Roman spear, that out of his heart came blood and *water*. Both are typical. The water was typical of the sanctifying efficacy of that precious sacrifice, and the blood we know was the sacrifice offered for sin itself. So the Holy Ghost in our text speaks of the water which is the sanctifying operation of the Holy Ghost in the heart, as we read, "And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 5:11.) Here is the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. And when the sweet influences and operations of the Holy Ghost are felt in a man's soul they bear an earthly witness, as the Holy Ghost in heaven bears an heavenly witness.

iii. And then thirdly, there is the blood—the blood of atonement, that which purges the conscience from filth and guilt and dead works. It is in the heart and conscience that this works. There is the spirit—the new man of grace; the water—the influences and

operations, sanctifying and regenerating of the Holy Spirit; and then there is the blood—the blood of sprinkling, the blood which is applied to the guilty conscience to purge away the filth and guilt of sin, and make the soul walk in the light of God's countenance. And these three agree in one. Not one as the three persons in the glorious Trinity are one; but they agree in one. And what is their testimony? That all is of grace, all is of God. Their testimony is one and the same, and that a spiritual living testimony in the heart of a saint. What does the spirit bear testimony to? That it is divine. What does the water bear testimony to? That it is of God. That it is not of an earthy birth, but a birth divine. And how does it testify it? It raises up faith, hope and love. Then there is an earthly witness. How does the water testify? When the blessed Spirit is pleased to shed abroad the love of God in the soul and sanctify the heart, subdue, soften, melt, moisten, and break it down at the footstool of Jesus, then there is a witness of the water, and this witness is in a man's conscience. And then, again, when the blood is applied by the Holy Ghost, when any token for good, any sweet testimony of the sinner's salvation and safety is given, it suits the spirit with the water, and thus the spirit and the water and the blood all agree in one united testimony, and this testimony is that the work is of God, that the influences upon the soul are divine, and they never can bear testimony to anything else. The Spirit can never bear testimony to our hypocrisy and self-righteousness, evil, sin and iniquity; it can accord with nothing but God and godliness. Therefore, they agree in one. And they also agree with the voice in heaven, and thus all these three witnesses in the heart agree with the voice of God in heaven. In heaven the Father sheds abroad his love, the Word—the Lord Jesus Christ reveals his blood, the Holy Ghost communicates his sanctifying operations and breathes pardon and peace into a man's conscience. These are the three heavenly witnesses and they are one. They agree in sweet union with the spirit in the word, with the water in the soul, and the blood upon the conscience, and thus they agree in one as an harmonious whole. There is no jarring in true religion. It is all sweetly bound up together in the bonds of love with the Lord the Lamb. There is no jarring in the teachings of God, no strivings. If

there be any strife, any division, any jarring, it is not of God. The witnesses of heaven are one in power, essence, dignity and glory; and the three witnesses upon earth in the heart of the saint agree in one. Now look at your experience. What has the Lord done for your soul? Is there any strife there? Is there any movement of the work of grace? Is the Lord in the beginning, middle, or end of his work there? What is God now doing for you? How the whole forms one harmonious continual chain? How there is an intermixture of the blood with the water and the spirit? Whence do you get your strength and righteousness? Whence do you get your power? Whence but from above? And do not the spirit, the water, and the blood speak of the glory of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost? Then you will find these three agree in one. And this is that that gives a substantial union in the children of God. At once they recognize each other. At times the sparkling of the eye, only a word, a single expression will bring about an union, and all this because, as when two drops of rain run down a pane as soon as they get to the bottom they unite and become one drop, so does the experience of God's saints agree each with each. When they are brought together they flow into one, because the spirit is the same, and this is the foundation of all spiritual union. You cannot bring together a child of God and a dead professor. You can as soon bring together, I was going to say, Christ and Belial, as a true saint of God and a professor. But the true saints of God can be brought together, because they are taught by the same Spirit, live under the same influences, and are washed by the same blood; and these three witnesses agree in one. This is the foundation of all union and communion, of all church fellowship, and of all walking together in sweet companionship. These are the things, my friends, we must know by the teaching of God. We may think we are sound Trinitarians. That is not enough. God must make us sound Trinitarians by forming a trinity in us. Here it is if we have the work of the Trinity wrought upon our heart. There is the workman and the work, the teacher and the teaching, and he who produces these gracious effects upon the soul is the source, the fountain whence it all flows. Without this we may have a sound creed, lead consistent lives, and walk in a

fair outside profession, but where is our hope, where is our standing? And, oh, where will our souls be at the last great and final day when the Lord shall arise to judge the earth?

HEAVENLY ATTRACTION AND SPIRITUAL OBEDIENCE

Preached on Thursday Evening, July 7th, 1842, at Zoar Chapel,
Great Alie Street, London

"Draw me; we will run after Thee." Sol. Song 1:4

A pestilent doctrine has lately been imported into this country from Germany, that this blessed book—the Song of Solomon—is not of divine inspiration, and that it ought therefore to be expunged from the canonical Scriptures. Now this is the downward progress of error. Men begin first with denying the inward revelation of the Person, work, blood, and love of Christ by the Holy Ghost in the hearts of the elect; and then they proceed to deny the outward revelation of the mind of Christ by the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures of truth; and, by and by, unless the Lord prevent, they will land in sheer infidelity. Such has been the case in Germany, with the churches founded by Luther; and such it is to be feared will be the case in the great mass of the Dissenting churches among us, if we may judge from present appearances. It is the want of divine teaching in the soul, and of an experience corresponding with that described in the Song of Solomon, that leads men to reject the inspiration and divine authority of this blessed book. Having seen no glory of Christ in their own souls, having felt no heavenly beams of His love and grace in their own hearts, having experienced no castings down nor liftings up, similar to those described in the Song of Solomon, their carnal minds see nothing in these beautiful images of a deeply spiritual and experimental nature; and therefore, not being able from a sweet experience to enter into those heavenly mysteries of divine love betwixt Christ and His Church that are set forth in this inspired Song, their polluted imagination turns into carnality all that the Holy Ghost has there revealed of a spiritual nature. "To the pure all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure, but even their mind and conscience is defiled" (Tit. 1:15). And thus their unbelieving mind and defiled conscience have combined to reject

as uninspired the sweetest expression of the loves of Christ and His Bride that is to be found in the Scriptures.

We must leave these men, however, to the deceits and subtle delusions of the father of lies, from whom this lie came. Deceived by him, on they will go in their downward progress. And it will be our mercy if we can lift up our hearts to the Lord, and thank Him for having taught us otherwise.

Now I think if we look at the Song of Solomon we shall see in it different states and stages of divine experience. I believe we should be wrong if we considered that the Bride—who speaks in my text—was in one uniform state or stage of experience all through the book. But she begins at a certain spot, to which I shall presently call your attention; and the Lord leads her on step by step, fulfilling in her that sweet word, that "the path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

What, then, is the spiritual stage in which the church is found in the opening of this book? I will endeavour to explain it as far as I see, or have any experience of it.

The Bride, judging from her words to the Lord in the first verse of this book, had felt a measure of His love shed abroad in her heart. Now this pre-supposes that she had been taught by the blessed Spirit her deep need of Jesus; it pre-supposes that she was deeply acquainted with the guilt of sin, and the corruption of her depraved nature. Nor is this merely pre-supposed, or faintly implied; it is *expressed* in actual words; for she says, "Look not upon me, because I am *black*." She here expresses what were the feelings of her heart—that she was altogether black; not partly fair and partly dark, but black altogether. Women in the East never go abroad without a veil, which preserves their complexion; but she had been thrust out, stripped of this protection, as she speaks afterwards: "The keepers of the walls took away my veil from me." And being thrust out into the wilderness, and exposed to the burning sun of temptation, she

became "black as the tents of Kedar," which being made of black goat's hair, as well as continually exposed to heat and dust, had not a white thread in them. Being thus blackened, and filled with self-loathing, she says to the daughters of Jerusalem, "Look not upon me, because I am black." And yet, black though she was, she had received into her heart such a measure of the blood and righteousness of her dear Lord, and she had experienced such a sense of His love "shed abroad in her heart by the Holy Ghost," that she could say "she was comely;" and vents the language of her soul towards her Beloved in that abrupt but impassioned language, "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, for Thy love is better than wine." Now had she never felt any taste of Christ's love, she never would have said, "Thy love is better than wine;" and had she never known any sweet manifestation of it, she never would have used the language, "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth." The kiss is the tenderest expression of love; and thus her words imply not only that she knew there was love in the bosom of her Redeemer, but that there had been some manifestation, some expression of that love, which she longed again to experience.

"Because of the savour of Thy good ointments, Thy name is as ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love Thee." Connected, then, with this love that she had to the Redeemer, and with this experience of its sweetness, as "shed abroad in her heart by the Holy Ghost," there was an inward sense of the savour of His name. He had drawn near to her holy garments. Their love was a consecrated one; and to her of a sanctifying nature. Though expressed in terms of creature love, it was altogether spiritual and heavenly. The very words of Christ to her, "My *sister*, my spouse" (4:10), show the purity of their affection. And, therefore, having felt the sanctifying, consecrating nature of this love, she speaks of "the savour of His good ointments;" and that "His name was to her as ointment poured forth."

And this brings us to the text—"Draw me; we will run after thee." We have in these words, *first*, a prayer—"Draw me," and *then* we have what she knew in her soul would be the consequence, if that

prayer were heard and answered—*"We will run after Thee."*

I. In the short and simple prayer, *"Draw me,"* we shall find, if the Lord shall be pleased to lead us into its contents, much experimental truth contained.

I. We find, *first*, that in it is couched a *deep sense of spiritual necessity*. She would never have asked the Lord to "draw her," unless there had been wrought in her soul a feeling of deep necessity, penniless poverty, thorough bankruptcy, and entire insolvency. But what had reduced her to this penniless condition? Why, guilt laid upon her conscience. And I would ask what else but guilt, pressing upon the conscience, can ever make a man really desire the blood of sprinkling? It seems absurd to me, that a man who has never been cut up by convictions of sin and guilt should want a Saviour. It seems absurd that any should want the application of the atoning blood of Jesus, but he that carries about with him a guilty conscience; or that he should desire to have a sweet revelation of His glorious righteousness—that comely robe—unless he shivers and shrinks from a sense of his nakedness before the heart-searching presence of Him whose "eyes behold, and whose eyelids try the children of men." Nor can I comprehend how anyone can want to have anything to do with Jesus, unless there has been raised up in his soul, by the blessed Spirit, such a sight and sense of his own baseness, blackness, and vileness, as shall make such a Saviour as is revealed in the Scriptures, a suitable Saviour to him.

2. But again; the word, *"draw me,"* pre-supposes *also a deep sense of helplessness*. Unless the Church, using this expression, was absolutely helpless, as well as absolutely necessitous—unless she were (as the Scripture speaks), "without strength" (Rom. 5:6), she could not call upon her Lord to "draw her;" for there would have been in her some strength to move towards Him, independent of His powerful attraction. Had she a grain of strength left, she need not have called upon the Lord to draw her. Were there in her any power to move a step forward, distinct from the attraction of His Spirit within, it would have been a

superfluous word for her to make use of.

The very expression, then, that proceeds from her lips, "Draw me," necessarily implies a sense of her own utter helplessness to move a single step unless she felt the powerful cords of His love and grace in her heart. Now this is a feeling common to all the family of God; they know experimentally, and they know painfully, what it is to be without help and without strength. But why do *they* know it? and why are all others ignorant of the secret? Because the quickened family of God know, each according to his measure, what divine power is; they have at times felt what it is to be "holpen with a little help," and to receive the strength of God into their souls, according to those words, "In the day when I cried, Thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul" (Ps. 138:3). And having once tasted this strength, all short of this strength is weakness. The Lord says, "No man, having drunk old wine, straitway desireth new; for he saith, The old is better." But what showed this man the difference betwixt old wine and new? It was having drunk it. So it is with respect to the secret of divine strength and natural strength. What shows a man the difference betwixt the two? It is having tasted a measure of divine strength put forth in his soul. And thus the regenerated family of God never can be cheated with that Arminian delusion of creature strength, because the Lord has let down into their hearts such a measure of spiritual life and heavenly light, of sovereign grace and supernatural strength, that, having tasted this gospel wine, they know it from all other; and having once felt it, having been thus initiated into "the secret of the Lord, which is with them that fear Him," when they are destitute of this strength, they feel themselves utterly helpless, utterly weak, and utterly impotent. A man may indeed stand very high in a profession of religion, but if he has not, like Samson, had his locks cut, if he has not been impoverished in his soul, and painfully felt his utter weakness and helplessness, he is not really in the secret as to the difference between natural strength and supernatural. Samson, when his locks were cut, thought he would go out as before, and "he wist not that the Lord was departed from him;" but directly the

Philistines came upon him, he learned in a moment that his strength was gone. Thus it is sometimes with God's children; their spiritual locks have been secretly cut, and they perhaps are at the same time unaware that their strength has departed from them; but let some temptation come, let some powerful enemy fall upon them, and they begin to find, with Samson, that all their strength is gone, and dried up as a potsherd. In this deep state of helplessness was the Bride, when she poured forth this impassioned prayer in the ears of her heavenly Lover, "Draw me."

3. But again; there was something in her conscience more than guilt, and there was something in her soul more than weakness; she had "tasted that the Lord was gracious:" she had received a measure of divine love into her heart. This it was which, mysteriously blending with guilt and helplessness, set her soul on fire; this it was which enkindled her affections, and drew forth the longing desires of her heart. Hart speaks of some:

"Not drawn by love, nor driv'n by fear;"

but the Bride had not merely that which *drove* her (such as guilt and necessity), but she had also that which *drew* her, "the cords of love and the bands of a man;" the puttings forth of the Redeemer's grace in her soul, which He Himself speaks of as "putting in His hand by the hole of the door." Now it is perfectly true that we are *driven* before we are *drawn*, and this is symbolised in Scripture very sweetly by the cities of refuge. The man-slayer was not *drawn* to those cities of refuge by any affection which he had towards them, but he was *driven* to them by the weight of guilt—by being a man of blood. And so the elect of God, under the first teachings of the Spirit, are driven through fear, through guilt, through necessity, to seek a refuge. But when once they have sheltered their souls in the Rock of Ages, and the Lord has received them into His loving arms, and given them some taste that He is gracious, then there is the putting forth of another principle, the working of another movement in their hearts, which is sweetly set forth in this petition of the Bride,

"Draw me; we will run after Thee."

His supernatural beauty (for "He is fairer than the children of men") had smitten her with love; and longing to get near, but crippled and paralysed with guilt and helplessness, all she could say was, "Draw me."

So that if we look at her in her state and stage of experience as here set forth, we shall find these two things working in her soul; two things different in kind, and yet both tending to the same spot. First, a sense of her necessity, her guilt, her helplessness, so that she could not do, could not live without a Saviour; and secondly, the affections of her heart were moved towards Him; so that in her were blended the being driven by necessity and the being drawn by love.

But what should raise up in her soul this earnest and impassioned cry, "Draw me?" Must she not have seen something in the Lord which enkindled her affections? Must she not have had a sight of some supernatural beauty, that drew forth these warm desires after Him? Yea, surely. The Lord had shown her His lovely Person; and a sight of that glorious Person had won all her heart.

But what is this glorious Person? and what is there in this glorious Person that it should so draw forth the affections of the renewed and regenerated soul? This glorious Person is the incarnate God, the only begotten Son of the Father manifest in the flesh, Immanuel, God with us. And it is in the mysterious and indissoluble union of these two natures in one Person that His supernatural beauty consists.

The Deity of the Son of God shines all through the sacred page. It is the grand cardinal point on which all the doctrines of grace turn: and he that is unsound there, is unsound everywhere. The Godhead of Christ does not rest upon a few texts of Scripture, but it shines all through the Scripture; it is the light of the Scripture, and it is the life of the Scripture. Take away the Deity of Jesus out of the Scripture, and you would do the same thing spiritually

as though you blotted the sun out of the sky naturally; the sacred page would be one black darkness. But the Person of Jesus is not Deity only. No man can see God and live; we could not bear to look upon pure Deity. And therefore the Son of God has taken into union with Himself our nature; He has "taken upon Him the seed of Abraham," that "holy thing" which was begotten by the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and there united to the second Person of the glorious Trinity, that Godhead and manhood might form one glorious Person, Immanuel, God with us. Now to the eye of faith there is the greatest beauty and glory in Christ's humanity. The enlightened soul views Deity shining through the manhood; and when it sees Jesus "going about doing good," when it hears the words that dropped from His gracious lips, when it views Him by the eye of faith, bleeding, suffering, agonising, and dying, it sees the Godhead in all these acts, upholding and shining through the manhood. And it is this union of the two natures in one glorious Person, that fills the heart that receives it in the faith of it and in the love of it with a measure of pure affection.

Here, then, the Church has a view of the glorious Person of Jesus; and she falls in love with Him. There is that in supernatural beauty which kindles spiritual affection, as there is that in natural beauty which kindles natural affection. When the quickened soul sees supernatural beauty, it immediately falls in love with it. The spiritual affections centre in spiritual beauty. And thus, when the redeemed and regenerated soul sees the glorious Person of Christ, God-man, Immanuel, God with us, and has a taste and sense of His love, the Blessed Spirit thereby kindles in it spiritual affection, and attracts it with these "cords of love and bands of a man."

But was the Church at this moment in the sweet enjoyment of it? When she poured forth this passionate cry, was she being embraced in the arms of love? No, surely; for had she been there she would not have been saying, "Draw me." She was at a distance; she was far off, and could not get nigh. She was sitting in the dark, and not walking in the light. She was mourning in solitary places, and not sitting with her Lord in heavenly places.

But yet in the midst of all her darkness and desolation there was the secret kindling of spiritual affection in her heart, which vented itself in that cry, "Draw me." The Blessed Spirit was secretly operating in her heart, and under His divine anointings there was a going forth of her spirit after the Redeemer. Had He not kindled the desire, nor prompted the speech, she could never have uttered the words, "Draw me." We know, from painful experience, that there are times when we dare not ask Christ to draw us, for were our prayer answered (and the living soul shrinks from the hypocrisy of putting up a prayer which it does not wish to be answered) it would draw us away from things that our carnal mind loves better. There are many of God's people, I believe, who are actually afraid of asking for great blessings, because they know that great blessings are attended with great trials, and their carnal minds are in that state of darkness, deadness, and rebellion, that they dare not put up the desire to be brought nearer to Jesus, because they feel there is no suitability betwixt them in their present state and Jesus, as their eyes see and consciences feel Him to be revealed in the Word. "But," say you, "is it possible for a child of God ever to be in that state, that he does not want Christ to draw him?" Where was the Church as described in Hosea 2:5, when she said, "I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink?" She at that time had known the Lord, and had been espoused to Him, for she says lower down, "I will go and return *to my first Husband*, for then was it better with me than now" (v. 7). So far from wanting to be drawn to the Lord, she was running away from Him after her lovers, and He had "to hedge up her way with thorns, and make a wall, that she should not find her paths." And is not this often our case? There is something in Jesus so holy, and there is in us that which is so unholy, there is something in the Lord so spiritual, and in us so carnal, that so far from desiring to be brought nigh, because in being brought nigh we must be cut off from everything that our idolatrous hearts are set upon, we would rather the Lord would leave us to ourselves than draw us to Himself, since by so doing He would draw us out of that which our flesh so dearly loves. Now suppose a man is so situated that if he cleave close to the Lord

he must make great sacrifices; say, for instance, that he is in trade, and if he is to follow very close after the Lord, and have a very tender conscience, and walk as the Lord would have him walk, it would be at a great temporal loss; why, there are times and seasons in that man's experience, though he is a child of God, when he dare not ask the Lord to draw him, because he fears, if the Lord were to do this, it would draw him out of a good business into the workhouse. And so a child of God may sometimes be so entangled in some idolatrous affection, so overtaken with a besetting sin, or so fettered and bound with some darling lust that he dare not ask the Lord to draw him, because he knows that in being brought near to His sacred feet he must be brought out of that which his carnal mind cleaves to.

But the Church, at the time that she was now speaking, was not in that state. The Lord had shed abroad a sacred power over her; He had made her willing to take up the cross, and "follow Him in the regeneration;" He had given her the will, if it were so needful, to cut off a right hand, or to pluck out a right eye; and He so attracted the eyes of her soul to Himself, that He drew her away from her lovers. She was not now in that backsliding state described, Jer. 2:25, "I have loved strangers, and after them will I go;" but the Lord had attracted and drawn forth all her affections to Himself, so that by the sweet operations of His grace in her soul, and by the blessed influences of His divine love shed abroad in her heart, she was willing to make any sacrifice, so that she might be permitted to come near unto Him, that He might "kiss her with the kisses of His mouth." These two things are very compatible in the same individual. For the spiritual man is usually very much like the scales of a balance, sometimes the carnal mind sadly preponderating, and sometimes the spiritual mind blessedly preponderating; sometimes having an aversion to everything that is holy and spiritual, and sometimes feeling vital godliness to be the very element of his soul.

The Church, then, in her present state and stage of experience, has turned her back upon her lovers; has forsaken the "broken cisterns that can hold no water," and is so overshadowed with

divine operations, and so attracted by the Lord's grace and love in her soul, that she says, "Draw me." As though all her heart was concentrated in those words, as though her very soul was poured forth in them, as though they contained all the workings of her mind, and were the summing up of all her spiritual feelings; as though she would say—"All my desire is summed up in this, all my wishes centre in this one point—'draw me;' I cannot live without Thee, and yet I cannot come nigh Thee; 'Thy love is better than wine,' and yet that love I cannot taste unless Thou art pleased to shed it abroad; I am a poor, vacillating, backsliding, inconsistent, idolatrous wretch, that cannot but sin against Thee, and shall ever sin against Thee, unless Thou art pleased to 'draw me' near to Thy sacred Person, that in coming near to Thee Thy name may be 'as ointment poured forth,' and thus that sweet savour may banish everything which is not consistent with Thy love." Though perhaps not very often, yet there are times and seasons when the child of God is here. Such or similar feelings come upon him at times when he is lying upon his bed; they steal over him at times when he is sitting in his solitary room, or visit him when he is engaged in his daily business; aye, it may be when he is passing along the crowded streets of this metropolis. "Draw me," in the words themselves, or in their substance and meaning, is sighed forth, as though he would complainingly tell the Lord that he was unable to get near, and yet unable to stay away; unable to realise that which his soul desired, and yet unable to live happily and contentedly without it.

II. "*We will run after Thee.*" That is what the Bride well knew would be the sure consequence of her prayer being heard and answered.

There is no free will here; nothing of the boasted free agency of man—"I will do this, and I will do that." But it is—"Draw me" *first*, put forth Thy divine hand, shed abroad Thy blessed operations, breathe Thy heavenly power into my soul, and *then* "we will run after Thee." Now this is just the state in which the child of God is from time to time. He is not the self-righteous Arminian, who can read, hear and pray, believe, hope and love, as when and how he

will: nor is he the presumptuous Antinomian, who, resting in the doctrine of creature helplessness, never wishes to have any obedience wrought in him, but is satisfied with doing nothing whereby God may be glorified, or His people benefited. But he is in this state—unable to do anything, and yet willing to do everything if the Lord would but enable him: unable to move a single step in the way, and yet so dissatisfied with his own slothfulness and inability, that he wishes nothing so much as that the Lord would "work in him to will and to do of His good pleasure," and make him all that He would have him to be.

"We will run after Thee." What does this imply? Why, it implies that there is a *"following on to know the Lord."* The Church does not say, "Draw me, we will *come to Thee,*" but "Draw me, we will *run after Thee.*" And this rather seems to point to an experience that I dare say some of you are acquainted with. Which is this—that when the Lord is pleased to draw the soul by some sweet attraction, He often (so to speak) retires and recedes out of sight, that He may lead us further on, and draw us more away from sense, sight, and reason, and more out of ourselves. We find this set forth in the third chapter, first and second verses, where the Church says—"By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth; I sought Him, but I found Him not. I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the broadways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth; *I sought Him, but I found Him not.*" Here is the Bride seeking Jesus, and finding Him not; He receding out of sight, retiring (so to speak) away from her anxious pursuit. Now this is what many of the children of God know in soul experience, that the Lord seems to recede from them; and the nearer they try to get to Him, the farther they find themselves from Him, and the more unable they seem to find "Him whom their soul loveth." The Bride then, being conscious of this, says, *"We will run after Thee;"* however long be the way, however dangerous be the road, whatever stumbling-blocks lie in the path, whatever difficulties, anxieties, and perplexities may intervene between me and Thee, only "draw me," only put forth Thy mighty power in bringing me nearer to Thyself with the cords of love, and *"we will run after Thee;"* the way will not be too long, and the path will not be too narrow; with the blessed putting forth of Thy

power in the soul, "we will run after Thee," though it be to the very ends of the earth.

But the soul, in thus running after Jesus, has some anxiously-desired objects to attain. What are these objects?

1. Why, when she is guilty, and sin lies as a heavy burden upon her conscience, she runs after Him that *she may obtain a sight of that blood of sprinkling* "which speaketh better things than that of Abel." Some people think that if they once have received pardon, they need have no renewal of it as long as they live. Hart was not of that opinion when he wrote,

"Begging mercy every hour."

He wanted pardon to be continually applied to his soul; as fresh guilt arose, he wanted fresh mercy to be manifested. And I believe such is the experience of every soul that knows anything of the Lord. It cannot be satisfied with having received mercy once; it must have mercy again and again; and the more mercy it tastes, the more it will be seeking fresh and fresh manifestations of it.

2. But to obtain a sense of mercy was not the only object that the Bride sought to obtain in running this heavenly race. She sought also to "*attain to righteousness*" (Rom. 9:30). She was "black," and therefore needed that "righteousness of God, which is unto all and upon all them that believe;" and she knew that she must run after Jesus, and get near to Him, that she might be clothed with this blessed garment of imputed righteousness.

3. She wanted also *strength*. She had no strength to resist sin, no strength to mortify the members which are upon the earth, and "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts;" she wanted power to be delivered from the spirit of the world, to put off the old man and to put on the new, and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit; and therefore she would "run after Him," that she might receive strength out of His fulness.

4. But she would "run after Him," not merely to receive pardon, righteousness, and strength, but above all that she might be favoured with *some sweet visitations of His gracious presence*. For that is what the Lord's people chiefly want to feel. If they could have pardon and righteousness and strength without Christ's presence, it would not be true pardon, true righteousness, nor true strength. It is the manifestation of these things as accompanied by the presence of Christ, it is the receiving of them from His own hands, it is the hearing of them from His own gracious lips, it is the sweet enjoyment of them by His own positive and inward testimony, that makes pardon to be pardon, righteousness to be righteousness, and strength to be strength. They are otherwise but so many doctrines that stand in the letter of the word, but are not blessed realities received into the heart and conscience from the lips and mouth of Jesus; and therefore she would "run after Him," that she might taste His presence, as the grand crowning blessing, and enjoy the Giver as well as His gifts.

5. And this leads us to observe that she would also "run after Him" that *she might enjoy communion with Him*. His gifts, His graces, even His very presence would not satisfy her, unless there were something mutual, some heavenly fellowship and divine intercourse, some exchange of loves. Love is not satisfied with mere presence. Some intercommunion is needed, some exchange of the pure affections of the heart, some melting into and union with the same spirit. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." "And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3)

6. And she besought Him to "draw her" that she might also "run after Him" *in a way of practical obedience*. Her desire was to fulfil His precepts, and to tread in His footsteps; that His holy image might be stamped upon her, and that she might walk in conformity to the example which He has left that we should follow His steps. But she had no power to obey; she could not perform one precept, she could not take up one cross, she could not lift her soul up out of that state of helplessness in which she was

now lying, nor could she run a single step forward in the path of simple and spiritual obedience, unless He was pleased to "draw her" that she might "run after Him," and so walk in the strait and narrow path that He walked in before her. To obey in the letter is easy, but obedience in the letter is like everything else in the letter—it is "of the earth, earthy;" it is sensual and natural; it cannot therefore profit the soul. But what the soul that is really taught of God desires, is to walk in the path of experimental obedience, that its motives may be spiritual and its practice spiritual; its words spiritual and its works spiritual; and that the mind and will of God may be so revealed in the soul that its way and walk may be experimental and spiritual from first to last. It may satisfy the blind Pharisee to tread a mill-horse round of legal duties; it may content the dead Calvinist to walk a similar round of mere doctrines; but the living soul must have doctrine, promise, precept—in a word, everything that it calls or counts *religion*, to be spiritual and experimental from first to last. Nor can such a one realise one doctrine which is not brought by the blessed Spirit into his heart; nor can he enjoy one promise which is not made sweet to his soul by an internal application of it by the Spirit; nor can he take a single step in the path of practical, spiritual obedience, unless the Spirit of God "work in him both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

There was, then, raised up in the heart of the Bride this simple, this single, this sincere desire to follow Jesus "whithersoever He goeth;" and that is the mark of a true follower of the Lamb. Through the flood, through the fire, through the wilderness, through the darkness, through temptation, through tribulation, through conflict, through exercises—whithersoever the Lamb leads, His people follow. He is their Head, He is their Guide, He is their Lord, He is their Husband, He is their King; and Him they follow, Him they run after, and in His footsteps they desire to walk. Thus the Bride, under the blessed operations of the Holy Ghost, says, "*Draw me, we will run after Thee.*"

Had she not been under the blessed operations of the Spirit, this would have been in her the language of presumption. Had she

said boldly that she *would* "run after Him," had she not preceded that by the sweet supplication—"Draw me," it would have been in her but the expression of vain confidence. It would have resembled his speech, who said to Jesus, "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest," but whose fleshly zeal the Lord soon suppressed, when He told him that "foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head" (Lu. 9:57, 58). But her whole soul being on fire, her affections drawn forth, and her heart sweetly touched by the Spirit of God, she was able to run in the path which He should point out, however distressing or however dark that path might be to nature, sense, reason, flesh and blood.

This, then, implies a willingness to make sacrifices; for he that will follow Jesus must take up his cross and deny himself, or he cannot be His disciple (Lu. 14:27). It implies a resolution to follow the Lord, whatsoever come to pass; it carries with it the solemn determination of the soul, when under these sweet operations, to do the Lord's bidding, and, in whatever path He may precede, in that implicitly and submissively to follow. Such a resolution, then, is not a thing that a man may take up and lay down just as he pleases; it is not a mere doctrine in God's Word, which one may see there, and, as such, may approve of as true. But it is having a certain experience produced in the heart; it is being brought by the Holy Ghost Himself into a certain state and stage of the divine life; and it is having these things wrought with that efficacious power in the soul, of which we read (Ps. 110:3), "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power."

This, as it appears to me, was the state and stage of the Bride in soul experience, when she poured forth these words so sweetly expressive of the warm desires of her heart.

How many of us can take these words now into our lips, or have ever been able at any one time of our life to use such an expression? Which of us has ever been so blessedly lifted up into the knowledge of Christ and of His glorious Person, and has had such a sight of Him by living faith, that these words would sum

up in them the whole desire of the heart, "Draw me?"—away from relations, away from friends, away from what flesh loves and clings to most closely, away from everything that my carnal heart is bound up in and fettered down by. Which of us has ever been made willing to give up and forsake all, and follow Jesus simply and singly in the path that He shall point out?—and all from spiritual love to His Person, all from a principle of pure affection; not merely from a desire to get to heaven at the last, not influenced by a self-righteous principle, as if by these things we shall merit salvation, but from a simple, sincere, single breathing forth of love and affection to Jesus, as being altogether suitable, and "altogether lovely."

Surely, then, there must have been some love sips before the soul could really say, "Draw me?" There must have been some sight and sense of the preciousness and loveliness of Jesus, before ever it could cry, "Draw me," from the depth of a sincere heart. For the sincere soul is afraid to utter a petition it does not feel; it fears to approach the holy Jehovah, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and insult Him with mock petitions and words that it does not feel. He, therefore, that can enter into the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of this—"Draw me," must have had something let down into his soul from Jesus previously, which has kindled affection, and drawn forth the sincere and fervent spiritual desires of the heart. When you lie, perhaps, upon your bed, and in an agony of intercession are crying, "Draw me," there must be that in your soul which longs after a manifestation of the love and presence of Christ. When, as you are engaged in your various occupations, there is a secret putting up of a cry in your souls, "Draw me," there must be in you some new principle, there must exist a spiritual nature within, which can really desire such a thing as to be drawn. It is not in some of you the mere uttering of words without any feeling, but it is the solemn intercourse of a living soul with a heart-searching God; it is some solemn transaction between God and conscience, when no eye is present to see, nor ear open to hear. And I believe that no man can really cry from the very depth of his soul, "Draw me," and pour this forth time after time in fervent intercession to the Lord, who has

not had a glimpse by faith of the glorious Person of Christ—who has not realised some measure of Jesus' grace, love, and blood. I grant it may have been a small measure, and that dim and transient; but there must have been some discovery of Jesus, as suited to his helpless and hopeless condition. And it is the mysterious working together of his misery and Jesus' mercy, of his weakness and Jesus' strength, of his guilt and Jesus' blood, of his death and darkness and Jesus' life and light, of his baseness and blackness and Jesus' everlasting righteousness—it is a living sight and sense of these two opposites, and a meeting together of them in the same bosom, that makes him cry, "Draw me."

The words then imply a felt and spiritual knowledge that there is everything in the creature which is vile and filthy, and everything in the Saviour which is beautiful and lovely; that everything in man is weakness and helplessness, and everything in the Lord is suitable to such an emptied, exercised, and poverty-stricken soul. No Arminian and no Antinomian could use these words with sincerity; for the Arminian could not say, "Draw me," when he could run of himself; and the Antinomian could not say, "We will run after Thee," when he is not willing to move a single step forward in practical obedience. None but a living soul can really use both clauses in sincerity and godly simplicity. For such only is so sensible of his own helplessness as to feel his need to be drawn, such only has had a sight of Jesus' beauty, which kindles the desire to be drawn, such only is willing to walk in the path of self-denying obedience, and "mortify the deeds of the body."

If ever then the Lord has raised up this cry in our hearts, there must be divine life there; there must be spiritual feeling, there must be faith, there must be hope, there must be love, there must be the Holy Ghost there. I do not say—if ever we have used the words; but I say—if ever we have had the feelings that I have been describing. And if you have these feelings, and are able in secret to vent them before the Lord, I want to know (and I appeal to the conscience of those who are exercised with distressing doubts and fears whether the Lord has ever been gracious to them), where did these things come from? Did they come from

the devil? Would he put it in the heart to cry, "Draw me?" Did they come from the flesh? Has the flesh any love to God? Is not "the carnal mind enmity against God?" Then whence did it come? Why, from "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." They came from Him as a good and perfect gift, as a blessed communication of divine life, as a pledge of eternal happiness, as a drop from that blessed fountain at which the redeemed will through all eternity slake their happy souls.

Have you then—can you, join with the Bride, and say, "Draw me? at whatever risk, whatever sacrifice; I cannot live without Thee, I cannot die without Thee; whatever it costs, 'draw me,' that I may 'run after Thee,' and receive Thee into my heart as my Lord and my God." If ever that desire has been kindled, and that prayer raised up in your soul, "Draw me, we will run after Thee," it must have been the work of the Holy Ghost in your hearts, to raise up those feelings, and to give you that living faith in the Son of God. And "he that believeth shall be saved." Whatever doubts, whatever fears, whatever temptations, whatever exercises beset the path, "he that believeth shall be saved." He that has had given him one grain of spiritual faith in Christ's glorious Person, who has had one sight of His atoning blood, one sip of divine love shed abroad in his heart, is sure to go to glory; he is saved with an everlasting salvation in his covenant Head. The Lord that has kindled these strong desires after Himself in his soul, will surely fulfil them. As we find He did in the case of the Bride! He said to her after a little time, "Rise up, My love, My fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land" (2:11, 12).

Some of you perhaps may be surprised to see me here this evening. As I had to pass through Town, I felt an inclination to see my friends at Zoar, and speak to them, though it were but once, in the name of the Lord. I assure you, my friends, that it has been a disappointment to me that I am not able to come among you as usual this year; and nothing but the state of my

health would have prevented me. Could I have come in a quiet way, without that anxiety, that excitement, that labour, which always accompanies my preaching here, I would have come amongst you as heretofore; but my constitution is not able to stand the great mental and bodily exertion that always falls upon me in coming to preach in London; and for that reason, and for no other, I have been obliged for this year to decline my annual visit. But I would not pass through Town without standing up here this evening to show that I bear you in my heart, and that I would willingly, had circumstances permitted, come as usual, and spoken to you in the name of the Lord.

THE HEAVENLY BIRTH AND ITS EARTHLY COUNTERFEITS

Preached on Lord's Day Evening, July 23rd, 1843, at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London.

"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:11-13

Hypocrisy and self-righteousness never probably rose to such a height as at the period when the Lord of life and glory was upon earth. The besetting sin of the Jewish nation before the Babylonish captivity was idolatry, as we find recorded in the pages of the Old Testament; but after their return from that captivity **more than five hundred years before Christ came into the world**, they never relapsed into open idol-worship. The form of ungodliness in them was changed. The human heart, ever "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," put on a new mask; and though they no longer bowed down to gods of wood and stone, nor went after the vain idols of their fathers, yet they prostituted the worship of the only true God into lip-service and "bodily exercise". And thus, though nominally worshippers of the only true God, yet they were as far from Him in their hearts, though with their lips they drew nigh, as when their forefathers bowed down before stocks and stones.

It was at this period, then, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world; and chose at this time to fulfil all those prophecies, which He before had given concerning the Messiah. Of this period the apostle John speaks in the opening of this chapter. "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received

Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" **Joh 1:9-13**.

The text speaks of two entirely distinct classes of characters—those who received Christ, and those who received Him not: and it further tells us what was the happiness and blessed privilege of those who received Him into their hearts and affections as the Son of God.

I. Now, what was the reason of this difference? How came it to pass that of men born in the same nation, living in the same period of time, and placed in precisely similar circumstances, some received Christ, and others received Him not? Must we not trace it up to God's absolute sovereignty?—that the reason why some did not receive Him was because God willed it so? And why others did receive Him was equally because God willed it so? Can we admit any other **final** cause of this difference than the sovereign will of God, determining rejection by one, and reception by the other.

But when we come down from looking at God's sovereignty to view the workings of the human heart, we see that there were certain **instrumental** causes which operated on the minds of the one, as there were certain **instrumental** causes which influenced the wills of the other. Those that "received Him not" were under the influence of certain workings. They knew nothing of divine sovereignty; they had no idea that what they said and did was according to God's "determinate counsel" **Ac 2:23**. In doing what they did, they followed the bent of their own minds; and thus they were seemingly left to the exercise of their own will, whilst God really ordered every action, that it might be to His own glory.

1. One cause, then, why those who "received Him not" scornfully rejected Him, was **the blindness and ignorance of their heart**. And this is one cause why men still to this day reject the

Lord of life and glory. As the apostle says, they were "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" **Eph 4:18**. And to this the prophet alludes when he says, speaking in the name of the Jewish people, "He shall grow up... as a root out of a dry ground; He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him" **Isa 53:2**. When the Jews looked upon the Man of sorrows, He was not what their fancy had figured out—a conquering Messiah, who should come to deliver them from the Roman yoke. And therefore, being spiritually ignorant of His Person and work, they rejected Him, because their eyes were not opened to see the dignity of the Godhead under the veil of the suffering manhood.

2. Another reason was **their self-righteousness**. And this same cause operates in men's minds now. Until self-righteousness is in a measure broken down in a man's heart, he never can see any beauty nor comeliness in a bleeding Jesus. Being madly enamoured of his own righteousness, and not seeing it in the light of God's countenance as "filthy rags," **Isa 64:6** he has no eyes to see, no ears to hear, no heart to receive that glorious robe of righteousness, which the Son of God wrought out, and which is imputed to all that believe on His name.

3. Another cause was **the worldliness of their minds**. They were buried in the world, in the poor perishing things of time and sense. Being dead in sin, they had no spiritual faculty, whereby eternal things were perceived; no spiritual appetite, whereby heavenly food was relished; no spiritual birth, whereby they could enter into the kingdom of heaven. When Nicodemus therefore came to Jesus by night, the very first truth that the Lord laid before him was the new birth: "Except a man be born again" he can neither "see," nor "enter into the kingdom of God." **Joh 3:3,5**.

4. But the grand prevailing cause, after all, was **unbelief**. It was not the determinate purpose of God to give them faith; He left them therefore in their unbelief. Thus, having no spiritual faith to

believe the testimony of God concerning His dear Son, and being left altogether to the power of unbelief, they first inwardly rejected, and then openly crucified the Lord of life and glory. The same cause operates now. When we consider Christ's miracles, we may look with astonishment upon the unbelief of the Jews; but the same unbelief reigns by nature in the hearts of all; and as long as men are blind, self-righteous, worldly, and unbelieving **and they are all these until God "works in them to will and to do of His good pleasure"**, they will reject Jesus, and say secretly, "We will not have this Man to reign over us," **Lu 19:14** just as their forefathers the Jews rejected Him openly when He stood at Pilate's tribunal.

II. But God's will was not to be frustrated; the Almighty's purposes were not to be disappointed by the almost universal rejection of Jesus by the Jews. He had from eternity "a peculiar people," who had an everlasting and indissoluble union with His dear Son. There was "a remnant according to the election of grace," **Ro 11:5** who stood eternally in Christ: for whom He gave Himself, shed His precious blood, laid down His life, was entombed in the grave, rose on the third day, and now sits at God's right hand, as their Intercessor and Mediator. And thus, however far a man may be from God, however desperate his wickedness, however thick his blindness, however powerful the unbelief of his heart, yet if he is a vessel of mercy, the light and life of God's Spirit will penetrate through all, and bring him into a knowledge, first of his ruin, and then of those blessings which are stored up for him in his covenant Head. Though Christ "came to His own, and His own received Him not" **that is not His own by election, redemption, and regeneration, but His own nation, His own property as Lord of heaven and earth**, yet there was a people, who should receive Him by living faith as their Lord and their God.

III. But as we have looked at God's sovereignty in the way of rejection, and then endeavoured to trace out the various causes by which the great mass of the Jewish nation rejected the Lord of life and glory, so will we endeavour **having seen God's**

sovereignty in choosing a peculiar people, to trace out also the secret causes which led some to receive Him whom the others received not.

1. The first cause, then, was the **quickenning life of God's Spirit** put into their souls; according to those words: "You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." **Eph 2:1**. Until God by His Spirit quickens the soul into spiritual life, there must be a determined rejection of Christ. However a man may receive Him into his judgment, the inward bias of his heart and the secret speech of his soul is, "Not this Man, but Barabbas" **John 18:40** If, then, there be any who do believe in Him, receive Him, love Him, and have a blessed union with Him, it all springs from the quickening Spirit of God, working with power in their souls.

Now this quickening work of God the Spirit upon the heart is manifested by certain fruits and evidences, which ever flow out of His blessed operations. For instance, wherever the quickening power of God's Spirit has passed upon a man's conscience, he is invariably brought to see and feel himself to be a sinner. This inward sight of self cuts him off sooner or later from all legal hopes, all Pharisaic righteousness, all false refuges, and all vain evidences, wherewith he may seek to prop up his soul. In many cases the work may begin in a way scarcely perceptible, and in other instances may go on very gradually, for we cannot lay down any precise standard. But I am sure of this, that the Lord will "bring down the hearts" of all His people "with labour;" will convince them all of their lost state before Him, and cast them as ruined wretches into the dust of death—without hope, strength, wisdom, help, or righteousness, save that which is given to them, as a free gift, by distinguishing grace.

And when the soul is brought down by the hand of God upon it to know the exceedingly heavy burden of sin, the wretchedness of the malady with which we are infected, the holiness and justice of God who cannot clear the guilty; and feels itself not only implicated in Adam's transgression, but also condemned by actual commission of sin, it then begins to find its need of such a

Saviour as God has revealed in the Scriptures. And this work of grace in the conscience, pulling down all a man's false refuges, stripping him of every lying hope, and thrusting him down into self-abasement and self-abhorrence, is indispensable to a true reception of Christ. Whatever a man may have learned in his head, or however far he may be informed in his judgment, he never will receive Christ spiritually into his heart and affections, until he has been broken down by the hand of God in his soul to be a ruined wretch.

2. We cannot indeed tell **how long** a man may be in coming here; some may be weeks, others may be months, and some may be years; but when he is effectually brought here, the Lord is pleased, for the most part, to open up to his astonished view, and to bring into his soul some saving knowledge of the Lord of life and glory. And this He does in various ways, for we cannot "limit the Holy One of Israel;" **Ps 78:41** sometimes by a secret light cast into the mind; sometimes by the application of a passage of Scripture with power; sometimes alone in the secret chamber; sometimes under the preached Word. In various ways, as God is pleased Himself to choose, He casts into the mind a light, and He brings into the heart a power, whereby the glorious Person of Christ, His atoning blood, dying love, finished work, and justifying righteousness, are looked upon by spiritual eyes, touched by spiritual hands, and received into a spiritual and believing heart.

3. But wherever faith is given to the soul thus "to receive" Christ, there will be mingled with this faith, and blessedly accompanying it, **love** to the Lord of life and glory; and sometimes we may know the existence of faith when we cannot see it, by discerning the secret workings and actings of love towards that Saviour, in whom God has enabled us to believe. There will be from time to time, in living souls, a flowing forth of affection towards Jesus. From time to time He gives the soul a glimpse of His Person: He shows Himself, as the Scripture speaks, "through the lattice" **So 2:9**, passing, perhaps, hastily by, but giving such a transient glimpse of the beauty of His Person, the excellency of His finished

work, dying love, and atoning blood as ravishes the heart, and secretly draws forth the affections of the soul, so that there is a following hard after Him, and a going out of the desires of the soul towards Him.

Thus, sometimes as we lie upon our bed, as we are engaged in our business, as we are occupied in our several pursuits of life; or at other times under the Word, or reading the Scriptures, the Lord is pleased secretly to work in the heart, and there is a melting down at the feet of Jesus, or a secret, soft, gentle going forth of love and affection towards Him, whereby the soul prefers Him before thousands of gold and silver, and desires nothing so much as the inward manifestations of His love, grace, and blood.

And thus a living soul "receives" Christ; not merely as driven by necessity, but also as drawn by affection. He does not receive Christ merely as a way of escape from "the wrath to come," merely as something to save a soul from "the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched," but mingled with necessity, sweetly and powerfully combined with it, and intimately and intricately working with it, there is the flowing forth of genuine affection and undissembled love, that goes out to Him as the only object really worthy our heart's affection, our spirit's worship, and our soul's desire. And we cannot say that less than this comes up to the meaning of the Scripture expression—"to receive Christ." If we cannot, then, trace out in our hearts more or less of this work, which I have attempted feebly to describe, we cannot yet be said spiritually to have "received Christ."

This is a very different thing from receiving Him into our judgment, or into our understanding in a doctrinal manner. To receive Him in the depths of a broken heart, as the only Saviour for our guilty soul, as our only hope for eternity, as the only Lord of our heart's worship, and the only object of our pure affection; so that in secret, when no eye sees but the eye of God, and only the ear of Jehovah hears the pantings of our pleading heart, there is the breathing out of the spirit after the enjoyment of His love,

grace, and blood—to know and feel this stamps a man to have "received" Christ into his heart by faith.

IV. But in the words of the text we read of a peculiar privilege, a sacred blessing, which is connected with and attached to the receiving of Christ. And perhaps you have been struck sometimes with the words: "As many as received Him, **to them gave He power to become the sons of God**, even to them that believe on His name." Did the word **become** never strike you as a singular word? Does it not intimate a further step? Does it not clearly imply that to "receive Christ," and to "become a son of God" are two distinct things, and that one precedes the other?

It is so. For it is only to those who "receive Christ," that the "power" **or "the privilege," as we read in the margin**, is given, "to become sons of God."

What then is it to "become **a son of God**?" For it is evidently not the same thing as "receiving Christ," but a step that follows on after receiving Christ; a privilege given to and reserved for those who do spiritually "receive Him." To "become a son of God" is to become so experimentally; to receive the Spirit of adoption, whereby the soul cries. "Abba, Father;" to have that love which "casteth out all fear that hath torment;" and not merely to receive Christ as our hope of salvation from eternal perdition, but to be enabled by the witness and work of the Spirit in the soul to enjoy that relationship.

V. But in speaking of these "sons of God," the apostle describes them negatively as well as positively; he tells us what they are not, and he tells us what they are. And it is by contrasting what they are not with what they are, that we may arrive at some spiritual knowledge of their real character and position.

1. Those then that have "received Christ," and by receiving Christ have "become the sons of God" manifestively, are said "not to have been born of **blood**." The Jews, we know, laid great stress upon their lineal descent from Abraham. "We be Abraham's seed," they said to the Lord on one occasion, "and were never in

bondage to any man; how sayest Thou, Ye shall be made free?" "Art Thou greater," asked they, "than our father Abraham?" **Joh 8:33 Joh 8:53**. Their lineal descent from Abraham was the ground of their hope; and they believed that, being his children, they were interested in all the promises which were made to him. They saw no distinction betwixt the children of Abraham literally and the children of Abraham spiritually; and those promises which were made to the spiritual seed of Abraham, as "the father of all them that believe" **Ro 4:11**, they appropriated to themselves as his lineal and literal descendants. Now the apostle in the text demolishes that false idea, cuts from under their feet the ground on which their vain hopes rested, and declares that those who are so highly favoured as to "become the sons of God" had something more than being "born of **blood**."

If you look at the word "born," it implies some change. Birth is a transition from a state of almost non-existence into existence—a coming from darkness to light. When the apostle then says of them, that they were "born not of blood," he implies that a change of some kind might take place, analogous to the natural birth, and yet not be such a change as makes a man become a child of God. Is there not such a false birth frequently now? Are there not what are called "pious children of pious parents?" And could you trace their religion to the very source and run it up to its first origin, you would find that it had no better beginning than parental piety; that the religious father taught religion to his child, and by dint of admonition and instruction made him just as religious as himself. So that a change may have taken place; seriousness may have taken the place of trifling, religious books may have been taken up instead of novels, and hymns be sung instead of songs; but after all, the change is a mere birth "of blood." There has been no **spiritual** change, no almighty work of the Holy Ghost in the soul; but the religion has been handed down from parent to child, and stands upon no better footing than a mother's instruction or a father's tuition. Those who were "born of God" had something better than this to stand upon.

2. But the apostle, in tracing out the character of those who were "the sons of God," brings forward another imitation of a spiritual birth; he says they were not born **"of the will of the flesh."** Has "the flesh," then, a will to be religious? Aye, surely; we have a religious "old man," as well as an irreligious "old man." Nature is not confined to one garb; she wears many masks, and can put on various appearances. Thus there is a will in man—at least in many men—to be religious, and, if possible, save themselves. But those who were "born of God," and had "power given to them to become the sons of God," had experienced a deeper, higher, because a spiritual and supernatural work upon their consciences, than any such birth "after the will of the flesh."

The flesh, however high it may rise, can never rise above itself. It begins in hypocrisy, it goes on in hypocrisy, and it never can end but in hypocrisy. Whatever various shapes it puts on—and it may wear the highest Calvinistic garb, as well as assume the lowest Arminian dress—a fleshly religion never can rise above itself. There is no brokenness of heart, no contrition of spirit, no godly sorrow, no genuine humility, no living faith, no spiritual hope, no heavenly love, "shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost," in those that are "born after the will of the flesh." No abasing views of self, no tender feelings of reverence towards God, no filial fear of His great name, no melting of heart, no softening of spirit, no deadness to the world, no sweet communion with the Lord of life and glory, ever dwelt in their breasts. The flesh, with all its workings, and all its subtle deceit and hypocrisy, never sank so low as self-abhorrence and godly sorrow, and never mounted so high as into communion with the Three-One God. The depth of the one is too deep, and the height of the other too high for any but those who are "born of God."

3. We read, however, in the text, of another birth still, which is, **"of the will of man."** Man then it appears has a will to become religious; and as the birth according to "the will of the flesh" pointed out a religion taken up by ourselves, so the birth after "the will of man" shadows forth a religion put upon us by others. And to what does the great mass of the religion of the present

day amount? If we gauge it by the scriptural standard, if we look at it with a spiritual eye, if we examine it in its bearings God-ward, what must we say of the vast bulk of religion current in this professing day? Must we not say that it is according to "the will of man?" Eloquent exhortations to "flee from the wrath to come," thundering denunciations of God's vengeance against the world, working upon the natural feelings, wooing men into a profession of religion, drawing into churches boys and girls just out of the Sunday school, and persuading all from infancy to grey-hairs to become religious—this is the way in which is brought about the birth after "the will of man." And what is the end of it all? It leaves the soul under "the wrath to come." There is in all this religion no deliverance from the law, no pardon of sin, no separation from the world, no salvation from death and hell. These various births, be they "of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man," leave a man just where they found him—dead in sin, destitute of the fear of God, and utterly ignorant of that divine teaching, which alone can save his soul from eternal wrath.

But those who were so highly privileged and so spiritually blessed as to "receive Christ," and by receiving Christ to "become the sons of God," were partakers of another birth than these false ones, and had received another teaching, another gospel, and another Jesus. And these, and these only, were "born of God." The Lord Himself had quickened their souls, and brought them out of nature's darkness into His own marvellous light; the Lord Himself, by His secret work upon their consciences, had cast them down and lifted them up, had brought them to the birth and had also brought them forth; and thus they were "born of God," and had received the kingdom of God with power into their hearts, so as to become "new creatures," and to "pass from death unto life."

We see then the steps that the Spirit of God has here been pleased to trace out. We see that He has drawn a separating line betwixt those who had nothing but nature, and those who had something more than nature—even the grace and Spirit of God;

and we see that the Lord with decisive hand sets aside every profession but that which springs out of His own divine teaching; and will have no subjects of His sceptre and no inmates of His kingdom but those in whose hearts He Himself has begun, and is carrying on His own "work of faith with power."

Now I believe that for the most part, those who have nothing else but a birth "of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man," have no doubts nor fears, no strong exercises nor sharp temptations as to their eternal state before God: whilst, on the other hand, those whom the Lord is teaching by the blessed Spirit, are often tried and exercised in their minds whether the feelings which they from time to time inwardly experience spring from a real work of God upon their souls, or whether they are mere counterfeits and imitations of a work of grace.

Thus, in God's mysterious providence, those who have every reason to fear have for the most part no fear at all, and those who have no reason whatever to fear, but stand complete in Christ, the objects of God's eternal love, and the sheep for whom Jesus died, are the only persons who are plagued and pestered with the fears that spring from their own unbelieving hearts, and the temptations with which Satan is continually distressing their minds. It is the object of Satan to keep those secure who are safe in his hands; nor does God see fit to disturb their quiet. He has no purpose of mercy towards them; they are not subjects of His kingdom: they are not objects of His love. He therefore leaves them carnally secure; in a dream, from which they will not awake till God "despises their image" **Ps 73:20**.

But on the other hand, where Satan perceives a work of grace going on; where he sees the eyes sometimes filled with tears, where he hears the sobs heaving from the contrite heart, where he observes the knees often bent in secret prayer, where his listening ear often hears the poor penitent confess his sins, weaknesses, and backslidings before God **for by these observations, we have reason to believe, Satan gains his intelligence**, wherever he sees this secret work going on in the

soul, mad with wrath and filled with malice, he vents his hellish spleen against the objects of God's love. Sometimes he tries to ensnare them into sin, sometimes to harass them with temptation, sometimes to stir up their wicked heart into desperate rebellion, sometimes to work upon their natural infidelity, and sometimes to plague them with many groundless doubts and fears as to their reality and sincerity before a heart-searching God.

So that whilst those who have no work of grace upon their hearts at all are left secure, and free from doubt and fear, those in whom God is at work are exercised and troubled in their minds, and often cannot really believe that they are the people in whom God takes delight. The depths of human hypocrisy, the awful lengths to which profession may go, the deceit of the carnal heart, the snares spread for the unwary feet, the fearful danger of being deceived at the last—these traps and pitfalls are not objects of anxiety to those dead in sin. As long as they can pacify natural conscience, and do something to soothe any transient conviction, they are glad to be deceived.

But, on the other hand, he that has a conscience tender in God's fear knows what an awful thing it is to be a hypocrite before God, to have "a lie in his right hand," and be deluded by the prince of darkness; and therefore, until God Himself assures him with His own blessed lips, speaks with power to his conscience, and establishes him in a blessed assurance of his interest in Christ by "shedding abroad His love in his heart," he must be exercised and tried in his mind, he must have these various tossings to and fro, for this simple reason—because he cannot rest satisfied except in the personal manifestations of the mercy of God.

In this congregation, doubtless, there are living souls who are thus exercised. When you feel how carnal you have been—and how often are you carnal!—how your mind has been buried in the things of time and sense, how little prayer has been flowing out of your heart, how eternal things have been hid from your view—when you awake as out of a dream, and find all your evidences

beclouded, and all your past experience covered with a thick veil of darkness, then these painful fears begin to rise in your mind—lest with all your profession you should be deceived at the last.

But what do you under such circumstances? Do you fly to man? No; for you are taught to see that "miserable comforters are ye all" **Job 16:2**. Do you fly back to past experiences? As you endeavour to pursue them, they more and more recede from your view. Do you endeavour to gather up your former comforts? They slip out of your fingers, and you have no solid grasp of them. Do you go to ministers, that they may speak a flattering word? If they do speak to you words of encouragement, you cannot receive it. And thus, driven out of all creature hopes, your whole refuge and sole resource is the Lord Himself. To Him you go with a contrite heart, with a troubled mind, with an exercised soul; at His feet you bend with holy reverence, and cast yourself as a poor guilty wretch at His footstool. And when, in sweet and blessed answer to the cry of your soul, He drops in a word to raise up your drooping spirit, then you receive that which no human hand could minister; you have a balm which no human physician could give; and your soul for a time feels satisfied with a sense and testimony of the Lord's goodness.

Shall we quarrel, then, with these doubts and exercises, these temptations and trials, these assaults from Satan, these workings up of inward corruption, when they are, in God's mercy and in God's providence, such blessed helpers? If they drive us to a throne of grace to receive answers of mercy there; if by them we are brought out of lying refuges; if by them all false hopes are stripped off from us; if by them we are made honest and sincere before God; if by them we turn away from all human help, and come wholly and solely to the Lord that He alone may speak peace to us, and bless us; shall we quarrel with these things, which are—if I may use the expression—such friendly enemies, that are so outwitted, that are so—in God's divine alembic—changed from curses into blessings, that in God's overruling providence are made so mysteriously to work for our good?

Shall we not rather bless God for every exercise that brings us to His footstool? for every temptation that has stripped away creature-righteousness; for every blow that has cut us off from the world; for every affliction that has embittered the things of time and sense; for everything, however painful to the flesh, which has brought us nearer to Himself, and made us feel more love towards Him, and more desire after Him? Sure I am, that when we sum up God's mercies, we must include in the number, things painful to the flesh, and which at one time we could only look upon as miseries; nay, in summing up the rich total, we must catalogue in the list every pang of guilt, every stroke of conviction, every agonizing doubt, every painful fear, every secret temptation, everything that has most disturbed us.

And could we among God's mercies assign a more prominent place to one than to another, we should give the most distinguished to the deepest trial. We should say—"Of all mercies, next to manifested mercies **for we must put them at the head of the list**, the greatest have been troubles, trials, exercises, and temptations; for we now see that their blessed effect has been to cut us clean out of fleshly religion, and out of those delusions which, had we continued in them, would have been our destruction, and thus eventually to bring us into nearer union, and to more sweet and special communion with God Himself."

God leads all His people "forth by the right way;" but the right way is to them as God leads them, a mysterious one, for He "brings the blind by a way that they knew not" **Isa 42:16**. Could you and I, by the eye of faith, retrace the whole path that God has been pleased to lead us in, from the time He was pleased to quicken our souls, or I might go further back than that—from the time that we came into existence; could we accurately and believingly trace out all the path, we should come to this sweet conclusion in our minds: It has all been a path of undeserved and unmingled mercy; His dealings with us, however painful they may have been, yet have all guided us "by the right way, that we might go to a city of habitation" **Ps 107:7**.

And what is our present condition? Some of us perhaps are passing through severe trials, walking in "darkness that may be felt," labouring under heavy burdens, and not seeing the sun behind the cloud. But may we not judge from the past, what is the use of the present, and what will be the issue of the future? Has the Lord ever disappointed your expectations? Has He ever been to you less than you have hoped, or other than you wished? Oh that the Lord would enable each of us to trust Him even now! However dark the path He may call us to walk in, may the Lord give us this blessed confidence, that He is still leading us, still guiding us, and will lead us and guide us, until He brings us to "see Him as He is," to enjoy His presence, and to sit down in His glorious and eternal kingdom.

Heavenly Buying

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening, August 3, 1846

"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." Rev. 3:17, 18

These words, I need scarcely remark, are addressed to the church of Laodicea. The seven churches in Asia Minor are thought by some to represent so many distinct phases or appearances of the church from the Lord's ascension to his coming a second time in glory. But, whether it be so or not, one thing is certain, that the messages addressed to them are pregnant with the richest instruction; that they are adapted to the wants and exigencies of the church of God in all time; and that they form a part of the inspired word of truth, of that treasury out of which the Holy Ghost applies promises, precepts, and counsels, as the church of God from time to time needs. Of all these churches, that of Laodicea seems to have been most deeply sunk, to have departed most widely from the right ways of the Lord. But we are not to suppose that the church of Laodicea had drunk in erroneous principles. We have no charge brought against her that she had fallen into error or heresy. She, no doubt, maintained the truth; but how did she maintain it? In form, but not in power; in the letter, but not in the spirit. She had all the requisites of a church, as to external forms; but the life-giving Spirit of God was sadly wanting. Yet, with all her declensions and all her decays, she was doubtless a church of God; for she is addressed as such. The Lord gives counsels, such as he gave her, to those only that are his. But she had departed from the state in which she was when first named in the New Testament, for we have her honourably

mentioned about thirty years preceding this time in the Epistle to the Colossians (4:13-16.) Those thirty years had witnessed a great change in her. Many of her gracious members had been taken home; and circumstances had introduced into her communion those who appeared to be, but were not, partakers of the grace of God. Thus, though she maintained all the external appearance of a church of God, the eye of eternal Purity and Omniscience detected in her those symptoms which marked her decay, and probably were the prelude to her utter excision.

In considering these words, we may look:—

I.—*At the state of the Laodicean church.*

II.—*At the good and wise counsel that the Lord gives her.*

I.—With respect to *the state of the Laodicean church*, we may observe that there was her *real* state, and there was her *fancied* state. These did not agree. In her own opinion, she was "rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing." But the Lord knew her to be in a very different state, actually and experimentally, from what she thought of herself, and the standing she maintained among her sister churches. He knew, that with all her pretensions, she was really "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Let us, then, take a glance at her *fancied* state, before we enter more minutely into her *real* state.

i. What she says of her *fancied* state, she no doubt uttered in the honesty of her heart. Like a person in a consumption, she was unaware of the malady preying upon her vitals: she sincerely believed she was what she appeared to be. It was the language of sincerity, though it was the language of mistake. She had no eyes to see her spiritual condition, no tender conscience to feel it, no spirit of discernment to be aware of it. When therefore, she said she was "rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing," she really believed that things were with her as she professed them to be. But the Lord's eye viewed her far, far

differently.

1. This, then, was the language of her lips, "*I am rich.*" But what made her utter these words? Doubtless she had a sound knowledge of the doctrines of grace; and holding them firmly in her judgment, and knowing that the church was enriched with all heavenly treasures in Christ, she therefore laid claim to a personal interest in these riches. Thus merely because she held the doctrines of grace, she believed she was "rich" in God's favour, "rich" in the mercies that God bestows on his people in Christ Jesus. But she was completely ignorant all the time of her desperate bankruptcy. In this she resembled what often takes place naturally. How many a merchant or tradesman bears the character of possessing great wealth! Nay, he himself, from want of a knowledge of his affairs, of the state of his books, and of his outstanding engagements, may believe himself to be what he is generally thought—a man of property and substance. But a crash comes, and his name is in the Gazette. Such appears to have been the state of the church at Laodicea. Because she had a knowledge of the doctrines of grace; because she maintained the ordinances of God's house; because she had not fallen into open sin; because she had not drunk into error or heresy; because she maintained her standing among the churches; because they highly extolled her as a church which contended for the truth as it is in Jesus, she took all these external appearances for inward divine realities; and therefore, in the language of honesty, though in the language of self-deception, she said, "I am rich." 'Look at me,' she boldly said, 'I maintain an exalted standing among the churches of God; I hold firmly the doctrines of grace; all the treasures of Christ are therefore mine.'

2. "*And increased with goods.*" Not only did she boast that she was rich, as not doubting her interest in God's everlasting love, and as being blessed with heavenly riches in Christ Jesus; but she went a step further—"I am increased with goods." She possessed a sound and clear judgment; she knew perfectly truth from error; who were the ministers of God, and who the ministers of Satan; who preached with power, and who preached in the letter; who

were right in the things of God, and who were wrong. She had a keen eye to discover the first breakings out of heresy, and she had a clear knowledge in her judgment what were the operations of God in the soul. Outwardly too, she was in a flourishing condition. She could boast, perhaps, of 'a talented pastor;' had probably many wealthy members; had large accessions, and was spreading on the right hand and on the left. And having this carnal prosperity, she could boast, "I am increased with goods." Her members too had many spiritual gifts; some could pray, some exhort, some open up Scripture, some converse on the things of God. Thus all seemed prosperity, while there was rottenness at the very heart's core.

3. But besides all this, she could go even a step farther, and say, she stood in "*need of nothing.*" She was not sensible, as the people of God deeply are, of her poverty, want, and necessity. *She* had "need of nothing." *She* had that unwavering assurance, that undoubting confidence, that firm standing in the things of God, to which nothing could be added. She wanted no more knowledge; for she had the perfection of knowledge in herself. *She* needed no communications of grace to her soul. As long as she maintained the *doctrine* of grace, she wanted nothing of the *power* of grace. She wanted no heavenly testimonies, no divine smiles, no sweet assurances from the Lord's own lips, no breakings in of the light of the Lord's countenance upon her soul, no gracious whisperings, "I have loved thee." She had no temptations to be delivered from, no snares to be broken, no idols to be purged out of her heart, no worldly spirit from which to be cleansed. She had "need of nothing." She was so firm in her own standing, so wise in her own conceit, so built up in pride, ignorance, and presumption, that she could look God in the face, and tell him that she had "need of nothing." Can we believe—could we believe, if it were not the express testimony of God—that ever a church of God could be in this self-deluded state? Yet, doubtless, there are hundreds of churches in this land on whom the Laodicean stamp is as deeply marked, and who are as completely eaten up with pride and wrapped up in delusion as ever the church of Laodicea was.

ii. But what was her *real* state? Her *fancied* state was one thing—her *real* state was another. She was like a patient who goes to a physician; and the physician's eye sees in a moment the real state of the case. He examines his chest, and listens attentively to those sounds that unpractised ears cannot discover; and he perceives the man is afflicted with some heart or lung disease, of which he himself and his family are completely ignorant. He thought perhaps it was some trifling ailment; that he should be well in a day or two, and would soon pursue his usual business. He was not aware of the real nature of the disease; he knew not the dangerous state of the case. So spiritually. The church of Laodicea was saying, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." 'I have everything that a church of God should have—I am everything that a church of God should be.' But O, how differently did the eyes of Omniscience see her from what she fancied herself to be! And what was the judgment which the voice of Omniscience pronounced upon her? "Thou knowest not"—*there* was the misery! She knew it not! It was hid from her eyes! She had not light to see it; she had not life to feel it. Had she but known it, there would have been some escape for her. Had she but mourned under it, then the Lord would have healed her disease. But this was the fatal symptom of the malady that was preying upon her vitals—she knew it not! She was not aware of her real state; the veil of ignorance, blindness, and self-delusion, was spread over her; and she knew not how she stood in the sight of him with whom she had to do.

1. "And knowest not, *that thou art wretched;*" that is, she was altogether destitute of everything in God's eyes that constitutes true riches. With all her pretended wealth, she was but a beggar, a "wretched" beggar, such as we meet in the streets, all filth, rags, and tatters. And yet, she said, she was "rich!" Spiritual insanity possessed her. She was like some maniac, enclosed in Bethlehem's walls, who fancies himself a king. He takes the straw spread for his couch, and plaits it into a crown, and from the wood laid for his fuel cuts a sceptre; and when he has put his straw diadem upon his head, he wields his wooden sceptre, and

swells, and struts, and mimics the majesty of kings. Alas! alas! his deluded mind makes him fancy himself a monarch, when he is but the tenant of a madhouse. Who would not pity such an object? If we went within those gloomy walls, should we not pity him, and pity him the more, because he fancied himself a king, while he was but an imprisoned slave? So was it with the church of Laodicea. She said she was "rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing;" and from labouring under this delusion was a "wretched," pitiable object. Have you not sometimes visited the bed of a person dying of consumption? You have seen death stamped upon his brow, and you have been told by his physician that a few weeks or days will close the scene. Yet when you have spoken to him, he has told you all his plans; he has talked of returning health; and how soon he hoped to go abroad again as usual. Perhaps you wanted faithfulness to tell him what you knew; but did not your heart bleed all the more to see him wrapped up in such a delusion? And was it not sinking to your soul, when you knew that he was dying and that in a few weeks the grave would close over him, to hear him talk of returning health, and of his schemes never, never to be fulfilled? So with the Church of Laodicea. She was pluming herself upon her health, whilst disease was preying upon her vitals. She was "miserable" for that very reason—an object of compassion to be bewailed over, because she had so sunk from her first state, because she was deceiving and deluding herself, and believing she was what she was not.

2. But besides this, she was "*poor.*" And why was she poor? Because she wanted that which alone is true riches. What are true riches? The manifestations of God's mercy to the soul, the smiles of his countenance, and the whisperings of his love; the work of his grace, the operations of his Spirit; the power, savour, and unction that accompany divine blessings; the teachings, leadings, and guidings of the Lord the Comforter; the sweet bedewings that he drops upon humble, broken, and contrite hearts. The man who has these things is rich; not in himself, for he always will be poor and needy in himself; but he is rich, because the Lord is favouring his soul with that blessing which

"maketh rich and addeth no sorrow with it;" because the rain and dew of heaven drop upon his heart, and make him fruitful in every good word and work; because the Lord is enriching his soul with grace, and leading him on to glory. These, and these things only constitute true riches. And what is it to be "poor?" To have all these things in profession, and none in possession; to have a sound creed, and know nothing by divine teaching; to hear experimental preaching, and be completely devoid of experimental religion; to love, or profess to love God's servants, and yet have no real knowledge of the things they bring forth; to attend the place where God's people meet, hear the truths that God's servants preach, speak of the things that the Lord's family know, and all the time be unacquainted with any one of them by divine manifestation—this is to be "poor." And such was the state of the church at Laodicea. She was poor—doubly poor, because she said she was rich, and yet inwardly devoid of those blessings in which alone true riches consist.

3. She was also "*blind*"—blind to her own state; blind to her sunken condition; blind to the majesty, holiness, and purity of God; blind to the grace and glory of Jesus; blind to see herself as he saw her, and to know herself as he knew her.

4. And "*naked*"—not clad in Christ's righteousness to cover her shame, not furnished with the ornaments and graces of the Spirit, not decked with jewels such as the bride adorns herself with when she is made fit for the bridegroom (Isa. 61:10); not clothed with humility and the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, or any one of those fruits which the Holy Ghost brings forth in broken and contrite hearts.

II.—But this church of Laodicea had doubtless living members. She had doubtless those in her who knew and felt the malady, who could not run with the swift, who saw there was something deficient, who feared in their own conscience there was some lurking disease; and yet who might have drunk into a measure of the Laodicean spirit, and were neither hot nor cold—neither cold enough for the world, nor hot enough for God. There might have

been, and doubtless were, sincere, God-fearing, praying members among them. To these the Lord speaks, and to these alone, and he gives them this wise and salutary counsel. "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see."

Three pieces of counsel does the Lord lay before her; and these three directions did the blessed Spirit doubtless whisper into some of their hearts.

i. The first was, "*I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire.*" What is this "gold tried in the fire?" Is it not faith? or, rather, is it not *tried* faith? And this the Lord bids her buy; as though he would sell no other. Do we not read, that "the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold which perisheth, though it be tried with fire, may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ?" (1 Pet. 1:7.) The faith then that the Lord counsels her to buy is "*tried*" faith, compared by himself to "gold tried in the fire." But why should he compare this faith to gold?

1. First, *gold is the most precious of all metals*; and so faith is the most precious of all graces. It is that whereby the soul is saved, whereby it is justified, whereby it walks in the ways of the Lord, and triumphs over death, sin, hell, and the world. And therefore, well may the Lord compare faith to gold, seeing that living faith in the heart of a child of God is such a precious grace.

2. But there is another quality in gold that the Lord makes use of to compare faith unto—*gold is indestructible*. Put it in the hottest furnace, submit it to the strongest flames, it loses nothing in the fire, it suffers no injury; it is still indestructible, inconsumable. And so faith, in the heart of a child of God, is a grace indestructible, inconsumable; the fire of temptation, the furnace of affliction, the flames of persecution, can never burn up living faith in the soul.

3. Again—gold is tried and made to shine forth in all its native purity and brightness by being *subjected to the furnace*. And thus faith in the heart of a child of God is separated from all the dross and impurity that attach to it, from the carnality and unbelief and infidelity that surround it, as the dross and tin surround the gold, by being subjected to the burning flame. And as there is no other way whereby the gold is made to shine forth in all its intrinsic splendour, but by the fire; so there is no other way by which faith is made to shine brightly forth out of the defilements that surround it, except by being put into the fire of affliction and the furnace of temptation.

Thus it is as if the Lord, giving this wise counsel to the Laodicean church, said to her, "I counsel thee to buy of me this precious gold tried in the fire. I give no other. It is that which I bestow upon my people; it is what I give to all my saints; it is that which comes down in answer to prayer—faith tried by the test of affliction, persecution, and distress; and made to shine more brightly in proportion to the furnace which tries it."

But some may say, 'Does not the Lord counsel the church of Laodicea to *buy* this gold? How can she buy it? Is she not poor, miserable, and wretched? What has she to buy this faith with? Shall she present her gifts? Shall she offer her graces? Shall she bring her knowledge? Shall she come with her consistency? Shall she offer her merits? What has she to lay at the Lord's feet in exchange for this "gold tried in the fire?"' Nothing—absolutely nothing; for she is poor, wretched, and miserable. What then has she to offer in exchange for this "gold tried in the fire?" for if she *buy*, she must have something to give in exchange. But still there is great beauty in the expression: it was not used in vain. The Lord does not say to her, 'I counsel thee to *ask* of me gold tried in the fire;' but he used the word "*buy*." And yet she has nothing to buy it with. How is this enigma to be solved? Thus: Does not the word "buy" imply some exchange? Where there is a buyer, there must be a seller, and there must be an exchange between the parties. How does this take place in spiritual traffic? Thus:—

when the soul is deeply convinced of its helplessness, ignorance, blindness, wretchedness, and folly, and lays all these at the Lord's feet, he takes them, so to speak, upon his own shoulders; and then, in return, he deals out of his loving bounteous heart, out of the fulness that dwells in himself, his precious treasures.

There is one passage that seems to show what this spiritual buying is, "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (1 Cor. 5:21.) That is, our sins, our iniquities, our defilements, our shortcomings, our imperfections, were all laid upon Jesus; as we read "He hath laid (or made to meet) upon him the iniquities of us all." (Isa. 53:6.) As one says in the Old Testament, "Let all thy wants lie upon me, only lodge not in the street." (Judges 19:20.) So, when the Lord draws a poor guilty sinner to his bosom, he says, 'Let all thy wants lie upon me. Lay at my footstool thy infirmities and thy backslidings; thy darkness, deadness, and coldness; thy doubts and fears, thy misgivings, thy troubles, thy exercises, thy temptations, and thy perplexities. Bear them not in thy own strength; carry them not in thy own arms; lay them not on thine own shoulders; thou canst not bear them; they would sink thee to hell. Let them all lie upon me.' And as the Lord speaks, he draws the poor, needy, guilty sinner to his bosom, and enables him to lay at his feet all the exercises, temptations, and distresses of his soul. Thus the Holy Ghost dictates, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord; he will sustain thee; he will never suffer the righteous to be moved." (Psa. 55:22.) And thus when the poor sinner is enabled to come, with all his helplessness, guilt, shame, sinfulness, and misery, and spread them before the Redeemer's feet, and by an act of faith casts his burden upon the Lord, there takes place in the court of conscience a spiritual exchange, set forth in the text under the word "buy." And this is the only buying—a buying "without money and without price." (Isa. 55:1.)

The Lord saw living members in the Laodicean church, and he therefore gave them this counsel: 'Be not like the rest; do not think that you are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need

of nothing;" I know what you are, and honest conscience in your bosom tells you the same tale. Draw near to my throne of grace; open before me your sorrowful heart: confess to me how you have backslidden, into what a carnal state you have sunk, and how lukewarm in the things of God; tell me what temptations try, what snares entangle, what sins beset you. Come, buy of me gold tried in the fire.' Thus the Lord, when he draws the poor needy soul to his footstool, communicates the precious gift of faith to his heart—living faith, a faith that is exercised with burdens—a faith "that lives and labours under load"—a faith that struggles against the world, the flesh, and the devil—a "tried faith"—for he gives no other. And when the soul takes his counsel (and we only can take his counsel as he enables us), then there is this blessed exchange—our poverty and his riches, our shame and his glory, our sins and his pardon, our defilement and his righteousness. And therefore, he adds, "buy of me gold tried in the fire, *that thou mayest be rich*,"—not in pretension, not in profession, but in reality; rich in the eyes of a heart-searching God; rich for eternity; rich by the possession and enjoyment of heavenly riches; rich in divine treasure; rich in that which the moth corrupts not, nor thieves break through and steal.

ii. But, he adds also, "*buy white raiment*, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear." What did she need? "White raiment." And why? Because she was naked, defiled, polluted, and unclean. But did she not maintain the *doctrine* of Christ's imputed righteousness? Doubtless she did. It is never brought against her that she had departed from the truth; it is never thrown as a reproach against her that she had imbibed soul destroying error. She held the doctrines of grace as firmly as ever. Her ministers preached truth; her members held it; it was written in her church articles; it was her creed and boast. But she had not received it with power into her soul. It had not been communicated to her by the teaching and testimony of the Holy Ghost. She had the *doctrine*, but not the *power*; she had the letter, but not the experimental reality. God the Spirit had never wrought with power in her soul to believe. He had never brought forth the garment of Christ's imputed righteousness, and

put it on her, nor had she received it by the hand of living faith. She was indeed a very sound Calvinist; she held the doctrines firmly; but the sweet enjoyment and divine unction of them in her soul she had not experienced.

Now, the Lord speaks to her conscience. He saw there were members of the church at Laodicea who could not be satisfied with doctrines in their head. They wanted the life and power of God's teaching and God's testimony in their conscience. They could not be contented with being members of a gospel church, submitting to the articles of a sound creed, hearing the truth preached Lord's day after Lord's day. They wanted something deeper, something more powerful, something more spiritual, something more experimental than this. They were at times full of guilt and fear; temptations and troubles exercised their mind. They felt they had a soul to be saved or lost; they felt they were standing upon the brink of eternity, and one plunge might hurl them into the dread gulf. These the Lord counsels, and says to them, 'Listen to me: I am the only wise Counsellor; it is I only who give true wisdom; I counsel thee to buy of me white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.' As though he thus spoke to the heart, 'Thou thinkest in thine own mind thou hast need of nothing, that thou canst appear boldly before the throne of God, and canst lift up thy head without shame in that awful day; and that thou canst say, "Lord, Lord, have we not called upon thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works." 'But,' he says, 'this will not do. There is something more wanted than this; I counsel thee to buy of me, who alone am able to bestow it, white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear before men and angels, as it appears to my heart-searching eye.' But what are we to do to obtain it? To merit it? to work for it? to earn it? No; the Lord despises all such things as these. The only qualification is, a deep feeling of our necessity, our nakedness, and our shame; and a feeling that there is no other covering for a needy, naked, guilty soul, but the robe of the Redeemer's spotless righteousness. And when the soul is led to his divine feet, full of

guilt, shame, and fear, abhorring, loathing, and mourning over itself, and comes in the actings of a living faith, in the sighs and cries of a broken heart, in hungerings, thirstings, and longings, desiring that the Lord would bestow upon him that rich robe; then the blessed exchange takes place; then there is a buying; then the Lord brings out of his treasure-house, where it has been locked up, the best robe, puts it upon the prodigal, and clothes him with it from head to foot. What had the prodigal done to merit the best robe? Was it by his consistency? by his obedience to his father's precepts? by carefully keeping the portion bestowed upon him? No: he had "wasted his substance in riotous living," had gone into a far country, and there trampled under foot, lavished, and spent all that he had received. But was there nothing else? We read, "He came to himself:" guilt and sorrow worked in his bosom; repentance unto life was given unto him; he felt himself unworthy of the least of God's mercies; that he was not worthy to be called his son; and he said—"I will arise and go unto my father." He rose, and went to his father. (This was all of grace.) And when the father saw him at a great distance, he had compassion on him, ran, fell on his neck, and kissed him; and said to the servants, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him." No other qualification (and this itself was the fruit of divine operation) was needed but a sense of his misery, nakedness, and guilt, and a cry unto his father to pardon, pity, and forgive. This is *buying*; sweet buying! blessed exchange! Our nakedness for Christ's justifying robe; our poverty for Christ's riches; our helplessness and insufficiency for Christ's power, grace, and love.

iii. But the Lord adds a third counsel. "*Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.*" What was the climax of wretchedness in the Laodicean church? She did not know her real state; did not see her true standing; was not acquainted with her own deceit and hypocrisy, and the delusions of Satan, wherewith he was blinding her eyes. Had she seen herself as God saw her, there would have been some hope for her; had she beheld herself in the light of God's countenance, and felt herself to be what the Lord knew she was, it would have been her mercy. But this was the climax, the ultimatum, the crowning-point of her misery—that

she was blind! She saw not how deeply sunk she was. She mistook evil for good, darkness for light, bitter for sweet, crooked for straight, the delusions of Satan for the teachings of God. Therefore, he says, "Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see;" mayest have a view of thy real case; go no longer on in this awful state of self-deception; that the devil may no longer blind thine eyes to thy state before God; that thou mayest not go unto the very verge of, or into eternity, with the veil over thine heart. "Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see."

How is this to be done? With eyesalve! Is it to be had in every street? O no. Where is the eyesalve, this wondrous eyesalve, which has such efficacy that when the least particle of it is spread over the eyelid, sight is given to see light in God's light? Who keeps in his bosom, who holds in his treasury, for the church of God, this marvellous, miraculous, supernatural eye-ointment? Is not this the teaching of the blessed Spirit? the "unction that teacheth all things, and is truth, and no lie," the "anointing which is from above?" In a word, is not this eyesalve *heavenly teaching*? And thus, when the Lord counselled the Laodicean church to anoint her eyes with eyesalve, he directed her to a throne of grace, that there she might apply to the Lord to bestow upon her that divine unction, that heavenly anointing, which "opens blind eyes." It does not mean that you and I have power, as creatures, to anoint our own eyes with heavenly unction. If we could do so, we should teach ourselves. But is not this the promise to the church, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord?" But this is the meaning of it, 'Come to my throne; plead with me in fervent prayer; pour out thy heart at my footstool; feeling thy blindness and ignorance, without special teaching, beg it of me; and, in answer to thy prayer, I will anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, and then thou shalt see.'

But why are the blessed Spirit's teachings compared to eyesalve, or eye-ointment? Because her eyes had films over them; darkness had covered them; cataract had seized them; and her eyes becoming blinded in this way, she could not see her real

standing. But the Lord says, 'If thou hast but the least particle of heavenly eyesalve, and that eyesalve is spread over thy eyelids; in other words, if the unction of the Holy Ghost touch thy conscience, and the anointing of the blessed Spirit come with power into thy soul, thou wilt see then (and this is the only sight worth having); and what wilt thou see? The first thing thou wilt see is, thy nakedness, thy shame, thy helplessness, thy misery, thy wretchedness.' And this is the prelude to receiving the blessing. Depend upon it, you and I shall never go to a throne of grace sincerely, earnestly, fervently, and perseveringly, unless we feel our need of those blessings which God alone has to bestow. If I can teach myself, do I need heavenly teaching? If I can see by my own unaided sight, do I want heavenly eyesalve spread over my eyelids? If I know God, and Jesus Christ, and myself—the workings of my fallen nature, and the deceitfulness, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness of my evil heart—by my own knowledge, or my own understanding, I want not God to teach me. But when I see and feel I know nothing except by divine teaching, have nothing but by divine communication, and feel nothing but by divine inspiration—this leads me to a throne of grace to beg of the Lord to teach me and show me what I am, take the veil off my heart, discover to me my real state; not suffer me to be deceived and deluded by the devil; not permit me to call evil good and good evil, to put darkness for light and light for darkness, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, and think I am something while I am nothing. Divine light in a man's conscience will teach him what he is, and divine life in a man's soul will make him feel what he is. When he has not God's light, he is dark; when he has not God's teachings, he is ignorant; when he has not God's wisdom, he is all folly; when he has not God's guidance, he goes astray; when he has not God's upholding, he falls; when he has not God's preserving, he turns aside into the paths of crookedness and error. So that we cannot see ourselves, we cannot see others; we cannot see the truth, we cannot see our interest in the truth; we cannot see the Person of Christ, his justifying righteousness, his atoning blood, his dying love, nor our participation in them, except so far as the blessed Spirit anoints our eyes with eyesalve that we may see.

Are there any here whose conscience tells a tale not to be mistaken, with a voice not to be silenced, that you are very dead in your souls, very cold in your affections, very dark in your mind, very worldly in your spirit? that you have very few or no smiles of God's countenance; few or no whisperings of God's love to your soul; that you have few or no intimations of your interest in the love and blood of the Lamb? Is there something that tells you all this? In prayer you are very cold, very short, and very formal. The word of God is to you a neglected book. When you go to hear preaching, your thoughts and affections are at the ends of the earth. Instead of being what most think you, a flourishing Christian, poverty, emptiness, and want are stamped upon your inward soul. Do you feel it? Then there is some hope for you. There is some hope for a man whose conscience is made honest and tender in God's fear. It is a good sign for him: and the Lord speaks to him, and gives him this good advice. May it not be thrown away! May we have ears to hear it! May the Lord himself speak it home to us!—"I counsel thee,"—(and what the Lord speaks will be attended to by the Lord's people,) "I counsel thee to buy of me gold." 'Come to my bosom! Come out of the world! Come to my feet!' How the Lord speaks to the soul! 'Come sincerely, come honestly, come boldly, come tenderly.' "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire." 'Ask me for it, plead with me to bestow it on thee, tell me that nothing else will satisfy thee except that living faith that justifies the soul; saves it, and takes it home to glory.'

Are there here those who feel they have not enjoyed the clear manifestations of God's love to their soul, and are trembling to think how they will stand at the great day? The Lord counsels them (may he give them an ear to hear) to buy of him also "white raiment," his righteousness, that spotless robe that covers the needy and naked soul; "that they may be clothed, and the shame of their nakedness do not appear," that they may stand at the last day in that robe of righteousness in which there is neither spot nor blemish.

"Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve." 'Beg of me to teach thee; call upon me—I will show thee things that thou hast not known; plead with me for the internal teachings and sure testimonies of the blessed Spirit and then thou wilt see thyself in thy true colours, as a poor, blind, naked, filthy, helpless wretch; and thou wilt see the glorious Person of Christ, the riches of his atoning blood, the sympathy of his merciful bosom, the superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of sin.' If you be thus highly favoured, you will also see others; you will not be deceived by pretensions then. It will not be mere profession of the truth that will satisfy you then; no mere outward consistency will do for you then; you will want to see something more than this in others, as well as in yourself; you will want to see the mind of Christ in them, to see the image of a suffering Jesus, and the likeness of Christ stamped upon their hearts, lips, and lives. And if you cannot find this in the church to which you belong; if you cannot find this in the congregation with which you worship; if you cannot find this among those who profess the same doctrines with yourself, then you will be a separate person. You will not associate with those who have not the life of godliness; but you will walk with the Lord, that he himself may teach and bless you; and you will come out of every thing that you find by experience defiles your conscience, that you may have the inward testimony and witness of the Lord himself in your soul.

Did the church of Laodicea listen to these counsels? Not as a *church*. There might be, and doubtless were, *individuals*, who did listen to this counsel; they got the blessing, for the blessing was designed for them. The blessing was not designed for the church at large. She was in due time to be spued out of Christ's mouth, for she was "neither hot nor cold." But the members, the spiritual members, were saved, though as by fire. There were doubtless in the Laodicean church (as there are at the present day) living members, gracious people; and these were, for the most part, mourning and sighing over their lukewarmness, deadness, and barrenness in the things of God. The Lord speaks to such, and gives them wise counsel; and they only will hear it. Dead professors resent all this. It is like going to a tradesman who is

thought highly of in the city, and asking him if he can pay twenty shillings in the pound. He resents it as an insult, though his conscience tells him he cannot. So these professors want no such counsel. They would rather be plastered over with untempered mortar, and have their vain minds pleased by being thought highly of, than have the point of the trowel pick out all their putty. God keep me from going about with lime and a brush to whitewash dead professors, and sepulchres filled with rotten bones! God enable me (he only can) to speak to the living souls of sensible sinners, and hold up before them a Saviour's blood and righteousness! But God keep me from bolstering up dead professors, who have but a name to live; and from sewing pillows to the armholes of those who are not taught of God, and have nothing but an outward profession, without the inward reality! I believe all God's ministers will be faithful according to the measure of faithfulness that is bestowed upon them. They are not to be bribed or frightened into silence. They will speak out of the fulness of an exercised heart what they have known, felt, and experienced. So I desire ever to speak in this pulpit or any other. Not to come here to deceive souls, and foster delusion by uttering smooth words; but to detect hypocrisy in hypocritical hearts, to unmask empty profession in empty professors; and at the same time, to strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees; and thus to say to them that are of a fearful heart, 'Fear not, the Lord is with you: and in his own time and way will abundantly comfort and bless you.'

HEAVENLY GIFTS TO VICTORIOUS SAINTS

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, London, on Lord's Day Evening, August 30, 1846

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." Revelation 2:17

I do not know a more striking or more deeply important portion of God's Word than that which is contained in the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation. What a solemn vision was John favoured with, when the Lord of life and glory appeared unto him in the manner described in the first chapter! "And in the midst of the seven candlesticks I saw one like unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow," **(evidencing his eternity,)** "and his eyes were as a flame of fire" **(to shew how he looks into the heart, and searches the reins);** "and his feet were like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars; and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword; and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength."

Though John was the beloved disciple, and had even lain in the Lord's bosom while upon earth, yet this glorious vision took such an effect upon him, that he "fell at his feet as dead." This vision was preparatory to the messages which the Lord gave him to the seven churches of Asia Minor. It is worthy of remark, that in every message there are three things repeated to each church. To all of them the Lord says, "I know thy works;" to all of them he declares, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches;" and to all of them a promise is made, though to each of a different nature, "to him that overcometh."

What do we learn from these three features which are thus stamped upon every message to the churches? We learn, first, that the Redeemer looks into all hearts, and searches all reins. We learn, secondly, the deep importance of the message he delivers; and yet that none will hear and attend to it, save those to whom the Lord has given an ear to hear. And we learn, thirdly, what sweet promises the Lord gives to him that overcometh in the spiritual conflict.

I shall this evening, with God's blessing, dwell chiefly upon two features which strike my mind as flowing out of the words before us; and shall endeavour to describe, in the **first** place, the character pointed out under the words "**him that overcometh;**" and in the **second** place, as the Lord may enable, to enter more fully into the promise which the Lord gives to him that overcometh, containing **three** distinct blessings

1. that he shall "eat of the hidden manna;"
2. that the Lord "will give him a white stone;" and
3. "in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

The Lord's purpose and object in his dealings with the souls of his people is, to glorify himself. The glory of God must ever be the end of all his works; the glory of man therefore must give way. The glory of God and the glory of man can never stand upon the same pedestal. Man therefore must sink, and be reduced to a sense of his real state and character, that the glory of a Three-One God may shine forth brightly and conspicuously.

I.—The Lord in the text speaks of a character that bears this designation: "he that overcometh." The promise is therefore limited to that character; it is his alone; and in his case alone will the Lord fulfil it to the uttermost.

But who is this **character**? Where shall we find the man to whom this promise is made—"him that overcometh?" Let us see if we can find such a one. When the Lord is first pleased to begin a work of grace upon the soul, he convinces a man of his lost state by nature. He sets before him eternal life as an object to be obtained: and without which, he convinces him, he must be of all men the most miserable here, and the most miserable hereafter. But in early days, the veil of ignorance remaining much upon the heart, having imbibed many superstitions and ignorant ideas from our very cradles, and not being illuminated by the Spirit's teaching, to know Jesus to be "the way, the truth, and the life," we make many efforts to win the prize by nature's strength, and to reach the goal by creature righteousness.

Now the Lord's purpose is to make us "overcome;" for the promise is only "to him that overcometh." But he purposes to make us "overcome" in **His** strength alone, and not in our own: and this for the most part we learn very slowly. We set before us the commandments; and we think if we keep them diligently, we shall at last obtain God's favour, and arrive safely in heaven. But as in this obedience we continually fail, yet not knowing the strictness of God's commandments, the spirituality of the law, nor the breadth of the precept, we think the fault must surely be in ourselves—that we have not watched enough, nor kept a sufficient look-out upon the avenues of our heart, nor done what we really might have done.

Not knowing at this time that the inherent depravity of man is such that he never can keep God's law; not knowing that the Lord intends by these means to teach us our weakness, like a person who falls down, we get up again, and try to run the race anew. But to our surprise we find ourselves continually defeated; that we cannot be what we would. We would be righteous: we would be holy; we would not sin: we would watch our eyes, our ears, our hearts; we would not break out on the right hand, we would not break out on the left. The Lord may suffer us for a season to go on in these labour-in-vain paths; but after a time there shall be some outbreak; some temptation may take us unawares,

which is so sweet and suitable, that we are entangled in a moment, and down goes all our strength; our resolutions for the future are broken in an instant; and we slowly begin to learn how very weak we are against any one temptation.

But again. We are not at first fully alive to **the breadth and spirituality of God's law**. But as the Lord begins to shew us more and more clearly what we are, makes us to feel more and more our helplessness and weakness against temptation, he also unfolds more and more clearly the breadth and spirituality of his law: he shews how it reaches to the very thoughts and intents of the heart; and not only so, but that it is connected with a curse to every soul which is found under it, and that it gendereth to bondage.

Who would think that this is the way to "overcome'?" When a man is continually being overcome; when sometimes his lusts surprise him; sometimes despair overtakes him; sometimes pride breaks forth; sometimes covetousness and carnality manifest themselves; sometimes one evil displays itself, at other times another, and anon a third monster lifts up its hateful head—who would think that this is the man who is to gain the victory, when he is so continually vanquished and so perpetually defeated? But there is one portion in God's word which shews us wherein the secret of their overcoming lies: "And they overcame"—How? By their own strength? by their own wisdom? by their own righteousness? by their own resolutions? No. "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of his testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." So that when a poor sinner, feeling deeply and daily that he has nothing but sin and has entirely given up all hopes whatever of being any better, sinks down at the footstool of mercy as a lost, guilty, condemned wretch; if indulged then with a glimpse of "the blood of the Lamb," which speaketh pardon and peace to the guilty conscience, and the "word of God's testimony" comes into his heart with divine power, **then** he "overcomes," not by his own strength, his own wisdom, or his own righteousness, but by the blood of the Lamb being applied to his conscience, and by the

word of God's testimony being applied with divine power to his heart. This is the only way to "overcome."

1. But if we are to "overcome," we must have enemies. Among these **the things of time and sense** will be one. How many of God's family find **the world** to be continually entangling them, sometimes with its cares and anxieties, sometimes with its vain company and its pleasures, falsely so called, for really there is no pleasure in them. Thus they are drawn aside by a multitude of vain things that only leave sorrow and vexation behind them. How then are they to overcome the world? Only by faith in the blood of the Lamb; as we read, "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:5). "And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." When the Lamb of God is pleased to manifest himself to the conscience of the sinner, and to raise up in his heart living faith whereby he is looked unto and embraced, this faith will give him the victory over the world which he never could obtain by any strength or resolutions of his own.

2. Again, there is a **whole army of doubts and fears** rising up against God's family; a whole array of apprehensions whether the work of grace is begun upon their heart; a whole host of alarms whether they are anything more than hypocrites. And this company of doubts and fears wars against every testimony that God has dropped into their soul. How, then, are they to "overcome" this company of doubts and fears? By arguing against them? Satan laughs at their arguments. By trying to persuade themselves they are children of God? Satan is a better logician than they; he can soon pour contempt upon all their attempts to persuade themselves they are interested in atoning blood and dying love. But when "the blood of the Lamb" is applied to their conscience, and the "word of God's testimony" is spoken by God's own lips to their heart, realizing to them that they are interested in his eternal favour—then they overcome this company of doubts and fears; not by any arguments they bring from nature or reason, but by the sweet unctuous teachings of the Spirit in the

court of conscience, and by that blood of sprinkling "which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel."

3. **Sin**, again, is an enemy. How many of the Lord's people are continually under bondage to evil! What power the lusts of the flesh have over some! How perpetually they are entangled with everything sensual and carnal! What power the pride of the heart has over another! and what strength covetousness exercises over a third! What power the love of the world and the things of time and sense exercise over a fourth! How then are they to overcome sin? By making resolutions? by endeavouring to overcome it in their own strength? No; sin will always break through man's strength; it will ever be stronger than any resolution we can make not to be overcome by it. But when the blood of the Lamb is applied to the sinner's conscience, and the word of God's testimony comes with power into his soul, it gives him the victory over those lusts with which he was before entangled, it brings him out of the world that had so allured him. and breaks to pieces the dominion of sin under which he had been so long labouring. "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14).

"To him that overcometh." A man must be overcome, then, in this battle before he can shout victory; and therefore the Lord suffers his people to be so long and often entangled, perplexed, exercised, and distressed, that they may learn **this** secret, which is hidden from all but God's living family—that the strength of Christ is made perfect in their weakness. Have not some of you had to learn this lesson very painfully? There was a time when you thought you should get better and better, holier and holier; that you would not only not walk in open sin as before, but would not be entangled by temptation, overcome by besetting lusts, or cast down by hidden snares. There was a time when you thought you were going forward, attaining some more strength, some better wisdom than you believed you once possessed. How has it been with you? Have these expectations ever been realized? Have you ever attained these fond hopes? Has sin become weaker? Has the world become less alluring? Have your lusts become tamer?

Has your temper become milder? Have the corruptions of your heart become feebler and feebler? No.

If I can read the heart of some poor tried, tempted soul here present, he would say, "No; to my shame and sorrow be it spoken, I find on the contrary that sin is stronger and stronger, that the evils of my heart are more and more powerful than ever I knew them in my life; and as to my own endeavours to overcome them, I find indeed that they are fainter and fainter, and weaker and weaker. This it is," says the soul, "that casts me down. If I could have more strength against sin; if I could stand more boldly against Satan; if I could overcome my besetting lusts; live more to God's glory, and be holier and holier, then, **then,**" says some poor distressed child of God, "I could have some comfort; but to feel myself so continually baffled, so perpetually disconcerted, so incessantly cast down by the workings of my corrupt nature, it is this, it is this that cuts so keenly; it is this, it is this that tries me so deeply." My friend, you are on the high road to victory. This is the very way by which you are to overcome.

If you, on the other hand, were sailing upon this tack—getting better and better, sin weaker and weaker, and your heart holier and holier, by and by you would look forward to a complete victory. But depend upon it, you would be then sailing upon the wrong tack altogether. But, on the other hand, when you feel weaker and weaker, poorer and poorer, guiltier and guiltier, viler and viler, so that really through painful experience you are compelled to call yourself, not in the language of mock humility, but in the language of self-abhorrence, the chief of sinners, then you are on the high road to victory. Thus when the Lord is pleased to bring a sense of his atoning blood with power into his conscience, and to speak a word with his own lips to the poor child of God, then he overcomes, not by his own strength, his own wisdom, or his own righteousness, but by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of his testimony, revealed to his heart by the power of God himself. Be certain, if we overcome in any way

but this, we do not overcome so as to gain a real and spiritual victory.

II.—Now to such the Lord gives a special promise; or rather, three distinct promises. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

1. The first promise is, "I **will give to him to eat of the hidden manna.**" What is this hidden manna? Is it not God's word applied with power to the heart? What says Jeremiah? "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (Jer. 5:16). When the Lord is pleased to drop a word into the heart from his own lips; to apply some promise; to open up some precious portion of his word; to whisper softly some blessed Scripture into the heart—is not this manna? **Whence** did the manna flow? Was it cultivated by the hand of man? Was it gathered, as infidels tell us, from the ash trees that grew in the wilderness? No; it fell from heaven. And is not this true of the word of the Lord applied with power to the heart? It is not our searching the Scriptures, though it is good to search the Scriptures; it is not our comparing passage with passage; but it is the Lord himself being pleased to apply some precious portion of truth to our hearts; and when this takes place, it is "manna;" it is sweet, refreshing, strengthening, comforting, encouraging: yea, it is angels' food; the very flesh and blood of the Lamb with which the Lord is pleased from time to time to feed and favour hungry souls.

But, in the text it is called "hidden." Why "hidden?" Because hidden from the eyes of the wise and prudent, as the Lord says, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Luke 10:21). Hidden from the eyes of self-righteous pharisees; hidden from those that fight in their own strength, and seek to gain the victory by their own brawny arm; hidden from all

but God's tried and tempted family; hidden from all but those who know the plague of their own hearts; hidden from all but those who have learnt the secret of overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of his testimony.

Say, that you have been entangled in some snare; say, you have been cast down by some of Satan's temptations; was there not some hidden manna for you? Did not the Lord apply some portion of his word to your heart with sweetness? There was conviction indeed, cutting conviction; there was guilt, deep, black guilt; there was shame, for you were covered with it; there was confusion, for your heart could say, "I am full of confusion." But was there not some sweet promise? Was there not a portion of Scripture opened up with divine power to your soul? Was there not some testimony of the Spirit of God to your spirit that you were one of his people? Was there no word, like hidden manna, dropped with power and sweetness into your heart? There was no manna, and never will be, while guilt remains upon the conscience, whilst sin has dominion, whilst we are entangled in and cast down by Satan's snares, whilst we are overcome with the lusts of the flesh, whilst pride and covetousness and every evil bear the sway.

But when the Lord leads us into this path—to sink down into weakness, and in weakness to find his strength made perfect; to fall down all guilt, and then to feel the application of atoning blood; to tremble under the weight of doubts and fears, and then to have the precious word of his testimony dropped into the heart—this is manna. The children of Israel had to endure hunger in the wilderness before manna fell; and thus the Lord's people learn the value of the hidden manna, the sweet communications from above, by hungering and thirsting in a waste howling wilderness.

But there is something more implied by the word "manna" than this. The Lord Jesus Christ himself tells us that he is "the true bread that came from heaven;" and that the manna represented his flesh which he gave for the life of the **(elect)** world. Now,

when we are in bondage to sin, when our lusts and passions get the victory over us, when guilt lies hard and heavy upon the conscience, when little is experienced but darkness and confusion—then there is no feeding upon the flesh of Jesus, no tasting how sweet and precious he is, no embracing him in the arms of faith, no enjoying glimpses and glances of his surpassing beauty. But, on the other hand, when the Lord is pleased to give power to the soul to overcome by "the blood of the Lamb and the word of his testimony," then his flesh and blood become sweet to him who thus overcometh. When do I value a discovery to my heart of redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ? When I am strong? When I am wise? When I am holy.? When I am righteous? These things set me far from Jesus. But when I am bowed down with guilt, cut up by temptations, tried and exercised with a whole company of doubts and fears—then if the Lord be pleased to draw me to his footstool; then if he open up what he has done and suffered upon the cross; then if he raise up faith in my soul to look to him, believe in his name, and receive him as the crucified Son of God—then there is a feeding upon the manna; his flesh becomes meat indeed, and his blood becomes drink indeed. But this is hidden from all eyes except those that are anointed by the Spirit to see it, and hidden from all hearts except those that are prepared to receive and feed upon it.

2. The next promise is, **"And I will give him a white stone."** In ancient times, they used to decide cases by white and black stones. The judges (**for they were rather judges than jury**) did not give their verdict upon the prisoner by oral testimony, "Guilty," or "Not Guilty," as in our country, but by dropping into an urn a white stone to express their opinion that the prisoner was innocent, or a black stone to declare their judgment that the prisoner was guilty. The Lord has made use of this figure. He says, "To him that overcometh I will give a white stone;" that is—I will give into his conscience a sentence of acquittal. As the white stone was dropped into the urn, so peace and pardon are dropped into the sinner's bosom; and just as the judge, when he deposited the white stone in the urn, declared thereby the prisoner's innocence; so when the Lord is pleased to speak peace

to the soul, he drops into the heart a white stone, to proclaim him discharged from the law's accusations, and interested in his love and blood.

But how is this figure applicable? Why, he that overcometh treads the same path whereby the poor guilty criminal came to receive the white stone. The promise is made to him that overcometh. Should not we think that this is setting a task before him which he is to perform? that he has to fast, to pray, to attend sacraments, to offer up so many prayers, and thus by degrees overcome sin and gain the prize? Would not that be nature's interpretation? But it is not grace's interpretation. This is grace's blessed interpretation, consistent with the experience of the saints and with divine teaching in their souls—that he overcomes by being overcome, for this opens a way for the Lord to bring a sense of his blood into the conscience, and speak a word of testimony to his heart. Then he receives "a white stone," deposited by the Lord himself in his bosom, whereby he declares that all his sins are forgiven: peace is sealed upon his conscience, and he goes free, walking in that liberty which the gospel proclaims to those that are in the prison-house.

But we may say, that **every** testimony from the Lord is "a white stone." Every token that the Lord ever bestowed upon you that you are a child of his, every promise that has ever come into your heart, every answer to prayer that you have ever received from his lips, every deliverance that you have ever experienced from his hand, is "a white stone."

Every application of truth with divine savour and unction to your soul, every reviving or refreshing season, every sweet manifestation, every breaking down or softening of heart, every melting of spirit at the Redeemer's footstool, is "a white stone." Every time that you felt Jesus precious to your heart—every time that you washed his feet with your tears, and wiped them with the hairs of your head—every time that you embraced him in the arms of faith and affection, and could say, "Dear Lord, how precious thou art to my soul!"—was "a white stone." The Lord has

given you "a white stone" with every visit of his gracious presence, with every communication of his eternal and never-ceasing love.

And what a mercy it is for the child of God to have even one white stone! Suppose to revert to the custom from which the figure is borrowed, there was any doubt as to whether a prisoner had been acquitted, could he not point to the white stones that were in the urn? And if he could produce them in his hand, and say to the judges, "Here are the white stones that you have put into the urn; you yourselves have acquitted me;" would not the production of them declare him vindicated from the charges brought against him? And what a mercy it is for a child of God to have a white stone that he can present before a throne of mercy! to have some testimony, some token for good, some promise brought into his heart with power, some sweet visit from the Lord! to have realized his presence, to have had faith in his blood, to have known his love! so that when doubts and fears, difficulties and perplexities beset him, he can, as the Lord the Spirit enables, look back to those times when "a white stone" was given as a proof on the Lord's part of his soul's entire acquittal from law charges, and a sure testimony that his name is in the book of life.

And how many doubts and fears, dark seasons, distressing moments, what sharp convictions, heavy burdens, hard bondage the soul must labour under from the want of "a white stone!" To be accused, accused, accused, and often not to find one "white stone!"—does not this try you sometimes? Perhaps some illness seizes you. or you feel some symptoms of disease; you are afraid that fever or cholera will lay hold of you, or that you are going into a decline, and your tabernacle is about to be taken down. You have been a professor some years; but doubts and fears now arise in your mind, convictions of guilt seize you, and you begin to quake and tremble—to fear that you never had pardon proclaimed or peace manifested, never had a visit from the Lord, never had an answer to prayer, never had a manifestation of God's presence, never felt his dying love, never had his word

applied with power to your heart. If you have a tender conscience, made alive in God's fear, it must bring bondage and distress into your soul to have all these doubts and fears working in your mind, and not have one "white stone" to produce, not one testimony, not one clear evidence that the Lord has visited your soul, and begotten you unto eternal life. But does that prove you are not a quickened soul? Nay, nay: it is a proof that you are a quickened soul. If you were a rotten professor, you would not want "a white stone;" but it is because you are a poor guilty, trembling sinner that you feel you want "a white stone."

Suppose we were in some ancient court, where cases were decided by these black and white stones dropped into the urn. Would the **bystanders** want them? No; only one would want them—the guilty criminal trembling at the bar. **He** would anxiously watch the hands of the judges, to see whether they dropped the white or the black stones into the urn. So you, who doubt and fear, who are distressed in your minds, cut up in your feelings, and harassed by convictions—all for the want of a sweet manifestation, all for the want of a clear testimony, all for the want of pardon and peace being sealed upon your heart; these very exercises, these very trials of mind, all prove that you have the life of God in your soul: for having the life of God, you are anxious after manifestations from the Lord; and nothing else can satisfy you. Now you are upon the high road to victory. Your doubts and fears, your cutting convictions, your sharp exercises, your numerous temptations, your many perplexities—what is their effect? To beat you down, to defeat, to overcome you, to prove stronger than all your attempts to master them.

But these things are to bring you to the foot of the cross. They are to cut up creature righteousness root and branch; they are to strip you of every rag of fleshly holiness, and bring you to that safe spot where you will one day "overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of his testimony"—the blood of the Lamb applied to your conscience, and the word of God's testimony spoken with sweet delivering power to your heart. And the Lord's family want these white stones. They want the Lord to give

something **to** them, and to do something in them: to speak something **to** them and **in them**. It is not what this man may say, or the other man may say, that satisfies a conscience made tender in God's fear. It is what the Lord does **in**, and speaks **to** him. This, and this alone, can satisfy one that has the life of God ebbing and flowing in his heart.

3. **"And in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."** Here is another custom alluded to. In ancient times it was customary to write upon a stone the name of the candidate for whom they intended to vote. If there were two, three, four, or ten candidates for an office, when a person would express his opinion that such a candidate should be chosen; in other words, when he would give a vote for a particular candidate, he wrote the name of the candidate upon a stone, and put that stone into an urn; and he whose name appeared most frequent was considered chosen by the majority of the people. The Lord alludes to this in the text, where he says, "In the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

What is this new name? Is it not a new heart, a new nature—Christ in the soul the hope of glory? This is the "new name which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." New affections flowing towards the precious Lord, new breathings of a heart made tender in his fear, new enjoyments of his manifested presence, new sensations from the work of the Spirit upon the soul; in other words, a new heart, a new nature, made new by him that sits upon the throne. When the Lord's people are exercised with doubts and fears, and cast down by many temptations, what are their two greatest trials? The workings of the old man of sin, and the few communications that they have of power from the Lord. Does not this sometimes trouble your mind? There is a sad darkness in your soul. You go to a throne of grace; you plead with the Lord; you ask him to give you a word. But there is no answer, no manifestation, no sweet whisper, no discovery of Jesus to your soul. You go away worse than you came. Or, you are tempted with some sin; some snare is spread

for your feet; some besetment holds you fast: you are cut up with guilt, and distressed in your mind. "O wretched man that I am!" is your constant cry. But you cannot break the snare, cannot deliver your own soul, cannot overcome the besetment that works so powerfully in your carnal mind. Under these feelings you have no communication from God, no sweet testimony, no answer to prayer, no divine light nor liberty, nothing to strengthen, nothing to comfort, nothing to encourage your soul; darkness, guilt, bondage, lay hold of you, and press you down into the deep and dark dungeon.

Now, at this time there is no new name. When you pray, it is with sighs and groans; if you read, you can find nothing but what condemns you; if you hear, your conscience fastens upon everything that describes hypocrites in a profession, but can take nothing that seems to strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. At this time there is the old man of sin, an accusing guilty conscience, a troubled mind, a tempting devil, but alas! no "white stone," no "new name." But after a time, when the Lord brings you a weeping sinner to the cross, a poor guilty criminal to his feet, and then begins to open up in your soul salvation through the blood of the Lamb, and to apply the word of his testimony with power in your heart, then no sooner is the "white stone" given, than the "new name" is given with it, "which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." There are new sensations, new feelings, new affections, new thoughts, new desires, and everything is made new in a man's soul.

But "no man knoweth this, saving he that receiveth it." New thoughts of Jesus; new openings up of Scripture, new meltings of heart, new softenings of spirit, every, thing made new by Him who renews us "in the renewing of our mind"—no man knows these things saving he who receives them. It is all betwixt the Lord and the soul: it is all betwixt a pardoning God and a pardoned sinner; it is all mercy, all grace, all love, from first to last. Grace began, grace carries on, and grace finishes it; grace must have all the glory, and grace must crown the work with eternal victory.

But what says the Lord in the context? "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." Have **you** an ear? Do **you** hear these things? I do not mean with the outward ear; we all have that. But do you hear with the ear of the heart? with the ears of a conscience that falls under the power of truth? with an ear that receives God's truth into it, "mixed with faith in them that hear it?" sometimes trembling, sometimes hoping, sometimes sinking, sometimes rising. You cannot put away these things, and say, 'It is all lies.' There is that inward voice, that living witness in your conscience that knows it is the solemn truth of God. You have ears to hear. The Lord has unstopped the deaf ears; he has given you a conscience to feel, and has raised up faith in your heart, which mixes with the word which comes from his own mouth to hear what the Spirit saith to the churches, to hear what the Spirit saith to those who fear his name, to hear the promises that drop from his gracious lips—these have ears to hear.

The Lord fulfil these things in your experience. Did you ever eat of the hidden manna? Was Christ ever precious to your soul? Have you ever had "a white stone" given you that you could look upon, and believe the Lord had dropped a testimony into your heart? With that "white stone" was there given you "a new name," a new heart, a new nature, new affections, new feelings, new desires; in a word, all things new? 'Yes,' says one, 'I have through mercy experienced all this.' Well, to whom is the promise made? "To him that overcometh." Are you that character? And if you are, how did you overcome? Was it according to the Scripture description, by "the blood of the Lamb, and the word of his testimony?" There is no other way. It is not because you have embraced certain tenets, or are a sound Calvinist, or approve of these things when you hear them with the ear. A man may do all that, and yet know nothing feelingly of the work of grace upon the conscience. But this is the question, whether you have overcome, or are in the way to overcome? If you have never overcome, nor are striving to do so, all your knowledge of these

things is but in the brain; it is not vital, it is not spiritual, it is not experimentally wrought in your heart by the power of God.

But perhaps there are some here whose conscience bears a secret testimony—"I know I have never eaten of the hidden manna, never had a white stone, never had a new name." Well, where are you? "O," say they, "if I could tell you my heart, I would say, it was full of doubts and fears whether I ever should get to heaven; I would tell you, it was full of carnality, wickedness, and sin; overcome by Satan, easily mastered by temptation, weak and worthless, poor and needy, filthy and polluted—such is a faint description of my heart!" Well, but what is the effect of all these feelings that are passing in the chambers within? Are they emptying you of creature strength? Are they stripping you of creature righteousness? In a word, are they bringing you to the footstool of mercy, to the cross of Jesus, to the throne of grace, as a poor guilty sinner, that there you may receive the sweet communications of his love and blood to your soul? Mercy is in store for you. The Lord is leading you to overcome. You are learning a great lesson by doubts and fears. You are getting very salutary instructions by knowing the corruptions of your heart, and the snares of the flesh, the world, and the devil. Your guilty conscience, often plunged in seas of guilt, is thus being prepared for the sweet reception of the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. The voice of conscience in your bosom, continually crying, 'Guilty, guilty!' is but the prelude and harbinger of another voice that will one day speak to your inward heart, and be as marrow and oil to your bones—"Son, or daughter, thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace." Then you will know something of the "hidden manna," of the "white stone," and of the "new name" written in the white stone, "which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

These are solemn realities. This is a religion which no man can get for himself, and which no man can communicate to another. This is a religion wholly dependent upon the power of the Holy Ghost: and no other religion is worth a straw. All other teachings but God's teachings will leave our souls needy, naked, and

undone. All other coverings but the covering of God's Spirit will leave the soul under the wrath of an avenging Jehovah. All other knowledge, except spiritual experimental knowledge, wrought in our heart by the power of the Holy Ghost, will leave us in the hands of Him who "is a consuming fire." I would not drop a word to cast down any of God's poor family, to disquiet the troubled, to burden the sinking, to add weights to those whose feet are in the stocks, or stumbling in the mire. But I would not hold out any encouragement to those who think to gain the victory by their own strength, wisdom, or righteousness. I know that such are not under the teachings of the Spirit, such are not in the high road to victory.

But you that are really the people of God, you that doubt and fear, you that are exercised in your souls, and that sharply and strongly—grace and truth are yours. These trials and temptations are to empty you, strip you, and lay you low. They are meant to bring you to the footstool of mercy, there to overcome by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of his testimony; there to have hidden manna dropped into your heart; there to have a white stone lodged in your conscience; there to experience the sweetness and blessedness of the new name, "which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

Do you approve of this religion? Are you sure in your souls it will stand the trying hour? And is this the feeling of your heart!—"Lord, let me have thy grace, mercy, and truth experienced in my soul!" Depend upon it, those whom the Lord thus leads, he will enable to overcome in his strength; and He who has given the promise will fulfil it in their hearts and consciences, to his own glory and their unspeakable joy.

THE HEAVENLY RACE

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, May 1st, 1859

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." Hebrews 12:1,2

When the peculiar and discriminating doctrines of the Gospel are proclaimed for the first time in a town or village, an immediate and universal outcry is almost invariably raised against them. Whatever divisions of opinion, whatever variety of sect or sentiment, may have before existed, all as with one consent take up arms against doctrines which they consider so novel, so dreadful, and so dangerous. You may plead, but you plead in vain, that they are doctrines according to godliness; that they are written as with a ray of light in the inspired Scriptures; that they were held by all our reformers, and are embodied in the articles, creeds, and confessions which they drew up; that they have been the consolation and support of thousands and tens of thousands of the most godly men who have ever trod this vale of tears; that they have been sealed by the blood of martyrs at the stake; and that God has honored them over and over again both in the life in the death of those who have most adorned their profession by their conduct and conversation. But prejudice is not so easily overcome, nor the carnal mind so easily silenced. Men will still persevere in believing that the doctrines of grace are doctrines of a licentious and dangerous tendency, and even the immoral as well as the moral, as if unanimously fired with holy indignation, will lift up their voices against them almost as if they had issued from the very portals of hell. But, apart from this real or assumed dread of their dangerous tendency, what chiefly stirs up the enmity of the human heart is their apparent novelty, and the reflection that they seem to cast upon departed friends and

relatives. "What?" Say they to the man who introduces these doctrines, "are you the only person who knows what religion is? Where are our fathers gone who knew nothing of these new-fangled doctrines of yours? Were they not loyal citizens, pious Christians, devout communicants, irreproachable husbands, parents, and friends, and have they not, having fulfilled a course of piety, uprightness, and honesty, laid their bones in the churchyard, where we hope to rest by their side?" Say, then, what you may in its favor, plead however strongly you may of its perfect harmony with the word of God, you cannot break through the invincible prejudice that the mind of man has against the doctrine of sovereign, discriminating grace. Thus, strange to say, instead of receiving the Gospel as a message of mercy, men rather view it as bringing tidings of gloom; instead of hailing it as an embassy of peace, they rather view it as a declaration of war; and instead of inhaling it as breathing a spiritual fragrance from heaven, they rather revile it as bearing on its wings noxious blasts from hell.

But this opposition to the doctrine of discriminating grace and to the experience and power of it in the heart, is no novelty; nor are these men singular in their enmity and opposition to it. When the Lord himself and his apostles preached the glorious truths that we now read as embodied in the inspired Scriptures of the New Testament, they had to encounter the same prejudice; they had the same opposition to meet; and they had to overcome the same desperate enmity of the carnal mind arrayed in arms against them.

These thoughts may be a clue to the intention of the apostle in dwelling at so great a length on the faith of the Old Testament saints in Hebrews 11. He had to meet the same charge as we have the charge of preaching new instead of old doctrines, and introducing a religion unknown to their fathers. To meet this accusation, he defines to them the nature of the faith which he preached, and then goes on to show in the most plain and clear manner that it was no novelty; that he was not introducing to them some new kind of religion with which their fathers were unacquainted; but

that the faith which he preached and on which he insisted as that whereby the sinner was justified, was the same faith as had full root in the bosom of all the godly men of old, of all the Old Testament saints, of all the ancient martyrs who had sealed the truth of their profession by their blood. He begins with righteous Abel, and naming one by one the most venerated patriarchs such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and all those Old Testament worthies of which the world itself was not worthy, he shows that they all without exception professed and evidenced the possession of the same faith which he preached; yet that the gospel unfolded and revealed greater blessings than ever they had enjoyed or experienced"God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." (Heb. 11:40)

Having thus dwelt upon the faith of all the Old Testament saints, he goes on in the words of our text to drop in our ears a word of admonition and exhortation"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses"that is, witnesses to the faith we preach; witnesses to the Gospel which we lay before you"let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." In endeavoring, with God's blessing, to open up and explain those words, I shall

I. First, direct your mind to the race that is spoken of as set before us.

II. Secondly, to the way in which this race is to be run, which is, by "laying aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us," and "with patience."

III. Thirdly, the Object of the race, and the supplies of strength given whereby we are enabled to run it, "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."

IV. Fourthly, the encouragement which is derived, enabling us to

run so as to obtain, seeing that we are "compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses."

I. You will observe, with regard to the figures which are used in the Scripture as emblematical of the experience and power of religion in the soul, that exertion is stamped upon them all. For instance, sometimes religion, in its experience and in its attendant conflicts, is compared to a wrestling match. "We wrestle," says the apostle, "not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Eph. 6:12) Now in a wrestling match, each antagonist does his utmost to throw his adversary: he bends every muscle, he plies all his bodily strength, he uses the most undaunted, unwearied exertion to prove himself the conqueror, and carry off the prize of victory. Sometimes the Christian's course is compared to a battle, and he is bidden as a soldier of Jesus Christ, to endure hardness, and "fight the good fight of faith." (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:3) Now in a battle we know that the warrior's garments are often rolled in blood, that every muscle and nerve is at full stretch, that cruel wounds are given and inflicted, and that nothing is thought of on either side but to gain the victory even at the expense of life. Sometimes, as here, religion in the power of it in the heart and life is compared to running a foot race, which tasks the strength of the runner to the utmost, which requires most intense exertion of every muscle of the body, and demands for a successful issue not merely the swiftest agility of foot, but the greatest vigor of limb and the strongest powers of bodily endurance.

Now if the word of God has used these three figures to set forth what religion is as wrought by a divine power in the soul, and as manifested in the daily experience of it in the heart and in the life, we may be certain that there is a battle to be fought, a race to be run, that will task our energies to the utmost; that religion is not a thing to be lightly taken up and as lightly laid down; that if a man is to be saved, there is something to be wrought in his

soul and experienced in his heart that shall at least meet the scriptural idea of a wrestling match, in which he is to prove conqueror; of a battle, in which he is to gain the victory; and of a race, in which he is so to run as to win the prize. Looking at most men, can we say that they are carrying out any or all of these scriptural figures as actual combatants? Are not most but spectators, idle, unconcerned lookers on, if even so much as that? They take no interest whatever in the wrestling match, in the battle, or in the race, as if they were personally concerned, or as if the struggle were to them a matter of life or death. The farm, the business, the profession, the family, if not things worse, for what I have named must be attended to, occupy all their thoughts: religion is with them a secondary matter. "What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed," is uppermost in their mind. As to the poor soul, what matters that? Are its concerns, its interests, its happiness or misery, its salvation or destruction, worth a moment's thought compared with dress and amusement, with mirth and feasting and jollity? "Eternity: what is that compared with time? Hell, heaven; an eternal state of enduring happiness, or an eternal state of enduring misery: what are all these trifles, compared with a few more sovereigns, a few finer clothes, a few better meals, a few handsomer tables, chairs, and carpets, or a few more enjoyments of the pleasures of sin? Therefore, let these dreams of a future state, these shadows of another world all go. This pleasant world is ours for present use and enjoyment, and we want to think no more about such gloomy themes as eternity and death. Let us pursue the solid realities of time, and let those who will think about eternity." Is not this the spirit and feeling, if not the very language of the atheistic world: the very breathings, if not the exact words, of man's infidel heart? Am I wrong, then, in saying that the great mass of men take no interest whatever in the race not even so much as to become spectators of it, or even admire those who are bending every sinew to win the prize?

But again: there are those who do run, yet never win the prize. As the apostle says "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain."

(1 Cor. 9:24) Many run, but few obtain; many seek, but few find; many are called, but few are chosen; many are religious, but few are saved; many have their thoughts exercised more or less with eternal objects, who will prove to come short of winning the glorious crown.

But turning our eyes away from these, let us fix them on the race itself. It is said in the text to be "set before us." If, then, we are to be runners in this race, we must run it as God has laid it down by the Blessed Spirit. And we may briefly say, that he has set it before us in three different ways.

1. First, it is set before us in the unerring word of truth. In all contests of strength or skill certain rules are laid down which must be rigorously observed what are usually called the laws of the game; and if these rules are not observed by him no prize is awarded to the successful party. This is true in grace as in nature, in the heavenly as well as the earthly race. If, then, the rules laid down in the word of truth are broken, a man may run, as he thinks, the heavenly race; but no prize crowns the exertion, for he has not run according to the rules which the sovereign Arbiter of the race has laid down. This may seem hard, but it is not my doctrine but the apostle's "If a man also strive for masteries, yet he is not crowned, except he strive lawfully;" (2 Tim. 2:5) that is, according to the laws laid down of the contest. It is not, then, the mere running which secures the prize, but it is whether you run the race set before you as God would have you run. You may choose your own course; you may mark out your own lists; you may select your own pace; you may fix your own time or your own rules. But even if you come in first, will the Lord award you the prize? No. He says "I have fixed in my own mind a certain race to be run, and I have laid down the rules of it in my inspired word; if then you run, you must run the race just as I have set it before you, or you will not obtain the prize and receive the crown." If, then, a man is not enlightened by divine teaching to see what the race is, as laid down by God himself, he has not yet put his feet into the course. The first requisite, then, to running the race is to see it with an enlightened eye as set before us in the Scriptures of truth. To do this requires divine light. But

as we all are dead by nature, we need divine life and power not only to see it, but to run it when seen.

2. But this race is set before us also in the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, when here below, ran a race that God had appointed him for he had a work to perform which his Father gave him, and which he finished to the uttermost; whereby we can see in the example of that most blessed Lord, if we are to follow in his footsteps, that there is a work to be done also by us, not indeed like his, meritorious and justifying, but an exercise of those Christian graces which shone forth so conspicuously in him. Thus we see in his holy example that there is a faith, a hope, a love, a patience, a submission to God's will, a glorifying him in heart, lip, and life, by the exercise of which we follow in his steps; and we may be assured that only so far as we follow in some measure in the footsteps of Jesus do we run the race set before us.

3. The saints of God, too, who have lived and died before us, have left us the pattern of their faith and obedience for us to follow. We see it in all the Bible saints, whose experience is left upon record, that we might compare the work upon our heart with what we read was wrought upon theirs, and not their experience only of God's goodness and mercy, but their trials, temptations, and sufferings, with their faith and obedience. This made the apostle say "Whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." (Heb. 13:7) And he proposes himself as their pattern "Be ye followers of me even as I am also of Christ Jesus." (1 Cor. 11:1) Thus James also bids us take the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord for an example of suffering affliction and of patience; (James 5:10) and the Church is bidden to go her way forth by the footsteps of the flock. (Songs 1:8) None can run this race but the saints of God, for the ground itself is holy ground, of which we read that "no unclean beast is to be found therein." None but the redeemed walk there; and none have ever won the prize but those who have run this heavenly race as redeemed by precious blood.

Bear in mind, then, that the first thing is to see the course marked out before our eyes as set before us in the Scriptures of truth, in the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the experience of the saints.

Now no sooner do we see by faith the race set before us than we begin to run; and, like Christian in the "Pilgrim's Progress," we run from the City of Destruction, our steps being winged with fear and apprehension. All this, especially in the outset, implies energy, movement, activity, pressing forward; running as it were for our life; escaping, as Lot, to the mountain; fleeing, as the prophet speaks, "like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah;" (Zech. 14:5) or as the manslayer fled to the city of refuge from the avenger of blood. As then the runner stretches forward hands, and feet, and head, intent on being first to reach the goal, so in the spiritual race there is a stretching forth of the faculties of the new-born soul to win the heavenly prize. There is a stretching forth of the spiritual understanding to become possessed of clear views of heavenly truth. There is a stretching forth of the desires of the heart to experience the love of God; to feel acceptance with him through the blood of sprinkling; to know the way of salvation for ourselves, and to have clear evidences that our feet are in it; to receive tokens for good, and manifestations of the pardoning love of God; to walk in his fear, live to his praise, and enjoy union and communion with the blessed Lord. And there is a stretching forth of the affections of the heart after Jesus and the truth as it is in Jesus, with many longings, breathings, earnest cries, and fervent wrestlings at the throne of grace, that we may know the truth and by the truth be sanctified and made free. So that when you look at the word "race" as emblematic of a Christian's path, you see that it is not any movement of the body, what the apostle calls "bodily exercise," that is intended, but an inward movement of the soul, or rather of the grace that God has lodged in your bosom, and to which are communicated spiritual faculties, whereby it moves forward in the ways of God, under the influences of the Blessed Spirit. "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart." (Ps. 119:32) Then every fervent desire of

your soul after the Lord Jesus Christ; every inward movement of faith, and hope, and love toward his blessed name; every sense of your misery and danger as a poor, guilty, lost, condemned sinner, whereby you flee from the wrath to come; every escaping out of the world and out of sin for your very life, with every breathing of your heart into the bosom of God, that he would have mercy upon you and bless you; all these inward acts of the believing heart in its striving after salvation as a felt, enjoyed reality, as the prize of our high calling, are pointed out by the emblem "running the race set before us." The Christian sees and feels that there is a prize to be obtained, which is eternal life; a victory to be gained, which is victory over death and hell; and he sees the certain consequences if this prize is not obtained, this victory not won an eternity of misery. He sees, therefore, let others think and say what they may, he must run if all stand still, he must fight if all are overcome. Thus as the Blessed Spirit works with a divine power upon his heart, he gives as if new wings to his feet and fresh desires to his mind, and from time to time rekindles those apprehensions of the wrath of God, those desires to be right, those fears to be wrong, that dread of hypocrisy and self-deception, that longing after Christ, his blood, and love, whereby he is urged on again and again to run the race set before him. And if sometimes he feel weary in running; if sometimes he be inclined to sit down by the way, to fall out of the course, and to give up heart and hope, fresh energy comes from above, fresh strength is communicated to his soul, and again, in the earnest breathings of his renewed spirit and the desires of his mind, he runs the race set before him. But to do this or any part of this a man must have the life of God in his soul. To begin to run is of divine grace and power; to keep on, he must have continual supplies communicated out of the fullness of a covenant Head; and to be enabled to persevere to the end so as to win the prize, he must have the strength of Christ continually made perfect in his weakness. But he does win; he is made more than conqueror through him who loved him. Jesus has engaged that he shall not be defeated; for the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong; but the lame take the prey; and not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord

of hosts.

II. But this leads me to show how the race is to be run. There are three things the apostle speaks of as being necessary to run the race aright. The first is, to "lay aside every weight;" the second, to lay aside "the sin which doth so easily beset us;" and the third, to "run with patience."

1. If a man were engaged to run a race, and that not for a temporal crown not for a poor, mercenary reward, but to run for his life; to run as the man ran who had killed his neighbor unawares, and at whose heels the avenger of blood was; surely, he would not load himself with many weights; he would not wear an extra quantity of clothes; he would not put on a thick pair of shoes; or even carry a heavy purse of gold in his pocket. But he would rather strip himself, as far as he could, of all unnecessary clothing; and if, on his starting, he still wore a certain quantity, as he found they incumbered him, and that at every step he became in consequence weaker and weaker, he would throw off garment after garment that he might not be overpowered by their weight. Thus it is in running the spiritual race. Before we make the first start we are already loaded with weights; there is every difficulty and obstacle in the way at the very outset, and these so great that many who seem to desire to run never overcome them. And this seems to be more especially the case with the child of God. How continually, when the grace of God first touches the sinner's heart, difficulties which seem insurmountable, and which indeed but for divine grace would not only seem but actually be insurmountable, stand before him in the road. The opposition of relations, perhaps a father, who would sooner follow him to his grave than see him what is called a saint; it may be the persecution of the partner of his bosom; the hostility and undisguised contempt of his own children; his situation in life, with all its prospects; his business or occupation, which may be of that peculiar nature that the very profession of godliness will seriously endanger his worldly welfare, and bring himself and his family to poverty: what difficulties of this kind often stare a man in the face when he first begins to have some desire after the

things of God! And the higher the station in life the greater the difficulties. The poor have their difficulties, and sometimes their persecutions, in the first outset, but nothing like those who occupy a higher position in the social scale. This made the Lord say that "it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." (Matt. 19:24) But whether rich or poor, every runner has his peculiar weights which he has to lay aside; and unless grace be in his heart, he cannot do so. Many have desired to be what is called "religious" and have made a few feeble, oft-repeated and as oft-defeated, attempts to come out of the world and seek the salvation of their souls, but then have been appalled by the difficulties in the way. They have not had strength or resolution to begin because they found at the very outset, at the very entrance in the race, there were such pressing difficulties to be encountered. They had relations who frowned; their worldly circumstances were imperiled; they had to face the frowns of a world whose frown they feared and whose smile they loved; and thus at the very outset they gave up, because they could not lay aside every weight. But grace, in a child of God, overcomes these obstacles. It plants in his conscience those deep convictions and it sets before his eyes such a sense of his lost, ruined condition; he is so stung by guilt, pierced by the arrows of the law, condemned by his own conscience, and has such a view of death and judgment and what awaits those who live and die unpardoned, that he breaks through every obstacle; however weighty, however numerous, he bursts through them all. He says "My soul is at stake: what are relations to me, if to serve them I am imperiling my soul? What is father; what is wife; what are children; what are house or land; what is everything or anything of an earthly, perishing nature, if I am to die under the wrath of God?" Therefore, he breaks through them all; and he finds it easy to do so, for at best these difficulties and obstacles are but cobwebs when met by a firm resolution. In fact, they are difficulties only to cowards; obstacles only to those who were but too willing they should be such, who only wanted an excuse not to run. When, then, grace enables a man to break through them, he finds them as Samson found the withes and bands that bound

him. Grace in the heart enables a man to set his face against all opposing obstacles: he breaks through them all finding them no barriers to his making the start; and laying aside the weights, he begins the race set before him. Like a runner beginning a race, he is at first all ardor, full of strength and energy, his eye bent upon the crown, his feet unencumbered; and he runs eagerly on. But after a time, he begins to find that he has not yet laid aside every weight; and as his strength begins to fail, the weights he carries make themselves manifest as encumbrances. He has not yet got thoroughly rid of the world. He may have thrown off the world without, but there is the world within of which he cannot so easily divest himself. He has thrown aside outward sins that once pressed him down to earth and were clogs and fetters to his laboring feet; but he begins to find that his sins within he cannot so easily lay aside; that if enabled by grace to break off commission of sin outwardly, there is still an evil heart that is ever bringing forth fresh occasions and fresh temptations to evil. He finds also that it is only by grace he can lay aside those weights; that everything that is not grace is weight; everything that does not help, hinders; and everything that does not urge forward, keeps back. Thus he finds that he has to lay aside many things which at first he did not feel to be weights; to give up many practices, principles, and dearly cherished idols, for he finds that now, unless he lays them aside, he is so clogged and impeded by them that he is sure he shall never come off conqueror. He begins to find that not only sin of every shape and name that is in the heart, as it rises to view and demands gratification, becomes a weight that clogs his feet, but his own strength, wisdom, and righteousness; his own resolutions, vows, and promises; his own fleshly piety and creature holiness are also encumbering weights which he must lay aside.

How, then, shall he so run as to obtain, when instead of getting stronger he becomes weaker, and instead of gathering fresh courage with every step, feels himself more and more faint and more and more feeble as the race is prolonged? If the Lord, then, were not with him in the race, he must sink; if he who is the strength of his people did not give fresh strength to his feet; if he

who teaches the hands to war and the fingers to fight did not make his feet to be as hinds' feet, they would fail him in this race for life or death. But the Lord, by his Spirit and grace, keeps giving him fresh strength and power; sets before him fresh motives to run; urges him forward sometimes by terror, and draws him forward sometimes by love. Thus receiving mercy, he faint not, but holds out and holds on. This in fact is the grand secret of the successful runner. Thus Paul ran. "I therefore so run; not as uncertainly." What then makes the difference between the runners who fail and the runners who win, but that the one runs in his own strength and the other in the Lord's; that the one runs by works and the other by faith; that the one runs by free will and the other by free grace?

2. But after a time he finds that there is a sin "which doth very easily beset him;" and if enabled to lay aside the various weights which I have named, he cannot with equal facility lay aside this peculiar sin. But what is this besetting sin which the apostle here bids us lay aside? It is not as many interpret the words, that sin to which this or that person is peculiarly addicted, such as pride, covetousness, sensuality. It is perfectly true that we all have our peculiar besetments, but it is not of these that the apostle here speaks; for the sin which all that run are to lay aside besets all runners alike, which would not be the case with each man's peculiar temptation. But the sin which doth so easily beset us all is the sin of unbelief. It is in the original a very expressive word, for it means a garment which hangs loosely about the feet, and, as the runner presses forward, throws him down. We may picture before our eyes a runner thus dressed, and we should soon see that, finding this loose flowing garment continually impeding his movements, and that he is thereby prevented from running actively on, he would throw it aside that he might have full scope to run without its impeding hindrance. But how truly and vividly does this figure represent the nature of unbelief! What spiritual runner does not find, as he runs the race, that unbelief is this besetting sin which more than any other entangles his steps and twines itself round every limb? It is a sin that of all other sins cleaves most closely and most continually impedes every spiritual

movement. If you are seeking the Lord with some earnestness in your soul, how suddenly, how quickly unbelief comes in as a chilling blast, and how almost instantaneously, like the east winds which we are now experiencing, it nips and chills the tender buds of spiritual desire and the opening life of the soul! How even sometimes it casts a black frost over the blossoms of hope in which the early life of the soul had, as a tree in spring, become clothed, and how in consequence they drop off blighted and withered! But where unbelief is not permitted for a time, as in Job's and Jeremiah's case, to blight hope, how, to revert to the metaphor of the text, it hinders and impedes the steps of the heavenly runner! And the reason is, because it is the grand antagonist to that faith whereby alone we are enabled to run at all. This seems evident from the very nature of the race itself. For if faith be the grand influencing motive, enabling us to run, what can hinder the race so much as unbelief, its opposite? How it hindered the children of Israel in running their race to the promised land, so that "they could not enter in because of unbelief." How it hindered Abraham when he denied his wife; Sarah when she put Hagar into a wrong position; Isaac when he secretly preferred Esau to Jacob; Rebekah when she procured by deceit the blessing; Job and Jeremiah when they cursed the day of their birth; David when he numbered the people; Jonah when he fled to Tarshish; and Peter when he denied his Lord and Master. And I may appeal to the experience of every saint of God who is running the race, whether he does not find unbelief to be that sin which causes him the greatest amount of hindrance. Then he must lay it aside, or he cannot run so as to obtain. But you may ask, how does he lay it aside? Can he without special help? No, assuredly not. To say that he could, would be to give strength to the creature; would be to pluck the crown of grace from the Redeemer's brow and put it upon the head of man. The same grace then that first opened his eyes to see the race set before him, that put his feet into the strait and narrow path; the same grace in blessed exercise enables him by an act of faith to "lay aside the sin which doth so easily beset us." But there is this difference between the heavenly race and the earthly; that in the earthly race, the weight once abandoned is no more felt; the

garment laid aside is no more taken up. But not so in the heavenly race. The weights, or at least many of them, return, or new ones come in their place; and if the sin which so easily beset us is laid aside, our heart again gathers it up, for unbelief is deeply seated in our very nature, and is continually springing up out of the depths of our carnal mind. If, therefore, we are enabled one day to lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, on the next the weights may be as heavy as ever, and unbelief may beset us with still greater power and still greater violence. Yet run we must, and run we shall as helped by the grace of God; and every step we put forward is attained only by laying aside the weights and the sin which doth so easily beset us.

3. But there is another qualification necessary, and that is patience, or, as the word means, endurance. This is the grand requisite of the runner naturally, if the foot race be of unusual length. He cannot possibly win the prize unless, besides mere fleetness of limb, he possess great endurance of bodily strength, and, above all, that force and energy of resolution whereby he is determined not to give up, not to give out, but to hold on even to the very last. This tasks all his power; for a race of any length is not won by sheer agility, by lightness of foot, and nimbleness of limb, but by bodily endurance, by strength of lung and power of muscle, and, above all, by high courage and determination not to be beaten. So in running the heavenly race. It must be run with endurance. It is not to be won by stepping nimbly forward at first, and then, scant of breath and worn out with fatigue, to fall flat upon the course or drop out as unable to proceed further. The heavenly race is not like a foot race in the meadows a ten minutes' spurt but a race for life; a race ever renewing and never ending till the immortal crown is won. It will task, then, every gracious energy, and can only be won by the most patient endurance of every spiritual faculty. We shall soon see this if we look at the hindrances and difficulties which meet the runner at well-nigh every step. Look at our own faintness, if we have run long; at our own doubting, misgiving hearts; our own feeble faith, scanty hope, and wavering love. Everything naturally out of us,

everything naturally in us, calls out for ease, rest, and standing still. To be ever watching, ever praying, ever reading and hearing; ever resisting sin and Satan, denying self, and crucifying the flesh; to be ever tempted, tried, and exercised; to be ever under some affliction of mind or body, of family or circumstances; to be plagued all the day long and chastened every morning; how all this daily experience needs patient endurance. Here all fail but the family of God. As then the soul finds more and more of its weakness and helplessness, produced by these painful trials and exercises, it feels more the need of patient endurance that it may hold out to the end; for only those who endure to the end shall be saved. Many run well for a time. Many seem as though by their earnestness and activity, their zeal and ardor, they would snatch the prize by a few onward footsteps as though they would gain the victory by the exertion of a day, or win heaven by the earnestness of an hour. But these are the first to give out; like the children of Ephraim, to turn their back in the day of battle; the first to yield to the foe when sharply pressed. Many run but few obtain. Sin ruins some; error blights others; the world damps this man's zeal, and prosperity wither's that man's ardor, till the course is strewn with the fallen, and a few only struggle on to the end. Grace alone secures the prize; and the reason is because the grace of God in the heart is of an enduring nature, and therefore abides when all else is lost. Natural faith soon dies out; creature hope gives up the ghost; and fleshly zeal and earnestness are speedily quenched to the last spark. But grace is of an enduring nature, as being from a divine fountain. "The righteous holds on his way," because "grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life." Therefore, those who are possessed of grace will hold out to the end; they will not only run the race, but win the prize. It will be true of them all what Paul said of himself "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Tim. 4:7,8)

III. But it is time to pass on to our third point, which is the

Object toward which we are to look, and the supplies of grace and strength which enable us to run. Let none of you think there is any strength or power in the creature to run the race, at least with any hope of winning the prize. A dead man might as soon be set to run with a living man as a dead soul to run a race which is wholly spiritual and divine. There must be divine life in a man's soul before he can even commence the race. Therefore, let no one think that I ascribe any power to the creature, or would rob the blessed Redeemer of his crown to give his glory to another. If I did not see it in every page of God's truth, my own experience would give the lie to this. No one can ever run the race set before him, except by looking unto Jesus. He is at the head of the race; he stands at the goal, holding the crown of victory in his hand which he puts upon the head of the successful runner. Here again we see the necessity of a living faith, for we can only run on as we view Jesus by the eye of faith at the right hand of the Father opening his blessed arms to receive us into his own bosom at the end of the race.

But if we look unto Jesus, it must be, as the word implies in the original, by looking off everything else. To run successfully we must not look upon the ground, to see where it is rough and rugged and where it is easy and smooth, that we may pick and choose our way; nor to the right or to the left, to see whether the bystanders condemn or approve, hiss or cheer; nor to our own strength or weakness of limb, and swiftness or slowness of foot; nor to the distance behind or the distance before; nor to our competitors to compare our running with theirs; nor to any object that may distract the eye from looking unto Jesus and to him alone. Here all fail but the heaven-taught child of grace. When we look out from off our watch tower, how we see professors of religion running in all directions. The religious world has its races as well as the profane, and there is no lack of entries, prizes, or competitors. But where among them shall we find those, who looking off every other object, look to Jesus alone? Nor indeed can any one really look to him but by the special gift and grace of God. He must be revealed to the soul by the power of God; we must behold his glorious Godhead and his suffering manhood by

the eye of faith; and we must view him as the incarnate God, the only Mediator between God and man. We must see the efficacy of his atoning blood to purge a guilty conscience; the blessedness of his obedience to justify a needy, naked soul; the sweetness of his dying love as an inward balm and cordial against all the thousand ills and sorrows of life. We must see his glory, as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth; his suitability to every want and woe; his infinite compassion to the vilest and worst of sinners; his patient forbearance and wondrous long suffering of our sins and backslidings; his unchanging love, stronger than death itself; his readiness to hear; his willingness to bless; and his ability to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Thus the heavenly runner looks not to the course however long, nor to the ground however rough, nor to his own exertions however multiplied, nor to his own strength whether much or little; nor to applauding friends nor to condemning foes; but wholly and sorely to the incarnate Son of God. Jesus draws him onward with his invincible grace; and as he runs and looks, and looks and runs, every fresh look gives renewed strength, and every time we view his beauty and glory we see more to believe, to admire, and to love. Every glance of his beauteous Person renews the flame of holy love; every sight of his blood and righteousness kindles desires to experience more of their efficacy and blessedness; and every touch of his sacred finger melts the heart into conformity to his suffering image. This is the life of a Christian, day by day, to be running a race for eternity; and, as speeding onward to a heavenly goal, to manifest his sincerity and earnestness by continually breathing forth the yearnings of his soul after divine realities, and to be pressing forward more and more toward the Lord Jesus Christ as giving him a heavenly crown when he has finished his course with joy. But as he runs, and just in proportion to his earnestness, he is bowed down with weights. Many trials and sorrows, many cares and wearying anxieties, many powerful temptations, many bosom sins, many inward idols, many doubts and fears, many sinkings and tremblings, many hindrances from his felt coldness, darkness, and death, hang upon him and press him down, so that at times he is utterly unable to move a single foot forward. But in

spite of hindrances from without and within, every now and then he sees Jesus at the end of the race holding out the crown, and seeing him he is encouraged and enabled once more to run looking unto him, that he may derive strength and virtue out of his fullness.

But Jesus is spoken of in our text as "the Author and the Finisher of our faith." Let us see how this bears upon the experience of the heavenly runner. He looks to him, then, as the Author of his faith. He feels it was he who gave him the first grain of grace; who communicated the first beam of light, and who raised up the first movement of faith towards his sacred Majesty; for he is the author of the whole. His first desire to run; his power to move his feet forward; the faith that was given as the first dawn of eternal life, were all breathed into his soul by Jesus. He softened his heart to believe and quickened his soul to feel; and thus he feels that the first movement of faith in his soul, enabling him to run, was his divine gift and work.

And as Jesus is the Author, so he is the Finisher of faith; he carries on the work begun, and never leaves it unfulfilled or imperfect, but keeps supplying the spiritual runner with grace out of his own fullness. And thus as he is the Author by the first implantation of faith in the soul, so is he the Finisher by continually breathing upon his own work, watering it with his own dew, reviving it with his own rain, and making it spring up and grow under his own warming beams as the Sun of righteousness. In this life faith can hardly be said to be ever finished. It is rather like the crops which whiten our harvest fields; when ripe they are fit to be garnered. So when faith is finished, heaven is at the door. When all its trials have been accomplished; all its sufferings undergone; all its battles fought, and all its victories won, then faith may be said to be finished. Every member of the mystical body of Christ has his allotted measure of suffering, which is "a filling up of that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in his flesh for his body's sake, that is, the Church;" (Col. 1:24) and as this measure is filled up, the faith which sustained them is finished with them. When a dying believer can say, "I have run

my race; I have finished my course;" he can add, "Jesus was the Author, and Jesus is the Finisher of my faith." With this life faith ends; it is turned into sight, and is no longer needed when Jesus is seen as he is, without a veil between. Ever then bear this in mind, that Jesus is and ever must be to the heavenly runner the Author and finisher of faith, the Alpha and Omega, the first and last. Nor can he run the race with any hope of success but as he looks unto Jesus, and derives supplies of strength and power out of his fullness. If he fail here, he fails everywhere; but if he thus run, he is sure to prove a conqueror. Does not he himself say "Without me ye can do nothing?" Though faint, be still then pursuing. Run on and run through every difficulty. The blessed Jesus, who is drawing you on by looks of love, will never let you go, will never cease his gracious work upon your heart; he will maintain the faith and hope once given, will never leave you to fall out of the race, but will certainly bring you off winner and crown you with eternal victory.

IV. The last point we have to notice is, the encouragement given to the runner to run the heavenly race, seeing that he is "compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." This is an allusion to the spectators of the ancient games, who being gathering together from every part of Greece were so numerous in witnessing a race, that looked at from a distance they were as a mighty cloud of forms and faces. So is there a mighty cloud of witnesses surrounding the runners of the heavenly race. These have already run the race and won the prize. The Old Testament saints; the noble army of martyrs; the thousands and tens of thousands who have run and won, fought and conquered, yet sorrowed and suffered, wept and mourned, sighed and groaned, cried and prayed when here below, but found Jesus to be the Finisher as well as the Author of their faith; all these celestial conquerors testify to the grace of God in having given them strength to run and having crowned them with victory. These witnesses surround Jesus as he sits upon his eternal throne, and they look down, as it were, over the battlements of heaven on the runners below, and cheer them on. It is as though they said from their celestial seats "Run, brother, run, sister, on; give not

up the race. If faint and weary; if ready to sink, still run on; victory is sure. Be not discouraged. Lay aside every weight and the besetting sin of unbelief, and run on with patience. Jesus can, Jesus will give you needful supplies of grace and strength. You shall not be overcome by any foe or overcome by your own weakness. Run on: it is only a little further. Heaven is at the end; immortal glory, eternal life. Run on, then; you are sure to win the prize. We have run; we have won." Thus all things in grace conspire to speed the Christian on; and he looks not only to Jesus, but to the crowd of witnesses of his faithfulness and truth, as numerous as drops of rain in a summer cloud, and he sees that all testify to his free and sufficient grace. And not only all whose faith and patience are recorded in the Scriptures, but all departed believers whom you have personally known and loved; whose happy death you have witnessed; whose last words you remember, and who are embalmed in the warmest, tenderest affections of your heart; these too are witnesses, and every one of them seeks, so to speak, to encourage your soul. They all bear witness to the efficacy of the blood of Christ in cleansing from all sin, for it washed away theirs; to his dying love, as a sweet, cheering cordial in every sorrow and trouble, for such they found it; to his faithfulness to his promises, for they proved it; to his power to save, for they experienced it; and to his presence on a dying bed, for they enjoyed it.

May we not therefore willingly run, seeing we are surrounded by such a cloud of witnesses, and all bearing testimony for Christ and against our unbelieving hearts, all prompting us forward in spite of the temptations which make us hang back, all encouraging us to lay aside weight, and to run on as they ran before, hoping in the same mercy, trusting to the same grace, looking to the same Jesus, and expecting the same blissful reward?

Are you one of these spiritual runners? If you are, you feel, it is true, the weights and the besetting sin; yet there are times and seasons when, in spite of them all, you run forward in the desires of your heart and the stretching forth, if I may use the expression, of the very neck of your soul. These desires, these

breathings of your heart, are all so many speaking mouths in your bosom, a cloud of witnesses within re-echoing the cheering cry of the witnesses without, encouraging yourselves, encouraging others to run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus. Nay, God himself from heaven his dwelling place; his dear Son from the throne of his glory; the Blessed Comforter; the holy angels; and glorified spirits of just men made perfect, are witnesses too. And what more shall I say? That the saints on earth, your brothers and sisters in the faith; nay, I may add that your enemies, and the very devils themselves, are all witnesses to a Christian's career, and all are made in the end to acknowledge him victor.

HEAVENLY REALITIES AND DIVINE CERTAINTIES

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Lord's Day Morning, June, 11, 1865

"And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true. even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God. And eternal life." 1 John 5:20

There is a reality in true religion, and indeed, rightly viewed, a reality in nothing else; for every other thing passes away like a dream of the night, and comes to an end like a tale that is told. Now you cannot say of a thing that passes away and comes to an end that it is real. It may have the appearance of reality, of possessing a firm, enduring substance, when in fact it is but a shadow. Our very language, nay, the very laws of our land, embody this idea. We read or hear sometimes, for instance, that a man of wealth has died and left such or such an amount of real and personal property. What is meant by real property, and why is it called real, as thus distinguished from personal? By real property we understand land and houses. Money, jewels, pictures, books, furniture, securities, these are not called real but personal, and for this reason, that they belong to the individual, and are therefore moveable and transitory. Money may be spent, jewels be lost, books be burnt, furniture decay, pictures vanish by time and age, securities be stolen. But not so with land; that cannot be burnt, nor stolen by night, nor dropped down a sink-hole, nor decay with old age. Amidst all the changes of time there it remains in all its original firmness, and is handed down as a solid possession from father to son. The law, therefore, calls all such property "real."

Is there not some similarity between this and the things of eternity? Nothing is real but that which has an abiding substance. Health decays, strength diminishes, beauty flees the cheek, sight and hearing grow dim, the mind itself gets feeble, riches make to themselves wings and flee away, children die, friends depart, old

age creeps on, and life itself comes to a close. These fugitive, transitory things are then mere shadows: there is no substance, enduring substance in them. They are for time, and are useful for a time state. Like our daily food and raiment, house and home, they support and solace us in our journey through life. But there they stop; when life ends they end with it. But real religion—and by this I understand the work of God upon the soul, abides in death and after death, goes with us through the dark valley, and lands us safe in a blessed eternity. It is, therefore, the only thing in this world of which we can say that it is real.

Is not this John's testimony? "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John 2:16, 17.) What a testimony is here given that everything in the world is passing away, and that only one man abides for ever. And who is that man, that blessed man, who lives when all dies, who abides for ever when all others pass away into the outer darkness? It is he who doeth the will of God. And how and when do we the will of God? When we believe in His dear Son by a living faith; for "this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:40.) If, then, you have seen the Son and believed in Him, you have now everlasting life, and Jesus will raise you up in the last day.

Now wherever there is *reality*, there will be a measure, more or less, of *certainty*. If you are the possessor of a piece of land, it may be but a small field or half an acre of garden ground, you know for certain whether you are the possessor of that piece of property or not. When you walk up and down the length and breadth of it, even if a few yards be the full extent of your walk, you can stamp your foot upon the soil and say, "This is mine; this is my property." But we may observe that there is a distinction between the certainty of possession and the certainty of title. You

might want to sell that piece of land, and I might want to buy it. But I should not be satisfied with your bare statement that you were its possessor; I should want to know your title, to examine your deeds, and see whether you have not only a certainty of possession but a certainty of right; that your title is good as well as your proprietorship. So in the things of God.

There is a certainty in the truths of revelation, and those who know something of the things of God in their own soul are resting upon them as divine certainties, of which the blessed Spirit has borne in their conscience His sure testimony. And even where this is not clearly the case, where this inward testimony is weak, the possession of the fear of God, as the beginning of wisdom, gives to its owner a possession of the kingdom of heaven. Thus every child of God may not have attained to the certainty of title, though he has the certainty of possession. His title may be good in itself beyond all doubt and question, as regards its reality; but if you ask him to produce it, he can scarcely find his deeds, or make out a title to satisfy himself, or fully to satisfy you. And yet if the Lord the Spirit has but begun the work of grace in his heart, he has the certainty of possession, and in due time he will have the certainty of title.

What leads me to make these remarks upon realities and certainties? The peculiar language of our text, the firm reality, the positive certainty which stamp its declarations. Do we find any uncertainties here? any "perhaps" or "peradventure; I think it may be," or "I cannot tell whether it may be so or not?" Does the Holy Ghost ever speak the language of uncertainty in revealing to us the truth of God? Mark how clearly, decisively, certainly the man of God speaks here: "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we *are* in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This **is** the true God, and eternal life." What a certain sound the gospel trumpet here gives; with what confidence the man of God speaks. And if he did not, how could we believe him? If a man profess to be my guide, say on some Swiss mountain, amidst rocks and snows and falling avalanches,

he must know the way and every step that he takes on that perilous ground or I cannot follow him with any confidence. If I own a ship, and a pilot undertake to carry it down the channel, he must know every shoal, or my ship and cargo and many precious lives may be lost through his uncertain handling of the helm. Other instances will occur to your mind in which we want certainties, that we may clearly know where we are, what we are, what we are about, and whither we are going, in order to preserve us from being altogether wrong and going altogether wrong.

Now if religion be of all matters most important, if a mistake in it, at least a very serious mistake, be fatal, how desirable, how absolutely necessary is it to have certainties in our own case. The word of God in the hands of the Spirit is our guide; how needful therefore it is that it should be a certain guide; and may I not add that the interpretation of it by a professed servant of Christ should be as clear and certain as the word itself? God help me then this morning to be this faithful interpreter of His word. Our text is clear and certain. If in my interpretation of it then there be anything dark, confused, or uncertain, to me must the fault belong. Still I hope that the Lord may enable me so rightly to divide the word of truth, so to dive into the treasures of our text, and lay them bare to your view, that you may with God's help and blessing, gather up from what I may bring before you something that may enrich, feed, comfort, and instruct your soul. I shall draw your attention to three points connected with our text.

I.—*First, the positive declaration,* " This is the true God, and eternal life."

II.—*Secondly,* the *knowledge* which the believer possesses that "the *Son of God is come,* and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true."

III.—*Thirdly,* the *positive assertion,* that "*we are in him that is true.*"

God give the needed blessing!

I.—*"This is the true God, and eternal life."*

1. Whilst we are in nature's darkness and death, we have no knowledge, and we want to have no knowledge of the true God. We are, as the Scripture emphatically declares, "without God in the world;" and we love to have it so. If we have any thought about God—and where is the conscience that has not at times some thoughts about Him?—we view Him for the most part as our enemy. We are told indeed that we ought to love Him. and in His holy Law He has bidden us to do so with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. But this we cannot do: for if we make the attempt we soon find and feel the springing up of that enmity of the carnal mind against Him of which Paul speaks. And indeed the law provokes it; for it "worketh wrath." and by stirring up the wretched enmity of our carnal mind baffles every attempt at love.

Besides this wretched enmity of our heart, we have an instinctive feeling that God must be our enemy as long as we are living in wicked works; for even our natural conscience testifies to His holiness, and that holiness we see and feel firmly and unalterably directed against the sins and idols which we hug to our breast. Viewing Him, then, as our enemy, we shun His presence, and escape as far as we can out of His sight. Under this feeling Jonah went down from the presence of the Lord to Joppa; and the prodigal son took his journey into a far country. So we get away as far as we can from anything which testifies of the presence and power of God. Any person, any place, any book, any conversation, and I may add, any thoughts which would remind us of the presence of God we get away from as fast and as far as we can, for we cannot bear the condemnation which His presence brings.

There is another reason why we wish to have nothing to do with God, and for God to have nothing to do with us. There is an inward conviction in our mind, that if we have to do with God and

God has to do with us, we must give up that which our nature loves almost more dearly than our life blood. We must part with our sins, pluck our idols from our breast, abandon loved pursuits, relinquish dear friends, offend affectionate relatives, sacrifice cherished prospects, and, as the world says, ruin ourselves for life. Now no man can look this prospect steadily in the face, this utter crushing of our inmost heart, until he has the fear of God deeply planted in his soul. This was just the case with me. I had often wanted to be religious and sometimes tried to be so; but I never could bear the thought of what I must give up if I truly became so. The sacrifice was too great; and I could not make it. Thousands are held here who never proceed any further. Here they live, here they die, here they perish.

But God will not let His own dear children thus perish. He therefore arrests us in our ignorance or our indecision, in our unbelief and in our enmity, by His all-subduing work of grace upon our soul, which He Himself begins, carries on, and finishes. Now, no sooner does a ray of light shine out of His fulness into our heart and divine life quicken our soul, than so far from seeking to escape the eye of this God whom we have thus far continually shunned, there is raised up in the bosom a deep-seated, abiding, and almost continual feeling, that wherever we go that eye follows us. Thence springs the fullest conviction that there is no escaping out of His hand. or withdrawing ourselves from His heart-searching eye. We are also made to feel that if we live and die His enemies, under His wrath we must perish for evermore. This deep conviction at once puts an end to all our false conceptions of God, and to all the vain imaginations that we have formed concerning Him. It detects our false worship of Him, and how satisfied we have been with addressing Him with our lips when our heart was far from Him. It shows us that our strict morality, all our, as we thought, decided piety, all our religious thoughts, connections, and associations were but a form of godliness, whilst we really denied the power thereof.

I speak thus, for it may have been the case with some of you not to have been abandoned to any course of immorality, but on the

contrary, to have been preserved in the greatest strictness of life and conduct, and yet by being varnished over with a false religion, to have stretched your limbs upon a bed too short, and wrapped yourself up in a covering too narrow. Whether then we lived in open sin, or were strict moralists, or false religionists, however it might affect our character and reputation, it made little difference when spiritual convictions entered into and laid hold of our awakened conscience. When God searches Jerusalem with candles, He lays bare every secret imagination of the mind; when He lays judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet, He sweeps away every refuge of lies and His waters overflow every hiding-place. When the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, it is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The word of God thus finds us out, piercing and penetrating every veil and covering, and brings us out naked and bare in all our natural and hideous deformity before His heart-searching eye.

Under this work of grace, under these teachings of the blessed Spirit, as a Spirit of conviction, we begin to have some acquaintance with the true God; learn to worship Him in spirit and in truth; and to have some right apprehension of His character, of His holiness, justice, majesty, and power. In all this we see the first budding, fruit, and effects of that godly fear which He gives by His grace, and which He has promised to put into the hearts of those with whom He makes an everlasting covenant that He will not turn away from them to do them good. (Jer. 32:40.) It is in this way that we come to a knowledge of the only true God in His justice and holiness.

2. But after a time, as the Lord is pleased to work by His Spirit and grace, we come to a knowledge of the only true God *as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ*. This we do not see at first. We read that "it is the glory of God to conceal a thing." (Prov. 25:2.) Thus it is for His own glory that for a time He conceals from His people that which afterwards He reveals unto them. For the most part, therefore, He exercises them well and

long with guilty apprehensions and fears of His great and terrible Majesty, that He may strip them thoroughly of all the rags of creature righteousness and bring them down to that spot where He means to reveal in them and unto them His dear Son. and make Him precious to their souls.

Now no man can bring into his own heart a spiritual, saving knowledge of the Son of God, or give himself faith to embrace Him as the Christ of God. so as to have any assurance that He died for him. He may long to do so, and even attempt to raise up faith in his own bosom; but till the time comes when God is pleased to give some discovery and manifestation of His dear Son to his soul, he cannot see Him; for He hides Himself in the thick darkness: nor can he believe in Him so as to find rest and peace from an assurance of pardoned sin and acceptance in the Beloved. Men may question and cavil at these strong assertions, but I am very sure that I speak in the fullest harmony with the experience of every living soul in thus speaking; for all such well know that the faith that brings peace is not in their own power, but is the pure, sovereign gift of God.

When, then, any whom the Lord the Spirit is inwardly teaching has been exercised, some for a longer and others for a shorter period, with such apprehensions of the character of the only true God as to bring him down into the dust of death, this gracious Teacher in some most unexpected moment will bring some discovery to his soul of the Son of God as a Saviour, suitable to his lost case and condition, and raise up faith in his heart to embrace Him as the Son of God. I cannot now stay to work this point clearly out in the experience of the Lord's disciples, as we see in the New Testament; but take it all in the words of Peter: "Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." (John 6:68, 69.) It is in this way that we are brought to see who the true God is, not merely in His character as holy, just, and righteous, inflexible against sin and determined to punish the guilty, but obtain the gracious view of His mercy, goodness, and love in the face of Jesus Christ. This is what the apostle means when he

says, "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.)

You will observe that our text says, "This is the true God." There is no other God but this. All others are false gods, the vain and vague conceptions of men's minds—not the true God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of all grace, of all mercy, and of all truth, as manifesting Himself in the Person and work of His dear Son. This revelation and discovery of the glory of God in the face, or, as it might be rendered, in the Person of Jesus Christ, changes the whole scene, brings the soul out of darkness into light, gives it a sweet deliverance into the mercy of God, makes Christ precious, fills the heart, according to the measure of the revelation given, with all joy and peace in believing. Then we can say, "This is the true God"—God in Christ, God revealing Himself in the Person of His dear Son, as pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin.

3. Now connected with this true God is "eternal life," for our text combines them as one: "This is the true God and eternal life." O the blessedness, which eternity itself can never exhaust, of possessing eternal life. There is something to my mind so singularly blessed in the expression "eternal life," that I cannot help dwelling upon it. How the thought, the feeling of it expands the breast! Compared with it, how poor, mean, and low is our temporal life and all its concerns—the short span which God has allotted to us here below!

Observe how our eye is directed by holy John to the true God as being Himself eternal life. He is not only the Giver, the Spring, the Subject, the Object of it; He Himself is it all. O if He has but quickened our souls by His Spirit and grace, we carry now, even now, eternal life in our breast; for this eternal life is the precious fruit on earth of that eternal life in heaven which was with the Father and was manifested unto us. (1 John 1:2.) We have no life in our own bosom independent of the Source and Fountain of life; for Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life." He is our life (Col.

3:14), and He has said, for our encouragement and consolation, "Because I live ye shall live also." (John 14:19.) If we have any light, any warmth, any fruitfulness, any motion, it comes from the Sun of righteousness; and so if we have any life, it comes from Him who is "the Fountain of life." (Psalm 36:9.)

4. How shall we *know* that we have eternal life, you may ask? How do we know that we have natural life? By an inward consciousness that we are alive; by the pulse which beats, the lungs which breathe, the eye which sees, the ear which hears, the tongue which speaks, the hands which feel; by the warm play of blood through our veins, by the thoughts which pass to and fro through our mind. Similarly we know the possession of spiritual life by an inward consciousness of it and by its inward actings. And as where there is spiritual there is eternal life, as we feel the bubblings, springings, risings, and varied movements of this spiritual life in our bosom, we have a testimony that we have also eternal life; that this eternal life is in the Son of God, and from the Son of God has been breathed into and communicated unto our souls.

II.—I now pass on to show the *knowledge* which the believing soul has that *the Son of God is come*.

1. You will observe the positive certainty wherewith John speaks; and you may perhaps ask yourself the question, Whence arose this positive certainty in John's breast? John himself shall tell us. "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 shew 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. And these things write we unto you." (1 John 1:1-4.) He was not speaking at a peradventure; there were no perhapses, or ifs, or buts in his knowledge, as there are none in his declaration of it.

He had seen with his eyes the Person of Jesus; he had heard with his ears the voice of Jesus; he had handled with his hands Jesus as the Word of life; and therefore knew by the witness of his eye, the witness of his ear, the witness of his hands, and the witness of his heart what he speaks of to us, and what he has by divine inspiration recorded in the word of truth, that we may have fellowship with him and all the saints of God.

You may say, "We cannot have that same certainty which he had. John saw our blessed Lord in the flesh; John could look upon Him with his natural eyes, John could hear His voice with his natural ears: and as John lay in His bosom he could almost feel the warm pulsations of the Lord's natural heart. But we cannot do this. We do not stand in the same position with John and the other disciples. How then can we have the same evidence and the same certainty?" All this is true; but did no others see the Lord with their bodily eye? Did no others hear the Lord with their bodily ear? Were there no other witnesses to his crucifixion? Were there no ears which heard, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani" but those of John? Did no other eyes but his see the spear pierce the Redeemer's side when forthwith there came there out blood and water? Yes, but what did they see? A malefactor. And what did they hear? The cry of a dying man. And what did the Roman soldier behold before he raised his spear? One who was "dead already." And did not thousands see and hear Him in the days of His flesh who perished in their sins?

It was not then sufficient to see the Lord Jesus with the bodily eye and hear Him with the natural ear, unless there was the believing eye and the believing ear, springing out of a believing heart. Because then the Lord has left earth and is gone up to be where He was before and is now seated at the right hand of the Father, is there no eye to see Him now, no ear to hear Him now, no hands to handle Him now? Just as much as there were eyes to see, ears to hear, and hands to handle Him when upon earth; for those only then "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father," "which were born. not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John

1:13, 14); and regeneration gives the same eyes now. Thus if we have not the same full amount of certainty we have a similar kind.

It was necessary that the apostles should have the fullest amount of certainty, and especially those of them who were inspired to write the Scriptures, to be the food of faith to the Church through all ages. They believed what they saw with their eyes and heard with their ears with the fullest certainty; and having given a testimony of this certain knowledge to us in the word of truth, we believe their testimony. Having thus a measure of the same divine teaching, divine witness, and divine revelation, we are made able to say, not perhaps to the amount of their full confidence, but still with a measure of it, according to the strength of our faith, "We *know* that the Son of God is come."

2. Now let me unfold to you a little more fully and clearly *how* we are brought to know that the Son of God is come; and do you weigh in the balances of the sanctuary what I shall bring forward upon the point, and see whether, when you have weighed in them your own experience, you can say with your hand upon your heart and your eye to God that you know that the Son of God is come. In working out this point, I shall come down as low as I possibly can, that I may not make the heart of the righteous sad whom the Lord has not made sad. But I shall draw the line as straight as I can.

i. We know it, first, then, by the *testimony of the Scripture*, by the light which the Holy Ghost casts upon the Scripture, and the faith which He raises up in our bosom to believe the Scripture. This is very important; for it excludes everything visionary and fanatical, as well as all the traditions of men from every side and quarter. When, then, we read the Scripture with the light of God upon it, and that light shines from the Scripture into our heart, raising up a living faith to believe what we read, then from the testimony of the word in our conscience, and the light, life, and power of the Spirit resting upon it, we know that the Son of God is come.

Have you not sometimes as you read the Scripture felt the power of it drop into your soul? The truth of it, the certainty of it, the majesty of it, the authority of it, and the very voice of God clearly and distinctly speaking in it, so came into your heart as the word of the Lord, testifying of Christ, that you could say, "I know that the Son of God is come." "As I read the miracles which Jesus wrought when He went about doing good; as I read the words which dropped from His lips in His parables, and especially in His gracious discourse with His disciples, my eyes are as if opened to see that this was no less than the Son of God. In His miracles I behold his Deity: in His eating, drinking, sleeping, groaning, agonizing, sweating blood, and dying on the cross I see His humanity; and I view Deity and humanity shining forth in His glorious Person. My enlightened understanding and my believing heart receive Him as the Son of God; and feeling myself a poor, lost, guilty sinner, I receive Him as able to save my soul to the uttermost; I cast the weight of my sins upon him; I look to Him to save me, and to Him alone: and I do this from the light that I have in my mind and the faith that I feel in my breast; and I thus embrace Him as a Redeemer and Saviour. altogether suitable to my case." Now if you can say all that. you can add with some measure of confidence. "I *know* that the Son of God is come."

ii. We will rise a little higher. When the Lord Jesus is pleased in some solemn hour to *reveal Himself* to our soul, when He graciously condescends to take the veil from off our heart that we may behold His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, when He kindly favours us with some manifestation and discovery of Himself as the Son of God, the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His Person, then we know, in fuller, larger measure that the Son of God is come.

How do you know that the sun rose this morning? By the light which rose with it. How do you know that it is not darkness now? By the light which even now streams in through the windows, and fills this place in which we are assembled. So we may say,

spiritually, "How do you know that the Son of God is come?" By the Sun of righteousness arising upon you with healing in His wings and the shining light which He diffuses in your heart. So the Lord speaks to Zion: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee." That is the way in which the darkness is dispersed: for He adds. "Behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the LORD shall arise upon thee and His glory shall be seen upon thee." (Isai. 60:1, 2.) Did not our blessed Lord say: "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness?" (John 12:46.) And has He not promised, "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life?" (John 8:12.) So also testifies John in this epistle: "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5.) Now as God is light, when He is pleased to shine into the soul, we walk in the light as He is in the light, and then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin. This is the best, this the surest, this the safest way to know that the Son of God is come.

iii. Again, we know that the Son of God is come by *the communion* with which He favours the soul *from off the mercy seat*. You know what it is to come to the mercy seat, there to behold by the eye of faith Jesus sitting as the great High Priest over the house of God; there to pour out your heart before Him to tell Him all your complaints, and to seek communion with Him. Now when He condescends to commune with you from off the mercy seat and speak a word to your heart, then you know that the Son of God is come—come from the bosom of the Father to save your soul; come out of heaven down to earth to bear our sins in His own body on the tree; come to do the work which the Father gave Him to do and to do it fully and wholly, so as to be able to say with expiring lips. "It is finished." before He gave up the ghost, rose from the dead and went up on high. How faith sees Him now on His throne of grace as the Mediator, the only Mediator, between God and us; how hope, a good hope through

grace, anchors in Him; and how love embraces Him as the Son of God. We thus know by faith and feeling, by an inward knowledge of Him, and by an experience of the power of his resurrection, that the Son of God is come, and come, we trust, into our hearts to draw up its sincere and warm affections unto Himself.

iv. We know also that the Son of God is come by His *presence*; by His **power** put forth on our behalf; by the **answers** which He gives to prayer; by the way in which He appears in dark and gloomy hours, making crooked things straight and rough things plain, discovering Himself to us as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, showing unto us that in Him there is rest and peace, solid, abiding happiness, and in no other. He thus draws and fixes our eyes upon Himself, where He sits at the right hand of the Father in the fulness of His grace, glory, and majesty. Thus we know that the Son of God is come. Every prayer, every petition, every sigh and cry, every longing look that you cast up to Him, and every word of His grace, every sweet promise, every glimpse or glance of the King in His beauty, which you receive out of His fulness, are all so many testimonies that the Son of God is come, and that you know that He is come.

Let me put this one point to your soul, that you may gather up from it some encouragement, if you are doubting and fearing through the power of unbelief. Take away the Son of God out of the word, off the throne of grace, and out of your heart, where are you? Where is your religion? Where is your hope? What is there before you but black despair? Thus, you know that the Son of God is come not only by your deep necessity, by your wants and woes, by your guilty conscience, by every cry, sigh, and desire of your bosom; but you know that the Son of God is come by the testimony which you have in your own breast of His presence and of His power, which alone support you in seasons of darkness and distress.

3. Another blessed word is added: "*And hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true.*"

There is a point involved in these words, in which many both private Christians and ministers appear, in my judgment, confused or defective. They do not see—at least I have rarely seen the subject clearly handled by any man of God, they do not seem to see the difference between a gracious, enlightened understanding Of the truth of God which springs out of the teaching of the Spirit, and what is commonly called head knowledge. There is such a thing—and a most dangerous, delusive thing it is, as head knowledge, and faithful ministers do well to warn people against it; for it is in our day widely prevalent in the Calvinistic Churches. But then there is such a thing as an understanding heart in the things of God: "the eyes of your understanding being enlightened" (Eph. 1:18) a spiritual, saving knowledge of the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent: or what is so beautifully expressed here, "hath *given us an understanding. (God's own special gift,)* that we may know him that is true."

Do you not find and feel sometimes that God has given you an understanding heart?—that you are not, as you once were, in ignorance of God and His dear Son? Is not your mind enlightened to understand the meaning of the Scriptures as they are opened up from time to time to your heart by the power of God? Do you see no beauty or blessedness in the word of God? Is it not commended to your conscience as divine truth? Has it not a liberating, sanctifying power and influence upon your soul? Do you not see at times wonders in the word of God, depths of wisdom, heights of grace, blessings and favours revealed and made known in it which seem to surpass all conception and all expression? Have you not seen sometimes "in one line of Scripture," to use an expression of Bunyan's, "more than you could well tell how to stand under?" Is all this understanding to be thrown away and trodden under foot as mere head knowledge? Is it not rather an understanding which God has given us, and by which we know Him that is true? Let us not then confound these two distinct things or despise one of God's best gifts, but ever desire to be "filled with all spiritual understanding;" yea, "unto all riches of the full assurance of

understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God and of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col. 1:9; Col. 2:2, 3.)

You may say, "How am I to distinguish between mere head knowledge and this spiritual understanding?" I will tell you. When a special light is cast into your mind; when the word is opened up in its spiritual, experimental meaning; when the Holy Ghost seals it with sweetness and power upon your heart, and you not only understand what you read but receive it in faith, feel its savour, and enjoy its blessedness. Is not this a very different thing from lifeless, barren head knowledge? But view also its fruits; look at what this enlightened understanding has done for us! Until we had it, the veil of unbelief and ignorance was over our mind; we stumbled at noon as at night, groped for the wall like the blind, and could not find our way to the city. We read the Scriptures, it is true, but knew nothing of their spiritual meaning; and though we talked perhaps about God and Jesus Christ, and it may be prattled a little about the truth of God, we were really shut up in the grossest darkness.

Do we not see this now in others, if we cannot distinctly see the change grace has made in ourselves? What ignorance we find in them when they talk about the Scriptures; and how we see through all their head knowledge even when they speak consistently with the truth. There is no power, life, or savour in anything they say. How highly favoured then are we if any of us can say, "We know that the Son of God hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true." Men think that we are fools, narrow-minded bigots, shut up in ignorance, or intoxicated with the fumes of fanaticism and enthusiasm, are walking in a false and delusive light. No; we are not fools; we are sober-minded men; we understand what we profess; we know what we believe; peradventures will not suit us. We do not sit down with folded hands and sleepy eyes, dreaming our time away in airy visions and speculative notions in a fool's paradise. Our soul is at stake; heaven and hell are trembling in the balance.

I must not live and die at an uncertainty whether there be a Christ or not, whether the Son of God is come or not come, whether I have an understanding to know Him that is true, or whether I live and die in darkness and ignorance. Such a religion won't do for me, or for any one in earnest about his soul; I must have realities, to know for myself that the Son of God is come, and to have an understanding in my very bosom to know Him that is true, by His own blessed manifestations, discoveries, and sweet visitations to my heart. And if I know that the Son of God is come and hath given me an understanding to know Him that is true, I shall speak that which I do know and my trumpet will give a certain sound. If I profess to be your guide, I must go boldly on as knowing every step of the way. If I am to pilot your ship down the channel, I must know the chart, that you and I may arrive at the harbour of safety.

Though men may speak against certainties in religion, the most important concern of all, yet will not men have certainties in the things of this life? Who will buy an estate with an uncertain title? Who will even deal at a shop where he is uncertain whether the goods sold him are valuable or worthless, pure or adulterated? When you receive change, do you never look at your money whether it be right? Why you count the very pence, lest you be a halfpenny wrong. The children of this world are too wise in their generation to do with uncertainties. "Let the thing be as clear and as certain as it can be," says the man of business, the trader, the farmer, the dealer, the buyer, the seller, "or I will have nothing to do with it; I will not be deceived if I can help it to the fraction of a penny."

If then the men and women of this world can so speak, so act as regards those poor, perishing things which are passing away like shadows, shall you and I, who have immortal souls and feel that we have them and that they are hanging in the balance,—shall we rest upon uncertainties, not to know whether the Son of God is come or not; not to know whether or not He "hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true?" Why the certainty of these things is our very life. Not that all the children

of God have the certainty in their own bosom. As I before said, a man may certainly be the possessor of a property, yet be dubious as to its title, and yet have a good title too. You with the fear of God in your breast are as certain of being in heaven as that Christ is there now; but you may not have the certainty in your own breast. You may have, as most of the people of God have, thousands of doubts and fears which may seem to rack you to the very centre, and yet there is a certainty in the things themselves, though your doubting soul may be at an uncertainty about them. Still, it is not good to be ever fluctuating upon a sea of uncertainty; it is good to find the ground solid under our feet, and to have a rock, the Rock of ages, on which to firmly stand. This brings me to my last point.

III.—"And we are *in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ*. This is the true God, and eternal life."

Here the man of God points to the union and communion which the saints of God have with His dear Son. "We are *in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ*."

How are the saints of God "*in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ*?"

1. First, they are in Him by *covenant ties*, by solemn engagements, by eternal choice, as the Holy Ghost speaks by Paul. "According as he hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world." Men may quarrel with election, but it is the grand foundation of the union which the Church has with her covenant Head; for she was chosen in Him; not chosen in herself, or chosen out of Him; and being chosen in Him, she can never, so to speak, be lost out of Him. This will be very plain by a moment's consideration. If every member of the mystical body of Christ was chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, it is impossible that any member of that mystical body should be lost. The whole body would suffer, and the Head would suffer with it, if the smallest member of the mystical body of Christ could perish. It would not be a complete body if it lost the smallest member. If,

therefore, you are in Christ by vital union, you were in Him by covenant ties before the foundation of the world. This is the grand security of the saints; this is that which kept the Church from being swamped and swallowed in the Adam fall, and held her up in the midst of that transgression which was attended with such fearful consequences.

2. There is another way in which we "are in him that is true;" and that is *by vital union*.

This vital union is of two kinds: a union of Him with us by His participation of our flesh, and a union of us with Him by our participation of His Spirit. There is thus, so to speak. a double union.

In order to make the Church wholly His, by becoming one with Himself, the Lord took her nature into union with His own divine Person. The apostle, therefore, says: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." (Heb. 2:14.) We therefore read: "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." (Eph. 5:29, 30.) Thus there is a union which the Church has with Christ by virtue of His partaking of her flesh and blood. As the wife has a union with her husband from being one flesh with him, so the Church has a union with Christ as being one flesh with Him. How beautifully does Paul unfold this mystery: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." (Eph. 5:31, 32.)

This union of Christ and the Church as one flesh, by virtue of His incarnation, is the ground and basis of that other union with Him, which I have already mentioned—a union with him by a participation of His Spirit; as we read, "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." (1 Cor. 6:17.) Thus our union with Christ is not only a union by covenant tie, which was the source, not only

a union by His partaking of our flesh as the great mystery of godliness, but a union with Him in living experience, by oneness of Spirit. Now if you know anything of the grace, the presence, the power, and love of Christ; if you have been baptized with His Spirit and have ever felt anything experimentally of communion with Him, you are one spirit with Him. There is a oneness of spirit between you and the Son of God. You see with Him; you feel with Him; you sympathize with Him; you walk with Him; you talk with Him. And He feels with you; sympathizes with you; walks with you; talks with you; communicates of His grace to your soul, infuses His Spirit into your breast, and makes you a partaker of the divine nature, that you may escape the corruptions which are in the world through lust. Now it is only by this oneness of spirit with Christ, and by being able to realize it, that we can ever say without fear, "we are in him that is true." When you feel a oneness of spirit with Christ, then there is a testimony in your own bosom of your union with Him, which can never be described, and yet can be and is blessedly felt. To melt into His Spirit and His Spirit to melt into yours; to have the mind of Christ; to see with the eyes of Christ, to feel with the heart of Christ; to love what Christ loves, to hate what Christ hates; to be jealous of His honour, tender of His glory, mourn over Him and with Him, hate your sins because He suffered for them, abhor yourselves in dust and ashes on account of your unlikeness to Him: to be sighing continually that He would draw you nearer to His bosom, supply you out of His fulness, manifest His love to your soul and baptize you into His Spirit—this is oneness of spirit with Christ. and by this oneness of spirit you can clearly make out your union with Christ.

Let me illustrate this by something of a similar character. You talk with a child of God, say for the first time; but from some cause or other, you feel no union or communion with him. Why? Because there is no present oneness of spirit between you and him. But another day you meet him: he says something that drops into your spirit; you say something which drops into his spirit: heart flows to heart, spirit melts into spirit; you are one with each other, know the same truths, believe the same things, feel the

same power, can unfold to each other your mutual sorrows and your mutual joys, and love flows into each other's breast. This is oneness of spirit. So it is with us and the dear Redeemer. There is a oneness of spirit with Christ the Head, as there is oneness of spirit with the members of His mystical body; and thus as we are able to trace out this oneness of spirit with Him, we arrive at the sweet testimony that "we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ."

Then it is, so far as we are enabled to enter into the vital reality of these divine things, that we can say with holy John, "*This is the true God,*" lifting up heart and mouth for ourselves, and pointing out to others God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, as manifested and revealed in the Person of Christ. "This is the true God, and eternal life;" for I have a testimony in my own bosom that "this is the true God," from the experience I have of His truth and blessedness; and as I look up and see by faith eternal life in Him, I can add also that this, and this only, "is eternal life."

Some of you may not be able to speak with this blessed certainty of your interest in this only true God and this eternal life; and yet you may be certain that these things are true. Faith, I believe, has in it always a measure of assurance. For what is assurance? It is merely the larger growth and fuller development of faith. The nature of assurance is much misunderstood. It is often considered something distinct from faith. This is not the case. It is merely faith in a fuller, larger development. The word "assurance" in the original has a very simple yet beautiful meaning. It means literally "a full bearing;" and the word is applied sometimes to a large crop of corn or fruit, and sometimes to the tide coming in with a fuller wave. Now it is the same corn which grows in the fields, whether the crop be much or little; it is the same tide that comes up the river whether in a scanty or full flow.

So it is with assurance and faith: it is the same faith, only increased, enlarged, bearing more abundant fruit, or flowing in a more abundant tide.

Assurance in Scripture is not confined to faith; there is "the full assurance of understanding" (Col. 2:2) that is, a fuller measure and amount, a greater enlargement of understanding to know the truth of God. The understanding is the same; but there is a larger measure of it. So there is the full assurance of hope, that is, a hope strengthened and enlarged, bearing more fruit and flowing in a fuller tide. But it is the same hope—the same in kind, though larger in degree; a stronger anchor and yet an anchor still. (Heb. 6:11.) Similarly there is the full assurance of faith (Heb. 10:22) that is, a larger, fuller measure of faith—a richer crop, a more abundant tide. Thus you have a measure of the assurance of faith if you have faith at all. In fact, if you have no assurance of the truth of these things, why do you follow after them? Why do you hang upon them, why do you hope in them? and why do you seek the power and experience of them in your soul?

Have you not arrived at this point yet? "we have not followed cunningly devised fables; these things that I am following after are realities; these objects set before me are certainties." I grant that you may be much exercised about your interest in them. Still, unless you know that they are certainties, why do you believe them? Why are you anxious to know your interest in them? Why do you sink in doubt and fear for want of clearer evidences of an interest in them? And why do you spring up in peace and joy the moment that a little light from them beams upon your soul and a little sweetness out of them drops into your heart? Because you know that these things are realities. So far then you have an assurance that they are certainties, and in due time, as God is pleased, you will have the assurance in your own breast, not only that they are certainties, but that you have them in your own sure and certain possession.

The Heavenly Sheepfold; its Door, its Entrance, and its Privileges

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Tuesday Evening, February 21, 1854

"I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture." John 10:9

Persons complain sometimes of the obscurity of the Bible. It is true that there are in the Scriptures deep mysteries; and, indeed, it must be so from the very nature of revelation itself. God is a mystery in his being and essence; what, therefore, God reveals must, to a certain extent, partake of his own mysterious nature. Thus, one of the fathers speaking of the Scriptures says, "It contains depths in which an elephant may swim." But if there be in it these depths, there are also in it, as the same father says, "shallows in which a lamb may wade." Look, for instance, at the passage before us. Is there any darkness or obscurity in it? Are not the words simplicity itself, pregnant with force and beauty? Who is the speaker? The Lord Jesus. How emphatically and yet how plainly does he lay down this sacred truth. "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." The Lord here is speaking of the sheepfold, and declares himself to be the door in it. With God's blessing, then, I shall dwell this evening chiefly on four points, all of which have a strict bearing on and close connection with the text.

I.—*First, the fold.*

II.—*Secondly, the door.*

III.—*Thirdly, the entrance.*

IV.—*Fourthly, the privileges and blessings which are promised to those who enter in by the door.*

I.—First, then, we have to consider the "*fold*." By the "fold" I understand chiefly three things. First, the universal, though at present invisible, Church of Christ; what the Apostle in the epistle to the Hebrews (12: 23) calls, "The general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven;" and that this is one, if not the leading meaning of the word, is evident to my mind from what the Lord says in the sixteenth verse, "There shall be one fold and one shepherd." This "one fold" must be the universal church of Christ, as this "one shepherd" is the Lord Jesus. But the Lord evidently in this chapter uses the word "fold" in another sense, as denoting the visible church of Christ on earth; for he says, in the verse which I just quoted, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold," evidently speaking of a fold upon earth; and, if on earth, it must mean those who are gathered into the precincts of a gospel church. In the same sense the Lord uses the word in the first verse of this chapter: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." Now no man can climb up into the sheepfold above, the invisible church of Christ.

But there is a third meaning of the word which seems mainly intended by the Lord here, and that is, spiritual union and communion with himself.

Now, looking at the figure which the Lord here employs, we must not view it as at all resembling the sheepfolds which we see in this long-civilized and densely-inhabited country, where there are no wild beasts to injure or destroy the tenants of the enclosure. The fold to which the Lord here alludes was such a fold as is used in countries where there are jackals, wolves, and wild dogs, as is now the case in Australia and other wild and uncultivated countries. This is evident from the very expression of the Lord, "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way." Unless there was a wall to get over, how could there be a climbing? We need not climb over a hurdle, that is easily put aside or stridden over.

But what is the leading idea of a fold, viewed as it would be necessarily built or pitched in the east? A place selected for sheep only, a place of separation whereby they are marked off from the world.

1. Now, in pitching the fold, the first thing would be, *to select a situation suitable for it*. Carry this idea, bearing upon the sheepfold, upward. God selected this world as a place wherein to pitch the fold. Sometimes infidel ideas have come into my mind of this nature: "What is this little planet compared with the starry skies we behold? and how can we think that this comparatively insignificant spot could have been so favoured that the Lord Jesus Christ should come down, suffer, and die in it?" But I have found sometimes my mind relieved from these infidel suggestions by this consideration: "God chose earth to be as it were the theatre, the spot whereon to manifest his love." And, therefore, the insignificance of the theatre is nothing; as the place which God chose wherein to display the exceeding riches of his grace, it loses its insignificance, and becomes really of greater importance than all the innumerable orbs of the starry sky. The spot, then, which God fixed upon as a place where he would pitch his fold was this earth on which we dwell.

2. Now, when a spot has been selected as a fit and proper situation on which to pitch the fold, the next step would be to draw a line round it, so as to mark off accurately its dimensions. The measuring line could pass the outward borders and determine exactly its length and breadth. So, in a spiritual sense, the everlasting covenant of grace is that measuring line whereby God traced out in his eternal mind the dimensions of the fold, and fixed the foundations so that they should never be moved. Thus we have a description in the Revelation, 21:16, of the new Jerusalem, of which we read that "the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth. The length, and the breadth, and the height of it are equal."

3. The next step, especially the Oriental fold, where there are wild animals from which it must be well protected, is to dig the

foundations on which the walls are to stand. And what are the foundations of the sheepfold, but the eternal decrees of God on which he has fixed the walls and bulwarks on which this fold rests. These foundations are said in the book of Revelation to be garnished with all manner of precious stones, implying the firmness and preciousness of this firm foundation.

4. When the foundations had been laid, there would next be a raising up of the walls to stand upon them. These walls are salvation, as God himself tells us, "we have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." God's plan of salvation, then, through the Lord Jesus Christ, salvation by the incarnation, sufferings, death, and resurrection of his dear Son, that salvation which, taking its original rise in the counsels of God, was brought to light in due time, and effected by the sacrifice offered upon Calvary. By these walls and bulwarks is the fold made a place of shelter for the sheep, and under their shadow do they lie protected from every enemy and every storm.

II.—Having thus considered the fold, the next point to consider is the "*door*." Who and what this is we cannot for a moment doubt, the Lord Jesus having declared, in the most clear and emphatic language, "I AM THE DOOR." Nothing can exceed the simplicity, force, and beauty of this declaration. They are words which a child may spell; a language, so far as regards its meaning in the letter, which the meanest capacity may comprehend. But the sublimity of this divine mystery, the lengths, depths, and heights of eternal love couched in the words, are such as will take an eternity of bliss to explore.

The words we may consider both negatively and positively.

1. First, negatively, when the Lord Jesus Christ says "I am the door," he excludes every other entrance, and lays it down in a most forcible manner: other admission into the fold than by himself there is none. And how strong are his denunciations against all who enter not in by him as the door. "All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep would not

hear them." Let us ever beware of attempting to enter into this fold by any other door, lest, as "thieves and robbers," we be suspended on the gallows of God's eternal indignation; as the cherubim guarded with the flaming sword the gates of Paradise, forbidding all access thereto, so does the declaration of the Lord Jesus Christ, guard as authoritatively the entrance into the fold except through him.

2. Secondly in a positive sense, in what way is Christ the door? As the Mediator. "There is one God and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." There could be no entrance into the fold of the church above or below unless there were a Mediator through whom the sheep might enter; because, without a door, not only would there be no entrance for them, but they are, in their natural state, utterly disqualified and unfit to enter. Sin has so marred and defiled them; they have fallen so deeply and so foully into the ditch of sin, original and actual, that only as they are redeemed by the blood of the Mediator, and washed in the fountain once opened for sin and uncleanness, are they qualified to enter into the fold of earth below or of heaven above. The glorious Person of the God-Man is "the door," the entrance into the sheepfold. By this great mystery of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh," is access given us unto God. Therefore the Lord Jesus Christ said of himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me." (John 14:6.) In the Revelation John viewed him clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; and clad as it were in this garment, does he stand as the door into the fold. In Egypt, when the destroying angel passed over, he saw the blood of the paschal lamb sprinkled on the lintel and side post of the doors of the houses. So one might almost say the door into the fold is sprinkled with the blood that the Lord Jesus spilt upon the cross—that "blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel."

Nor must we lose sight of his glorious righteousness, for in that also he stands as the door, and those who enter in by that door do so through virtue of that righteousness imputed unto and put upon them. It is not our righteousness which can gain us an

entrance into that heavenly fold. This divine righteousness consists in the strict fulfilment of all his covenant engagements. All, therefore, that he did, all that he said, all that he suffered, the whole of his doing, and the whole of dying, every thought, word, and deed which passed through his holy soul or was performed by his holy hands during the whole period of his sojourn upon earth, from the moment of his conception in the womb of the Virgin, until he expired on the cross, were all a part of that righteousness which he was to work out, whereby, and whereby alone, "we can be justified from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses."

Let us, therefore, ever bear in mind that however beautiful the fold may appear, however strong the foundations, walls, and bulwarks, and however ardently or earnestly we may long to get in, there is no entrance but by the door, and that that door is the Lord Jesus; Immanuel, God with us. This is a truth that all the Lord's people are sooner or later brought to receive and realise, which leads

III.—To our third point, which was to shew, *the entering into the fold*.

These two things are distinct; for *the door* is one thing, and the entering in *through the door* is another. Let me explain this a little more fully. You may see in a certain way and to a certain extent the door; you may be convinced in your own conscience that there is no other entrance; you may be most fully persuaded that you only can be saved by Christ, and yet never be saved yourself. It may seem a hard saying, but it is most true, that you may be certain none can be saved except by faith in Christ; and yet you yourself may live and die without faith in Christ. So that merely to see and acknowledge there is a door will not gain you an entrance into the sheepfold. There must be an entrance into it before you can enjoy the privileges and blessings which are attached to those who enter in. Therefore the Lord says, "I am the door: by me if *any man enter in*." What, then, is it to enter in? Though there is but one entrance, yet we may be said to

enter in in various ways, though all these are closely and intimately connected with each other. Faith is the grand, we may say the only means, whereby we enter in; but we enter in in various ways, according to the strength, or weakness of that faith. Let me explain this a little more plainly and clearly. There is an entering in *by desire*. The soul being convinced of sin, is brought in due time to see that there is a blessed sheepfold, and that in it there is warmth, food, and shelter. But at present it stands without, exposed to the pitiless storm, yet all the while knowing that if found outside the door it must perish under the fury of that tempest. But the eyes being opened, it gets a transient gleam of the shelter, food, and warmth of the fold, and envies the sheep and the lambs as they lie down under the shelter of the walls, and feed upon the provision laid before them. As, then, he stands and looks into the fold, the desire of the heart goes forth that he may enter in and be one of them. Now this is entering in by desire. He cannot be said to have entered in actually, but his heart has entered in, and this is a pledge that he will in due time personally and actually enter in. But there is another degree of entrance beyond this, and that is, an entering in *by hope and expectation*. He may have been drawn a little nearer to the door than before; may have felt a degree of warmth coming out of the fold; may have got a little shelter from the leese; may have caught a glimpse of the loving countenance of the good Shepherd, and there may have been raised up in his bosom a hope that he may one day, if not now, enter in and be made manifest as one of the sheep. As in this and various ways he gets from time to time encouragement to hope in God's mercy, his doubts and fears become weakened; and as his soul is more sensibly and repeatedly favoured, so he enters in more and more in hope and expectation.

But still he has not yet entered in. The apostle, speaking of hope compares it to "an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil." Thus there is an entrance by hope. And yet this falls short of real and actual entrance, which is by faith and faith alone. But how is this consistent with what I have before said of an entering in by

desire and hope? for was there not faith before? If there were no faith there would be no desire and no hope. It was faith, then, we admit, but still, weak faith; if I may use the expression, it was a doubting faith; that is not faith itself doubting, but the faith of a doubter. It was therefore faith not sufficiently strong to give an entrance. Faith, like the wind, admits of degrees; the wind may blow into the harbour, but not sufficiently strong to carry in the ship. This was the spot in which the disciples so often were when the Lord told them that they had so little faith. And whilst there is only a faith of desire or a faith of hope, faith seems lacking in its full development. It is more like the bud or blossom than flower or fruit. But when the Shepherd himself draws specially near and opens a way through his Person, blood, and righteousness into the sheepfold, and faith embraces him as such, and enters in through him as the door, this is the crowning act of faith whereby the soul enters into the fold; for there must be an entering in *through* the door—not merely seeing that there is one, or seeing it opened. When, then, there is a sweet discovering of the Person, love, blood, and obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ, and special faith is raised up whereby he is laid hold of and entered into, then the believer enters by faith into the fold. But until this takes place in the heart, by Christ and the soul being brought together, doubt, unbelief, and guilty fear will work, and all these prevent entrance.

But the Lord has framed, so to speak, the words of the text in a most encouraging manner. It is as though he would seek by them to beat down the suggestions which Satan continually raises to cast seeking souls into despair. "If any man," he says. How the Lord seems here to open his arms wide to encourage those who have everything to discourage them. See if you cannot gather from them something applicable to your case. You feel to have been a great sinner; your heart seems to you worse than anyone's else can possibly be; it appears as if no words could describe and no sin could exceed the baseness of your fallen nature. Well, be it so; make the worst of yourself; dip your brush into the blackest colours, and paint yourself as dark as you feel yourself to be in the most desponding moments. Then look at the

words: "If *any* man enter in." Does it not appear as if the Lord uses these words with that wide sweep in order to take in those who see in themselves every disqualification, and make against themselves the strongest objections of fitness or worthiness? It is as if he would meet all their guilty fears, and address himself to all their unbelief. It is as though he would look down with the tenderest compassion on those lying at his sacred feet, longing to get into the fold, but unable to do so through the power of unbelief and the burden of a distressed and guilty conscience. O write not bitter things against yourself because you are and feel yourself to be one of the greatest and basest of all sinners! The words still run, "If any man," whatever he has been, whatever he may be, or feel himself to be, "enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

IV.—But we come now to our fourth and last point—the *privileges and blessings* which the Lord Jesus Christ has promised to those who enter through him into the sheepfold. These, as mentioned by the Lord, are three. First, "*he shall be saved;*" secondly, "*he shall go in and out;*" and, thirdly, "*he shall find pasture.*" How sweet, how expressive are these words! how they seem to fill and are adapted to every spiritual desire of the soul.

i. First and foremost comes that emphatical declaration, "*he shall be saved.*" To be saved!—this includes everything—what more do we want? To be saved!—saved from what? saved into what? Saved from hell; from an eternity of endless misery and horror; from the worm which dieth not, and the fire which is not quenched; from the sulphurous flames; from the companionship of devils and damned spirits; saved from ever-rolling ages of ceaseless misery and horror. Have you not thought sometimes about eternity? What an eternity of misery must be, when you can scarcely bear the pain of toothache half an hour. O! to be in torment for ever!—how it racks the soul to think of it; and how, when the mind is exercised upon these solemn realities, and faith and hope are not in exercise, it strikes a gloomy damp upon the heart. What tongue, then, can express the mercy and blessedness of being saved from this; saved from hell, from the

billows of the sulphurous lake, from infinite despair. I have thought of those poor creatures who lately suffered shipwreck in the *Tayleur*. What a picture does it represent to the mind of death and eternity. How thoughtless most of those poor creatures were of their approaching end until the ship struck on the rock. But did the inexorable sea listen to their cries when it swallowed them up in its briny waves? There was no respite nor rescue then. The few that escaped, escaped as it were by miracle—hundreds perishing around them. It seemed to represent to my mind how, when a soul strikes upon the rock of perdition, it is at once swallowed up in an awful eternity; and that those who are saved, are saved by a miracle of grace. And not only are they saved from all this infinite and unending misery, but they are saved into unspeakable happiness and glory. How completely do the words take salvation out of the hands of the creature and lodge it in the hands of the Redeemer. If, then, "any man," with all his sins and sorrows, doubts and fears, miseries and distresses, temptations and trials, self-condemnation and self-abhorrence—"if any man" enter in by *Me* he shall be saved, in spite of and out of all these things, however painful or distressing. What a firm foundation these words lay for a poor sinner; what a firm rock for his weary foot to stand upon. How the Lord speaks here as man never spake, and lays down a broad platform for the foot of faith to stand upon.

And as we have looked downward and seen what he is saved *from*, may we not look upward and see what he is saved *unto*? Yes. He is saved into heaven, into eternal communion with the Three-One God, into the eternal enjoyment of his blessed presence, into the perfect enjoyment of that perfect and everlasting love in those regions of endless bliss where tears are wiped from off all faces. What a contrast! heaven and hell! eternal misery and eternal bliss! ages of boundless joy and ages of infinite despair!

But salvation includes not only what we may call salvation future, but salvation present. Thus, there is a being saved from the present guilt, filth, love, power, and practice of sin; there is a

being saved from the curse and bondage of the Law, from the spirit and love of the world, from inward condemnation through the entanglement of Satan; there is a being saved in the present life from worldly anxieties and cares, from being "cumbered with much serving," from following after idols; there is a being saved from carelessness; coldness, and carnality; in a word, from every evil way and every delusive path.

The fold of Christ is a sequestered spot from the world, and therefore, those who enter into it through Christ the door, are practically and experimentally brought out of the world and delivered from it. Salvation is *past, present, and to come*. *Past* by the work of Christ upon the cross, "who *hath* saved us and called us;" *present* in the personal enjoyment and realization of it, "to us who *are* saved it is the power of God;" and *future* in the eternal enjoyment of it, when it will be fully completed. The children of God little know the blessings which their heavenly Father has so freely and graciously bestowed upon them; they do not value them half enough; nor do they fully and adequately realize the great, the wonderful things God has put them in possession of by giving them a name and place amongst his sons and daughters, and having written their names in the Book of Life. But the blessings of salvation are still the same, and equally theirs; though they, for the most part, so faintly realize them. And if you have ever seen what you are as a poor, lost sinner, you will feel if you are saved: at the very last it will prove an unspeakable mercy. Yes; if your lot were to pass through life a miserable creature in body and soul, to expire on a pallet in a forlorn garret, to die in the wards of a hospital, or even breathe your last in a ditch, beaten upon by snow and chilled to the bones by frost, without a crust to eat, or a friend to render you the last offices, even thus and then, to be saved as it were at the last gasp, will prove a mercy which will require an eternity of praise. Is it not worth living for, to obtain salvation at last?—worth labouring for? And yet all this unspeakable mercy comes out of entering in through Christ. "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, *he shall be saved*." Let no man deceive himself; there is no other entrance into the fold, and no other entrance into

heaven.

ii. But there is another blessing here promised by the Lord to those who enter in by the door: "*He shall go in and out.*" By these words I think we may understand chiefly two things.

1. The primary meaning of the words, as it seems to me, conveys the idea of the sweet liberty of the soul as admitted by Christ himself into the fold. Look at the idea as it stands in its native simplicity and beauty. Here is a fold, the entrance into which is by a door. Now, through this door, the sheep go in and the sheep go out; that is, they have liberty to do so. It is with the fold in this sense as with the door in the house; the children and members of the family come in and go out, the free liberty of thus running in and out unchecked being their privilege because the house is their home. The words, therefore, do not mean that a person sometimes goes into the church, and then goes out into the world; goes into Christ, and then goes out of Christ; goes into truth, and goes out into error; goes into knowledge, and goes out into ignorance; goes into faith, and goes out into unbelief or infidelity. But it is the liberty that a child has to go in and out of its home when it pleases. The stranger knocks; but the child lifts up the latch and walks in, and this it may do with perfect liberty twenty times a day. The words, then, seem to imply that comfortable access, that holy and divine liberty, that being at home in Christ, that free admission to all the privileges of the fold whereby the child of God is no longer a foreigner and an alien, but is a fellow citizen of the saints and of the household of God. The fold of Christ is not like a show-house in which there is only admission on one day in the week, and that for pay; but having once entered through Christ into the fold the child of God has, as it were, a holy liberty to come in and go out, unchecked and unrestrained. It is as it were being made free of the fold; Christ having as it were given a free certificate of admission. If the Lord has ever indulged our soul with any manifested sense of his goodness and mercy, we are no longer strangers to him and he a stranger to us but friends; as the Lord said to his disciples, "henceforth I call you not servants but friends." It is in the church

above as in the gospel church, the representation of it, below. If once admitted to a gospel church you have, so to speak, the run of the house, and the privileges which belong to a member of that church, such as partaking of the Lord's supper, attending its meetings and having a manifested interest in its prosperity and welfare. These are certain privileges which belong to you as having entered through the door of baptism into the church. Thus, when the Lord speaks of going in and out of the fold, he means to convoy thereby the sweet liberty that the soul enjoys when it has once entered through him, the door.

2. But the words, I will admit, have a secondary meaning, and one which preachers most usually attach to them. There is in experience a going into the fold when the soul goes into it for food and shelter, lying under the warm wall and feeding at the full crib; and there is a going out back into the storm, wind, and rain, which eventually makes the fold more sweet and acceptable. But this meaning of the words seem to me somewhat strained and not fully to agree with the promise; for the Lord is not describing here the soul's experience of light and darkness, but giving certain blessed promises for its comfort and consolation. I much prefer, therefore, the first meaning of the words which I have already mentioned.

iii. But the Lord also promises another sweet privilege and heavenly blessing to him who enters in by him into the fold. "*He shall find pasture.*" This the Lord has provided abundantly in himself, and this of various kinds, suitable to the appetite and conducive to the health of the flock. For instance. There is a finding *pasture in providence*. A sweet and healthy pasture indeed this is, to watch the Lord's providential dealings with us spread through a long series of years. It is seeing the Lord's providential hand which makes the commonest temporal mercies sweet. Every nibble of grass or lock of hay which we can believe to be specially provided for us by the hand of that good Shepherd, becomes thereby doubly sweet. Is it not the office of the shepherd to bring pasture to the sheep and lambs? And is not this brought to them under the sheltering walls of the fold? and

does not this kind care of the shepherd endear him to the flock? Now when we can see that our daily bread, our various earthly and most undeserved comforts, our raiment, house, and home, family and friends, are all bestowed upon us by a kind providence—when we can receive them as such, immediately from the hands of God, as though he himself brought them unto us, then there is finding pasture in providence. Viewed in this light, the commonest mercies shine before our eyes as bearing stamped upon them the lovingkindness of God. I remember, many years ago, when I was in the church of England, and fellow of a college, going on one occasion to receive my half-yearly salary. As I sat waiting in the room to receive it, I had a most clear and sweet view, such as I never had before, how it was given me by God himself. Though not very large in amount, and though I have often taken much more, yet it was, I think, the sweetest money I ever took in my life, because I could so clearly see the goodness of God in giving it me. Whenever, then, we can see the goodness of God in giving us the bounties of providence, it seems to stamp upon them a double value, and we enjoy them, as it were, with a twofold relish, as coming from his bounteous hand. "These wait all upon thee: that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good." (Psalm 104:27, 28.) If you want to eat your food in misery, take it with a thankless, rebellious heart; if you want to eat in sweetness, take it with a thankful heart, seeing it stamped with the goodness of God. A crust of bread, received thankfully as the gift of God, is sweeter than the richest and daintiest meal in which his hand is not seen: at a table so spread, you may sit down with discontent, and rise up with ingratitude.

But the pasture here spoken of is also more specially and particularly *pasture in grace*. And O what pastures in grace has God provided for his hungry sheep! Look at the promises and declarations, the sacred truths and heavenly consolations scattered up and down the Scriptures of truth. But of all spiritual pasture thus provided for the flock, the chiefest is the flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus. This is his own divine declaration: "For

my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." (John 6:55.) But besides this special food from heaven, there is a wide range of pasture provided. Thus, every communication of grace to the soul out of the fulness of Christ, every promise applied with a divine power to the heart, every truth which drops with heavenly savour, every season of encouragement; in a word, every part of God's word which the soul can eat and feed upon is spiritual pasture. Thus the prophet found it of old: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts." (Jeremiah 15:16.)

But before we can find the pasture, we must have a *spiritual appetite given us*. Without this, the richest pasture presents no food, and we may starve in the midst of plenty, die of famine in the "green pastures," and perish of drought "beside the still waters."

Here, then, are three marks whereby you may know whether you have entered by faith into the sheepfold. First, have you any evidence of being saved in the Lord Jesus Christ with an everlasting salvation? Secondly, have you felt any blessed and holy freedom and liberty of going in and coming out of the heavenly sheepfold? Thirdly, have you found pasture? Sometimes finding pasture in the ordinances of God's house; sometimes in the sacred truths of the gospel, as you read or hear the word of truth; and especially in partaking by faith of the flesh and blood of the Lamb.

But there may be those in the congregation who are in this spot. They see plainly that Christ is the door, and are fully convinced there is no other way of entrance into the fold but by him; and yet they do not seem to have entered personally and experimentally in, so as to enjoy for themselves its privileges and blessings. But have you never entered in by hope and expectation? And how could you enter in by expectation unless something in you, which you could not give yourself, were expecting a blessing from God; unless you possessed a principle

of living faith, whereby, though at present weak and feeble, you yet seem to realize the sweetness of the blessings held forth in the gospel. How different is this state of soul experience from climbing daringly and presumptuously over the wall, or taking the ladder of self-righteousness, and thus helping yourself in by some other way than the door. How much better to be lying in humility at the gate, looking to Jesus and longing to enter in, begging of him to open the door and give you admission, than to make yourself a daring and rash intruder. How different is this humble, dependent, and self-abased state of soul, from self-righteousness on the one hand, and bold presumption on the other. There is everything to encourage the weak and feeble part of the flock who long to enter into the fold. To them Jesus opens his arms wide, and says in their heart and ears, "I am the door:" enter through me, and by no other way. There is access to God by me, for "I am the way, the truth, and the life." If ye enter in by me ye shall be saved from all you justly dread and fear, both as regards this life and the life to come. Ye shall go freely in and freely out, and find pasture; lying down and feeding on my divine Person, flesh, and blood on earth, as the prelude and foretaste of enjoying me for ever in the blissful courts of heaven above. Amen.

HEAVENLY TEACHING

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning, August 6, 1843

"All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." Isaiah 54:13

The full extent of the "spiritual blessings" wherewith God has blessed the church in "heavenly places in Christ" can never be thoroughly known in this time-state. It is only when the ransomed of the Lord shall reach the heavenly Canaan, that they will fully know either the awful gulf of misery from which they have been delivered, or the height of bliss and glory to which they are exalted in Christ. But sufficient is revealed in the word of God to shew that they are indeed blessed with peculiar privileges and mercies; and that in being thus blessed their distinction as "a peculiar people" chiefly consists. Moses, therefore, on one occasion thus pleaded with God: "Wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? Is it not in that thou goest with us? *so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth*". (Ex. 33:16.)

But of these peculiar blessings that God has blessed his church with in Christ, four seem especially prominent above the rest—their *eternal election*—their *particular and personal redemption*—their *regeneration*—and their *heavenly teaching*, which last is the promise contained in the text, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord."

But why should this last occupy a prominent place in the catalogue of covenant blessings? Because without it the others would be in a measure nugatory; for such is the blindness of man's heart by nature, so thick a veil of ignorance is spread over his understanding, and so completely is he "alienated from the life of God," that he never can have any spiritual knowledge of the "only true God, and of Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent" (*in*

which knowledge eternal life consists), until he is made a partaker of this *divine teaching*.

We will endeavour, then, with God's blessing, to trace out a little of the *nature and effects* of this divine teaching in the soul. And as it consists for the most part of two leading branches: *first*, the teaching whereby *we know God*; and *secondly*, the teaching whereby *we know ourselves*, we will look at each of these in their order.

I.—But it will be desirable, first, to consider what is the *nature* of this heavenly teaching. And as the Holy Ghost certainly knows and has described its nature best, we cannot do better than examine one or two of the scriptural figures and explanations given of it.

1. This divine teaching, then, is compared in one place to dew and rain: "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew" (Deut. 32:2). But what is the nature and effect of rain, and more particularly of dew? It falls gently; and yet, though it falls so quietly and stilly, it has a penetrating and softening effect. Thus it is with God's teaching in the soul: like dew, it falls from heaven stilly and gently into the heart, and yet it penetrates the soul with a secret and invincible power, that opens whilst it softens it. It does not tear it up, like hail or lightning, but it sinks deeply and yet quietly into it, and with a peculiar softening power so pervades it as to take a thorough and entire possession of it.

2. Another thing to which it is compared in scripture, is *oil*, or *unction*, as the apostle John says, "Ye have an *unction* from the Holy One;" and again, "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the *same anointing* teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (1 John 2:20; 2:27). This figure does not differ very widely from the one just mentioned, but contains three leading ideas—that it *penetrates*, *softens*, and *spreads*. Thus the unction of

God's teaching in the soul not merely penetrates and softens the heart into which it comes, but also gradually spreads and sinks into it more and more deeply; it supple the conscience and makes it tender, and penetrates into the inmost roots and fibres of a man's heart.

This teaching is the special work of God the Holy Ghost on the soul, and is as distinct from our own wisdom, or from any knowledge that we may obtain by the exercise of the natural understanding, as eternity from time. heaven from hell, and Christ from Belial.

II.—But we pass on to consider what are the *special effects and fruits* of this divine anointing.

The nature of this teaching is less plainly revealed in the scriptures than its *effects*. And therefore though the figures above quoted sufficiently shew that there is in its nature something soft and gentle, falling like rain upon the new mown grass, or like oil penetrating the heart into which it comes, yet, for the most part, we cannot, except by its fruits and effects, be certain that we are partakers of this divine teaching. But when we look at them (*for it always will produce fruits and effects*) we may sometimes, when the Lord is pleased to shine into the soul, come to a blessed conclusion, that we are anointed with this unction from the Holy One.

1. I believe, then, that the *first effect* of this special teaching of God in the soul is, to convince us of the *truth and authority of God's word*. We may have professed to believe the word of God from our infancy; we may have been instructed by our parents or in the Sunday School as to the truth of the scriptures; we may have studied in books the evidence of their authenticity and inspiration; but all the while our heart was not touched with any divine power. The head might have been enlightened, but no enlargement of heart was ever sensibly felt under the power of truth, nor any powerful conviction wrought in the soul by the

application of it, so as positively to convince us that God himself speaks in the scripture.

But when the "unction" of "the Holy One" drops into the soul with power, it speaks with such authority through the scriptures, that they are at once known and felt to be the word of the living God. If previously one had been tempted with infidelity, if the mind had been puzzled by apparent contradictions, so as to be almost on the point of giving up the scriptures as a divine revelation, yet when this special teaching and divine unction come into the heart, the word of God carries with it a power and authority that put every infidel argument, to the rout, and disperse every objection as the sun dissipates the morning mists: and the soul is abundantly satisfied that the scripture is the revelation of the mind and will of the blessed God. And whatever infidel objection may afterwards arise, whatever doubts may assault the mind, whatever contradictions may seem to unsettle the foundation of his hope, he never thoroughly loses the solemn conviction which God himself has given him, that the scripture is the truth of the living God.

2. The next thing, I believe, that this "unction from the Holy One" teaches is, *the being of a God*. Now, of the being of a God, we might have been persuaded by traditional religion, or we might have been convinced of it by natural conscience: but these could never give us a feeling conviction of the being of such a God as the scripture sets forth. The apostle Paul declares, that all men by nature are "without Christ... having no hope, and *without God* in the world" (Eph. 2:12), literally 'atheists.' And not only have they no knowledge of the being of God, but as he again says, quoting from the Psalms, "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18). They have no inward conviction that there is a self-existent Jehovah, whose "eyes are in every place;" that he is an omnipresent, omniscient, almighty, eternal, and just God; that his eye sees into the secret and inmost recesses of the soul, and that he will one day bring them into judgment. But no sooner does "an unction from the Holy One" convince us of the power and authority of the inspired scriptures, than we learn through it

the being and existence of a great and glorious Jehovah, who is around our bed, and about our paths, and spieth out all our ways.

3. But with this inward spiritual conviction of the **being** of God, there is manifested by this divine unction the *character* of Jehovah. Not merely that he exists, but that he is what he declares himself to be in the revelation of his holy character and attributes. His word is brought home with divine authority to the soul, and with a living power to the conscience; and thus it is taught to see him as a holy and a just God who will "by no means clear the guilty;" that he hates sin with a perfect hatred, and will infallibly punish all those who are found under the curse and condemnation of the law, when they stand before his dread tribunal. So that here the holy character of God is opened up with power to the soul by the work of the law in a man's conscience.

Many, I believe, of God's people, who have had a work of the law on their conscience, are at times much exercised and tried in their minds, whether they have really known it, for this reason, because no sentence of the Decalogue. or particular portion of the Old Testament has come with power into their heart. But, wherever the character of Jehovah, as a just and holy God. has been spiritually made known to the soul, there the law has done its work on the conscience. God, as the Lawgiver, is known, though the exact letter of the law may not be felt. The spirit of the law, in the hands of a just and a holy God, is made known to the heart and conscience, producing conviction, condemnation, guilt, and a sense of ruin, where the exact letter of the law is not made use of by the Lawgiver to do the work. But the spirit of the law, in the hands of the Lawgiver, has produced condemnation, fear, guilt, and a sense of misery and ruin, so as to cut away all legal hopes, pull down self-righteousness, and lay the soul in ruins before God's footstool. And wherever this is experienced, there is a work of the law on the conscience.

4. But this teaching of the Spirit, when the soul has learned the holiness of God, and has felt itself condemned by his righteous law, and cut off from all hope or help in self—this same "unction

from the Holy One," which "is truth and is no lie," unfolds to the heart, and brings into the conscience experimentally, *a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ*. Those are striking words, and they have often rested with weight and power on my mind, perhaps no part of scripture more so, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). How briefly the Lord of life and glory has here summed up in what eternal life consists!

How many are anxious to know what is the way of salvation, how eternal life is to be obtained, and how to "flee from the wrath to come!" but the Lord Jesus has shewn in one short sentence in what eternal life consists, that it is in the knowledge of the "only true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he has sent." He therefore that knows the Father and the Son has eternal life in his soul. The Lord Jesus, in the chapter, which I read this morning, quoted this amongst other passages of the Old Testament, and says, "It is written in the Prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:45). He lays this down, then, as one especial fruit of divine teaching, that it produces a *coming unto him*.

The Spirit, who teaches to profit, holds up before the eyes of the soul, the Person, work, blood, love, grace, and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He shews the soul that he is just such a Saviour as it needs. He opens up the dignity of his Person, and shews that he is God-man. He makes known in the conscience that he has offered up himself a sacrifice for sin: that he has shed his atoning blood so that the sin of the church is for ever put away from the sight of a just God. He opens up before the eyes of the mind his glorious righteousness, as that in which, the Father is well-pleased, and in which, if the soul has but an interest, it is secure from the wrath to come. He unfolds to the heart the willingness of Christ to receive every coming sinner; he shews the treasures of mercy and grace which are locked up in him: and brings down in the heart the comforting words that he spake in the days of his flesh, such as, "Come unto me, all ye

that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (John 7:37).

And sometimes he unfolds to the understanding, and brings into the heart a sweet melting sensation from seeing how, when Christ was upon earth, he healed the sick, gave eyes to the blind, and ears to the deaf; raised the dead, went about doing good; and how that in everything he said or did, he spake forth the kindness and compassion of his loving heart. Thus, he sweetly draws the soul on, whereby it comes to Christ, casts itself at his blessed footstool, and looks upon him with the eye of faith. And whenever he brings the soul thus to come to Christ, with a real feeling of ruin and misery, with a true sense of guilt and condemnation, with a sincere submission to God's righteousness (as the apostle says), "Not going about to establish our own righteousness," but a "submitting of ourselves to the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3), and a yielding up of ourselves into his hands, there is a proof of heavenly teaching. And whenever that blessed union of humility and love is felt, whereby the soul lies at the feet of the Lord, as Ruth lay at the feet of Boaz, beseeching him to cover it with the skirt of his garment, the Holy Ghost has wrought with power in that soul: it is taught of God: and has an interest in that special teaching, the result of which the Lord has declared to be, "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:45).

5. This blessed teaching also leads the soul up into a *knowledge of the Holy Ghost*. All God's people are led into a knowledge of the Trinity: not indeed by metaphysical reasoning or subtle arguments addressed to the understanding. The Spirit teaches them, not by reasoning addressed to the head, but by the power and dew of divine truth resting upon the heart. All God's people learn the doctrine of the Trinity in their souls. They learn, under divine teaching, the authority, justice, majesty, holiness, and in due time feel the love of God the Father. They learn the Godhead of Christ in their souls, by seeing and feeling the power of his

blood, as the blood of God (Acts 20:28), and his righteousness as the "righteousness of God." And they learn the Deity and Personality of the Holy Ghost by feeling the divine power of his operations on their hearts. They learn also that he is God, by perceiving how he scrutinizes all their actions, brings to light every secret thought, and applies passages of scripture to their souls, which none but God could produce, or so suitably apply. And when they are thus led by divine teaching, into the Three Persons of the Godhead, they are brought to know and feel in the depths of conscience, that there are three Persons, equal in power, will, essence, and glory, and but one Jehovah.

Now these truths no man can learn in a saving manner, except by this special teaching. He may know all this, and much more than this, in his understanding and judgment: but a sensible realization of the power of these things in the conscience, a divine melting of the heart under them, with an enlargement of soul, and an experimental enjoyment of them, is the alone fruit of God's teaching resting on him, so as to make him "a new creature" in Christ.

III.—But, as I before hinted, a considerable branch of this heavenly teaching consists also in producing in us a *knowledge of ourselves*, for spiritual acquaintance with ourselves runs ever side by side with a spiritual knowledge of God.

1. We know not, for instance, *the evil of sin* till God makes it effectually known in the conscience. We may, indeed, by the workings of natural conviction know *this* and *that* outward crime to be sin. We may at times, too, have had some sharp pangs of conscience on account of committing open sins against light and knowledge. But the *evil* of sin, its horrible and dreadful nature, we cannot know, except by this special teaching.

Now there are two ways whereby God makes us to know and feel the evil of sin; first, by the law; and secondly, by the gospel.

In the law, in the light of God's justice, we see the damning power of sin. We find God's justice arrayed against it, that it is totally contrary to his holiness; and that he could not be just, unless he visited it with his eternal wrath and displeasure. But though the law shews us the evil of sin, as committed against justice and holiness, it does not convince us of its evil as committed against love and mercy; it does not, therefore, teach us to hate and abhor it; nor does it produce any sensations of godly sorrow on account of it; but it rather stirs up rebelliousness, and genders to bondage; it rather works up enmity against God, because he has condemned sin, and will not let us commit it. In order, therefore, to teach the soul the evil of sin as exceedingly sinful, we must see it in the light of a suffering Jesus.

We must view by faith the Son of God, equal with the Father in essence, glory, and power, come down to the earth; we must behold him by the eye of faith as "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" we must trace out all his life of humiliation from the cradle to the cross; we must go with him to the garden of Gethsemane; from Gethsemane to Calvary, and there behold God's only begotten Son, stretched betwixt heaven and earth, as "a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men," groaning out his soul under the weight of sin laid on him, and the hidings of his Father's countenance. And only so far as the Spirit leads the soul into the sufferings and agonies of a bleeding Jesus, does it really see and feel, and truly hate and abhor sin and itself as extremely sinful.

2. But heavenly teaching is also necessary to shew us *what our hearts are*. We may, by observing the workings of the natural mind, come to some conclusion that we and all men are naturally very selfish, very proud, and very worldly: but all this does not produce any sense of godly sorrow, or any self-loathing on account of indwelling sin. But when the blessed Spirit takes us in hand, strips away the veil of delusion from our hearts, and opening up the depths of our fallen nature, discovers the secret recesses where everything that is filthy and loathsome hides

itself,—*then* we begin to see and feel that we are sinners indeed; inwardly as well as outwardly, in thought and imagination, as well as by habit and practice.

It was this special teaching in the conscience that made Isaiah, when he saw the vision in the temple, cry out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts" (Isa. 6:5). It was this sight of the purity of God, that made Daniel say, that "his comeliness was turned into corruption, and he retained no strength" (Dan. 10:8). It was this that made Job exclaim, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5, 6). And if any of us have ever learned to loathe ourselves before God, it is by having some special discovery of the purity and holiness of God, contrasted with our own vileness and filthiness.

3. Another fruit and effect of this divine teaching is, to *cut in pieces, and root up all our fleshly wisdom, strength, and righteousness*. God never means to patch a new piece upon an old garment; he never intends to let our wisdom, our strength, our righteousness have any union with his; it must all be torn to pieces, it must all be plucked up by the roots, that a new wisdom, a *new* strength, and a *new* righteousness may arise upon its ruins. But till the Lord is pleased to teach us, we never can part with our own righteousness, never give up our own wisdom, never abandon our own strength. These things are a part and parcel of ourselves, so ingrained within us, so innate in us, so growing with our growth, that we cannot willingly part with an atom of them till the Lord himself breaks them up, and plucks them away. Then as he brings into our souls some spiritual knowledge of our own dreadful corruptions and horrible wickedness, our righteousness crumbles away at the divine touch: as he leads us to see and feel our ignorance and folly in a thousand instances, and how unable we are to understand anything aright but by divine teaching, our wisdom fades away: and as he shews us our inability to resist temptation and

overcome sin. by any exertion of our own, our strength gradually departs, and we become like Samson, when his locks were cut off.

Upon the ruins, then, of our own wisdom, righteousness, and strength, does God build up Christ's wisdom, Christ's righteousness, and Christ's strength: as Jesus said to his servant Paul, "My strength is made perfect in weakness:" and this brought him to that wonderful conclusion, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9). But only so far as we are favoured with this special teaching are we brought to pass a solemn sentence of condemnation upon our own wisdom, strength, and righteousness, and feelingly seek after the Lord's.

4. Another fruit and effect of divine teaching is, *faith*, whereby Jesus is believed in to the saving of the soul. There is not a grain of living faith in the heart by nature. We may indeed have a certain sort of belief, we may have the workings of a natural faith: but as to any real spiritual faith, such as the apostle describes, as "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen;" such a faith as was possessed by the Old Testament worthies recorded in the eleventh of Hebrews; such a faith as saves the soul from "the wrath to come," we know absolutely nothing of, until God is pleased to kindle it by his special teaching in our hearts.

5. Nor, again, have we any *hope* worth a straw, except what springs from divine teaching. We may indeed have the "hope of the hypocrite" which perisheth, but "a good hope through grace," as "an anchor of the soul;" the hope whereby "we are saved" (Rom. 8:24), which "maketh not ashamed" (Rom. 5:5): a "good hope" like this must spring up alone through the teaching of God, a making known of the Lord of life and glory, and raising up that power in our souls whereby anchor is cast on his blood and righteousness.

6. And *love*: that also is a fruit and effect of this heavenly teaching. There is no love to God, except as he is pleased to shed it abroad in the heart: teaching the soul to know him as the God of love. We may try to love him. and set him before the eyes of our mind: but love cannot be thus compelled to flow out to him: our hearts remain dead, cold, and stupid. And it is only as he is pleased to let a drop of love fall into the soul, that it flows back unto the eternal fountain whence it came down.

And so, with respect to *love to the brethren*. The apostle says, "Ye are taught of God to love one another." This, therefore, can only flow from divine teaching, by the Spirit of God communicating his blessed unction to the soul, whereby when we see grace in them, we feel a sweet melting down of heart, a flowing together of spirit, and a knitting of affection to them. We may have had a selfish love in the flesh; but there can be no real love towards God's people, except as the Lord is pleased to teach us by his Spirit to love one another.

7. Nor is there any *humility*, except as the Lord is pleased to teach the soul to be humble. And how does he produce genuine soul humility? By shewing us what we are, opening up the secrets of the heart, discovering the desperate wickedness of our fallen nature, and convincing us that sin is intermingled with every thought, word, look, and action.

8. Nor is there any spiritual *patience*, except what springs from this special inward teaching. Trials do not bring patience; they only stir up rebellion. We may pass through the heaviest afflictions, and so far from feeling patience under them, be worked up almost into desperation. But patience and resignation to the will of God flow immediately from the Lord himself; he alone can teach the soul to be patient under his strokes, and shew us that "affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground" (Job 5:6). He alone can make the soul feel that chastisement comes from the hand of a Father, and open up to the heart that it is for our spiritual good; and thus give it to realize the blessed and happy results which flow

therefrom, when it "yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:11).

9. Nor is there any *spirit of prayer*, except as the Lord teaches us how to pray. The apostles felt this when they said, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1). We cannot pray spiritually and acceptably, except as God teaches us. Parents sometimes try to teach their children to pray; and Sunday School masters and mistresses attempt the same thing with their scholars. But how grating these things are in the ear of a God-taught soul! Scarcely anything used to grate more upon my ears, when I had to attend the Church of England services, than hearing the Sunday School children shout out, "Take not thy Holy Spirit from us," and other similar petitions with which they had no spiritual acquaintance. And few things I believe more hurt the ears of godly parents than to hear their carnal children idly repeating to the Lord words of which they neither know nor feel the meaning; and generally, I may remark, nothing is more offensive to a spiritual ear, than to hear carnal persons make use of petitions the power and sweetness of which they have never felt. God must teach the soul to pray. We may teach children collects and prayers, and to say a blessing before meals; but these man-made petitions do not please God, nor reach his approving ear. But when he himself imparts a spirit of prayer, he teaches the soul in sincerity and godly simplicity to seek his face, and to call upon his name. He teaches us our ruin and his mercy, our malady and his remedy, our lost estate and his salvation. No human teaching can make us know these things; but when he teaches, he draws forth the secret desires and breathings of the soul after himself.

10. *Deadness to the world, and inward as well as outward separation from its company and wretched spirit*, is an effect too of divine teaching. Until God is pleased to teach us, we do not see the evil of the world; but when the Spirit makes the conscience tender in his fear, we find that going into the world is like touching pitch; our hands become defiled, and we feel at once that "evil communications corrupt good manners." When the Lord

teaches us what we are, we find we carry about with us such combustible materials, so much gunpowder, that if a spark come near us an explosion may take place. And as those who are careful of their lives would not enter a powder magazine with anything that might cause an explosion: so when the child of God is under the power of divine teaching, and feels sensibly what a vile nature he has, he will be afraid of carrying his heart into the world, lest a spark might come in from some unexpected quarter, and in an instant set all his corruptions on flame.

11. By God's teaching, also, we learn what a wretched evil *covetousness* is. It is indeed a sin, which it is to be feared many of God's people are deeply tainted with: but its tendency is to eat out the very heart of vital godliness, and its very essence and spirit is idolatry; for the man who bows down before gold and silver, is as much an idolater as though he bowed his knee before stocks and stones. But when God teaches his people to profit, he fixes their heart on better things; he shews them the unsearchable riches of Christ, and thus unlocks their mind from that wretched love of money which is "the root of all evil."

12. It is only by God's teaching that we are enabled *to feel for the wants of his children*, that our hearts are moved with a sense of their many temporal sufferings, and have a disposition given to administer to their wants. But when you look at some who pass for God's people, who have so much of "this world's goods," and yet appear so insensible to the wants of their poorer brethren, you wonder what they think of that scripture, "All ye are brethren." But God must teach us to feel for their wants, and make us liberal towards them according to our means, by laying them on our heart, and drawing out our affections towards them.

13. Every *good word that we speak* for the honour and glory of God must arise from his special teaching. However clearly and ably a minister, for instance, may preach the truth, every word will be utterly lost upon his hearers unless God is pleased to inspire thoughts and dictate words, and speak by him to the conscience. Every action, too, of our life will surely go wrong,

unless it is under God's special guidance; and every step in providence we take will not be right, unless it is specially directed by God himself.

IV.—The *teaching of God* is not confined to shewing a man a few grand truths, and then leaving them to have a certain effect upon the conscience. But God's people need his teaching perpetually; and, in providence as in grace, we need unceasing instruction. I believe many a poor child of God often does not know how to do the simplest thing in providence, not even how to carry on his daily business, or execute his manual labour, except as the Lord is pleased to teach him: God must guide his eye and direct his hand, in the least things as well as the greatest. He needs divine teaching in every action if it is to be done to God's glory, and for every word if it is to be spoken in his fear.

But this special teaching of God can only be known and realized by those who have seen an end of all creature perfection, and who are completely and experimentally destitute of all wisdom in the flesh. Until a man is brought to see that he has no wisdom of his own, he will never seek after God's wisdom. But when he is brought to walk in darkness that may be felt, when the thick veil gathers over his mind, and God hides himself from his view; when eternal things are wrapt up in obscurity, and he cannot see the things of God, nor feel his interest in them; when "he gropes for the wall like the blind, and gropes as if he had no eyes;" when he is "led into darkness and not into light," he is brought to see that the Lord alone can teach his soul to profit.

God's teaching does not leave a man where it found him, dead, stupefied, worldly, unfeeling, and carnal. If he is in distress, it does not leave him in distress; if he feels guilty, it does not leave him guilty; if he is in darkness, it does not leave him in darkness; but it lifts him out of these evils. Thus God's people are continually led to come unto him for his instruction, because they feel that without his special teaching they can know nothing as they ought to know. Nay, the more they have, the more they want to have; for no sooner is the light withdrawn, than the

darkness is more sensibly felt. If any text of scripture has been opened up to them, it makes them want to have others made known in a similar way; if they have had any consolation, and it is taken away, it makes them want it again. So that the more wise and spiritual God's people become, the more foolish and carnal they appear in their own eyes; the stronger they are in the Lord and in the power of his might, the more sensibly do they feel the weakness of their flesh: and the more they are enabled to walk closely with the Lord, the more they discover the wretched wanderings of their base and sinful hearts.

Here, then, we see how God's people are distinguished from all heady, high-minded professors. They grow upward. but God's people grow downward. Special and divine teachings do not lead the soul into pride, arrogance, and presumption: but they lead to humility, simplicity, sincerity, contrition, brokenness of heart, low views of self, and admiring views of the Lord.

Natural wisdom only hardens a man's heart, sears his conscience, and makes him more worldly-minded: spiritual teachings make the heart tender, the glory of God its great object, and spiritual communion with the Lord ardently desired.

How, then, shall we know if we are God's people? Because we believe in election, particular redemption, effectual calling, and the final perseverance of the saints? Because we go to hear a certain minister, or belong to a certain church? A man may have all these things, and ten thousand times more, and sink to hell at last as a deceived hypocrite. But can we trace in our souls anything of this divine teaching?

The Lord has given us two marks or tests whereby it may be proved; let us then confine our attention to them for a moment or two, and see if we can find them manifested in us.

One is, "Every man therefore that hath heard and learned of the Father *cometh unto me.*" Are you from time to time coming unto Christ, and breathing forth your desires and pantings after him,

that he would reveal himself in your soul? Are you more or less daily seeking to "know him, and the power of his resurrection," and to enjoy the sweet manifestations of his love? Then you have a scriptural proof that *you are taught of God*.

But let us take the other test: "Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another" (1 Thess. 4:9). Do you know anything experimentally of love to God's people? I mean a real, spiritual love to the poor, exercised, tempted, sin-burdened, and Satan-harassed family of God? Then, I will say *you are taught of God!*

The Lord enable us to see that we are taught of him. The Lord enable us to believe that we have received "an unction from the Holy One," that "anointing which is truth and is no lie"—the sure pledge and foretaste of eternal life.

But remember that the promise runs, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." There is no exception here. "All shall know me, from the least unto the greatest." It is very plain, then, that those who know nothing of this divine teaching are not manifestly the children of God: what they may be in the purpose of God we know not: but in their present state and standing they *are not* manifestly his children.

The Lord enable some of you to lay this to heart. And if it be his pleasure, may he touch the consciences of some who have never yet sought his face, and bring them to cast themselves as ruined sinners at the footstool of his grace and mercy! For he, who said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me:" also added, "And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Nov. 8, 1863

"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. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." 2 Cor. 4:6, 7

If we examine with a little attention the chapter preceding that from which my text is taken, we shall find that the apostle draws in it a very striking and close parallel between the two covenants, or, as they are sometimes called, dispensations—the dispensation of the law and the dispensation of the gospel: his object being, by contrasting the one with the other, to show the superiority of the latter over the former. He grounds his comparison between them upon a remarkable incident recorded in the book of Exodus (34:29-35), where Moses is represented as coming down from the mount, and his face shining with such resplendent glory, that Aaron and the children of Israel "were afraid to come nigh him." The glory which thus shone on the face of Moses was a reflection of the glory of God which he had seen for forty days and forty nights on Sinai's top; but in the glory, thus reflected on his countenance, there was on other grounds deep significance. Moses, you will remember, was the typical mediator of that covenant: as we read, "It was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator." (Gal. 3:19.) As being then the mediator of the covenant given from mount Sinai, the glory of that dispensation was typically represented by the shining of his face.

Now if we examine the nature of this contrast a little more closely, we shall see that there are six points in which the glory of the dispensation of the gospel is superior to the glory of the dispensation of the law.

1. First, the dispensation of the law was only *in the letter*: "Who

also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the Spirit." (2 Cor. 3:6.) By the word "letter" the apostle means that the law, though it was written and engraved in stones, did not go beyond the bare outward command. Though it forbade sin by the most terrible injunctions, and commanded perfect love to God and man under the most solemn curse, there was in it no communication of power to obey, no ministration of the Spirit to enable to love. Contrasting, then, the gospel with this feature of the law, as a dispensation of the letter only, the apostle says that it is "of the Spirit;" that is, the gospel reveals and ministers the Spirit to those who believe, and to whom it comes as the power of God unto salvation; for when the gospel is preached "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven," it comes unto the people of God, "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." (1 Thess. 1:5.)

2. The second point of contrast between the two dispensations is, that the law is a *killing* letter, and therefore the *ministration of death*. It was not ordained to give life: it was a revelation of the holiness, justice, and righteousness of the Lord God Almighty as a consuming fire—a proclamation, amidst thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud, of the demands of God upon the obedience of man; but not giving him any help to obey them. It therefore is and ever must be a killing letter, slaying and slaughtering all who are found in its hands, and bringing them under its tremendous curse. But "the spirit *giveth life*;" that is, the very spirit of the gospel is life: for, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, it communicates spiritual and eternal life to the soul.

3. A third point of contrast is that the law is the *ministration of condemnation*. The law is called "the ministration of condemnation," because it is a means whereby condemnation is communicated. It is a revelation, a discovery, and, if I may use the expression, a vehicle for carrying the wrath of God into the conscience, and thus registering not only externally in the letter but internally in the heart the terrible anger of the Almighty against sin. Nor was it ever meant to do anything but to condemn the sinner and bring him in guilty before God. It is, therefore,

emphatically "the ministration of condemnation," as it administers condemnation to every soul found under it. There is a glory in this, though a glory terrible to man as a sinner; for as a revelation of the wrath of God against all unrighteousness, it glorifies and magnifies the holiness and justice of the sovereign Judge of all. But, as contrasted with this, the gospel is the "*ministration of righteousness.*" And it is so termed because it reveals and brings to light what the apostle elsewhere calls "the righteousness of God" (Rom. 3:21); that is, not the intrinsic righteousness of God, but the display of that righteousness whereby he can "be just, and yet the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus."

4. A fourth point of contrast is that the law was but *for a time*, but the gospel *abideth for ever and ever*. The law "was added," as the apostle elsewhere speaks, "because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." (Gal. 3:19.) As a dispensation, therefore, it was as if a parenthesis between the covenant made with Abraham and the coming of Christ. When, therefore, the Son of God came in the flesh to fulfil the whole of the moral law by his obedience to its commands, and the whole of the ceremonial law by his sacrifice, bloodshedding, and death, the law, as a dispensation, passed away, its object being fulfilled, because the whole of it was perfectly accomplished by the incarnation, sacrifice, death, and resurrection of the only begotten Son of God. All must admit that a glory which remains must be more excellent than a glory which passes away, as the glory of the abiding sun exceeds the glory of the fading stars.

5. The fifth point of contrast is that the law was a *veiled* dispensation, but the gospel an *unveiled* one. This, indeed, as I have before observed, was typified by that remarkable circumstance, that when Moses' face shone so brightly that Aaron and the children of Israel were afraid to look upon it, he put a veil over his face. This act of Moses, as the typical mediator of that covenant, was emblematic of two things; first, that the glory of that dispensation was a *veiled glory*. This was analogous to the

"thick veil" which rested upon the mount when the law was given (Exodus 19:16), when, to use the language of the apostle, there was on it "blackness and darkness and tempest." (Heb. 12:18.) But, secondly, the veil upon the face of Moses typically represented *the veil that is upon the human heart*, and especially the heart of the literal Israel: "But even unto this day when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart." (2 Cor. 3:15.) Now, as contrasted with this, the gospel is an unveiled dispensation. "We all with open (or unveiled) face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord."

6. The sixth and last point of contrast is that the law is a dispensation of *bondage*, for "it gendereth to bondage." (Gal. 4:24.) But the gospel is a dispensation of *liberty*: "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (2 Cor. 3:17.)

Having thus proved the superiority of the gospel over the law, the apostle in our text shows the effect of a spiritual reception of it into our hearts. He compares it to a treasure deposited in earthen vessels. With God's help and blessing, therefore, it will be my endeavour this morning to show you what this treasure is, how it is communicated, where it is lodged, and why the Lord has so lodged it; but this will be more apparent if I shall be enabled to bring clearly and experimentally before you,

I.—*First, what the treasure is*: "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

II.—*Secondly, the mode of the communication* of this heavenly treasure to the soul: "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of this glory."

III.—*Thirdly, the place* in which it has pleased him to lodge this heavenly treasure: "Earthen vessels."

IV.—*The reason why* God has been so pleased to deposit it: "That

the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

I.—My first object then is to show you *what* this treasure is.

Now what is the scriptural idea of a treasure? In ancient times property being very insecure, and there not being those modes of investing money, and thus making a profitable use of it, which modern skill has devised, it was a custom to hoard gold and silver in large heaps. Kings especially were accustomed to have "treasure houses," as Pharaoh had his "treasure cities" (Exod. 1:11), in which they stored up vast amounts of coin. Those are called by the prophet "treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places." (Isai. 45:3.) Sometimes also for greater security money was buried in the earth; and to prevent it being scattered it was frequently deposited in earthen vessels; as we read in Jeremiah, where the Lord bids him "take the evidences of the purchase and put them in an earthen vessel that they may continue many days." (Jer. 32:14.) Similarly in the parable, we read of "treasure hid in a field, which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." (Matt. 13:44.) By this treasure he was enriched for life. From those passages then we may gather up the scriptural meaning of the word "treasure," and we shall find that it includes two leading ideas. 1. First, it is that which makes or manifests a man to be rich. And, 2, it is a large amount of wealth stored up for safe preservation. Having thus gathered the scriptural idea of the word treasure, it may the better prepare us to enter into the meaning of the apostle in our text; for we may be well assured that "the treasure," of which he there speaks is not earthly treasure, which may be squandered and lost, or abused and perverted to the worst of purposes; but a heavenly treasure, which makes the soul rich unto God and wealthy to all eternity.

i. We can have no doubt what the treasure is *in itself*, for its character and nature are written as with a ray of light in the language of our text. "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." This then is the treasure, and it consists mainly in two things—*light* and *knowledge*; and a light and a knowledge of such a peculiar character and of such a heavenly nature as give us a spiritual sight of, and an experimental acquaintance with the glory of God as shining forth in the face of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant. (Heb. 12:24.) As Moses was the typical mediator of the Old Covenant, so Jesus Christ is the real Mediator of the New; and as being the Mediator of the new Covenant, it is in him—in his Person and in his face—that the glory of God especially shines; for he is the glory of the new covenant. We will look then at this glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ as the Holy Ghost has laid it down in the Scriptures of truth, that we may find in it some evidence for ourselves whether God has ever shone into our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of this glory as our own possession.

1. First, then, see how the *wisdom* of God shines forth in the constitution of the *Person* of Jesus Christ; for the word "face" here may be translated "the Person" of Jesus Christ, it being the same word as is rendered "Person" in that passage where the apostle says, "If I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sake forgave I it in the person of Christ." (2 Cor. 2:10.) By the Person of Jesus Christ we may understand here not so much his Divine Person, as the Son of God, as his complex Person as God-man—Immanuel, God with us. Now what a glorious display there is of what the apostle calls the "depths of the riches of the wisdom of God" in the constitution of the Person of Christ. Look at man in his lost, ruined state through the Adam fall; see his utter distance from God by wicked works; view the alienation of his heart, and the desperate state of enmity, rebellion, and every imaginable and unimaginable depth of misery and wretchedness into which he has been cast by sin original and actual. How can a plan be devised to extricate him from his fallen condition; to restore him to the favour of God; to reconcile and bring him near; and fully deliver him from all the dreadful consequences of his utter departure from original righteousness? For bear in mind,

that if this be done, it must be done in the fullest harmony with every perfection and attribute of the self-existent, immutable perfection. This point is not often considered; but the whole of the human race must rather perish than that any one perfection of the Almighty suffer the least infringement. But how can man be saved upon such terms as these? Where will be God's justice if man is pardoned? Where God's holiness, where his righteousness, if sin be passed by as though it had never been committed? What would become of human laws if the stern attribute of justice which is given to kings is to drop out of their hands like a broken sword? Law ceases to be law when not executed. How then can God's justice be preserved intact, in all its fulness, majesty, and glory, if man be let off unpunished when he has committed such crimes against the Majesty of heaven? But that mystery which never could have been solved by the united intellect of men and angels, God himself has solved in and by the constitution of the Person of Christ as God man, for therein we see a display of his infinite wisdom in contriving a way by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, not only to condemn sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3), but also to put away sin by the sacrifice of Jesus. (Heb. 9:26.) O wondrous display of eternal wisdom, that by sending his own dear Son to suffer in the sinner's place and stead, the justice of God should have all its righteous claims fully satisfied, and yet that mercy should be able to rejoice against judgment! (James 2:13.) O wondrous scheme, worthy to fill heaven with anthems of eternal praise, that a way should have been contrived to harmonise the seemingly jarring attributes of God, that he might be just, scrupulously just, and yet "keep mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity transgression and sin."

2. But view also in this wondrous plan of redeeming blood the infinite *love* of God; for as the glory of God conspicuously shines forth in the face of Jesus Christ, every one of his glorious attributes is manifested in him. The *love* of God is so peculiarly one of his divine attributes that it may almost be said to be himself, for "God is love;" and surely of all others this attribute was specially manifested in the gift of his dear Son. Did not our Lord himself say, "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 so testifies holy John, "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.) Would we then view by faith the love of God; would we receive it, embrace it, realise it, and enjoy it, it must be as beholding it gloriously shining forth in the face of Jesus Christ.

3. But view next the *grace* of God, for he is "the God of all *grace*" (1 Pet. 5:10); and it is "the *grace* of God that bringeth salvation." (Titus 2:11.) But what is *grace*? It literally signifies "favour." Thus, when we read of Noah finding *grace* in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8); and when the Lord said to Moses, "Thou hast found *grace* in my sight" (Exodus 33:12), it means that they had found favour in his eyes. Now there is nothing in us to draw forth the favour of God. We are like Ruth in the field of Boaz, in whom there was nothing naturally attractive, which made her therefore say, "Why have I found *grace* in thine eyes that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing that I am a stranger?" (Ruth 2:10.) There were many maidens in Israel fairer and more engaging than this Moabitish widow; but Ruth was the woman who won his favour. But this *grace* or favour of God shines conspicuously forth in the face and person of Jesus Christ; for in him, and in him alone, God can be gracious. There is no favour for any out of Christ. Out of Jesus all is wrath, condemnation, and terror, for out of him our sins and the justice of God angrily meet.

4. But in a similar way, the *mercy* of God shines forth gloriously in the Person or face of Jesus Christ. *Mercy* is a peculiar attribute of God. It lay, so to speak, buried in the bosom of God until the fall of man. His justice was known before; for it was signalled in the banishment of the sinning angels from "their own habitation;" but his *mercy* first came to light in the garden where man sinned and fell. *Mercy* is suitable only to criminals; but the *mercy* of God, though it has respect to criminals, though it is mingled with the tenderest compassion for unworthy wretches, yet has this peculiar feature attached to it, that it must be in the strictest harmony with every righteous attribute of the Almighty. It must

not, therefore, be weak mercy—mercy to the injury of justice; for justice might well complain if the criminal were pardoned, and no satisfaction made to its righteous demands. If the Queen tomorrow, by an act of royal favour, were to set open all the prison doors and let loose upon the country all the criminals who are now in penal servitude, it might be an act of mercy. But would it be an act of justice to the rest of the community? Would there not be a general outcry from Caithness to Cornwall at such an act of royal clemency? Let loose all the criminals! Are robbers and murderers, men stained with and ready for every crime, to be let loose upon society? Well might justice lift up her voice and hands against a demonstration of mercy, by which every righteous law would be trampled upon, and society itself almost go to wreck. How could we walk the streets in safety if garotters might go unpunished? How lie peaceably in our beds if robbers may break into our houses with impunity, as secure of the Queen's mercy? So unless Justice have her due as well as mercy, she might lift up her hands in the holy place and cry out against a display of mercy to guilty criminals, which would be an outrage against her righteous demands. But through the constitution of the glorious Person of Immanuel, God with us: through his bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, and making full atonement for them, justice suffered no wrong, the holiness of God endured no loss.

5. And what a display, too of *power!* How this attribute of the Almighty shines forth in the constitution of the glorious Person of our blessed Lord! What power was needed to rescue man from the awful state of misery and condemnation into which he had been cast! What power to raise up a spotless humanity out of the womb of a sinful Virgin! What power to uphold our gracious Lord all through his sojourning in this vale of tears! What power to hold him up on the cross when he was enduring all the wrath of the Almighty, and bearing on his suffering head all that intolerable load of guilt which but for that power would have overwhelmed him in the deep waters! And what power to raise him from the grave, into which he mystically and visibly sank, under the curse of the law and the transgressions of his people; I say "mystically and visibly," that is, to the human eye, because

our Lord had finished the work which the Father gave him to do before he gave up the ghost; but, as death was a part of the sacrifice, it was needful for him to die that "by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." (Heb. 9:15.)

This, then, is the treasure—"the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"—light given to us to see it, life given to us to feel it, knowledge given to us to apprehend it. By this light shining into the heart; by this life felt in the soul; by this knowledge communicated to the understanding, the veil of ignorance and unbelief is taken away; and as the veil is taken away, we behold with unveiled face as in a glass the glory of the Lord. The "glass" is the glass of the gospel, which is a revelation of the love, grace, and mercy of God in his dear Son; and as this gospel is made unto us "the power of God unto salvation," and comes into the heart "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance," it gives us to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This treasure, then, is a spiritual, saving, experimental knowledge of the gospel as revealing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; and to possess this light, life, and knowledge in our own bosom is to possess the treasure for ourselves.

II.—But I pass on to show—for this is a most important point—*how this treasure is communicated*. If a poor man were to go into a bank with a £100 or a £1,000 note, which he wished to be exchanged immediately for gold, a suspicion might arise, and a just one, in the minds of the managers how he came into possession of so large a sum. "How did you get this note, my man? Is it your own?" The man is known to be poor, and not to have been able to earn so great a sum; no tidings have reached the bank of any such money left him by legacy. Suspicion at once arises whether he may not have stolen it, or come in some dishonest way into unlawful possession of it. So in grace. You speak of the light and knowledge which you have of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; you talk very boldly and

confidently as if you really had been put into possession of this heavenly treasure; and you offer your note to us for acceptance. You bring it before the church of God, lay it down upon the counter, and say, "This is my money. Give me credit for it." Is it not then a legitimate question to ask you, "How came you into possession of this large sum? Have you stolen it, or have you earned it? Was it given you, or have you found it?" Now I will show the way, the only way, by which it is lawfully and honestly possessed. And, first, it cannot be *earned*. No poor man could earn a thousand pounds. He has no capital; and no amount of labour, at least in this country, could enable him to get together so large a sum. That is utterly set aside in this country and in the present state of society. And surely in a higher sense our nature is too impoverished to earn a sum which shall make us rich for eternity. Then if it cannot be earned, it must be either stolen or given. *Stolen* will never suit the conscience of a child of God, for he knows that the heart-searching God will never accept robbery for burnt offering. It must then be *given* him, if he is put into real possession of it. And is not this the testimony of God all through the Scripture? Is not "every good gift and every perfect gift from above, and does it not come down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning?" (James 1:17.) So it is with this heavenly treasure. God is its divine Author and Giver. And so testifies the apostle in the words of our text: "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."

i. The apostle here takes us back to the first day of creation, and uses the work of God there as a figurative representation of the way in which he is pleased to communicate the light of the knowledge of his own glory to the soul. Let us look at that figure and see how it bears upon our subject. What was this earth before the creative fiat of the Almighty went forth? A dark, confused, and lifeless chaos. We therefore, read that "the earth was without form and void," and that "darkness was upon the face of the deep." At this primeval period earth is represented as a mighty deep, and gross, thick, and palpable darkness covering

all its face. This we may take not only as a description of the face of the earth, but also as a typical representation of the heart of man, without form and void; a mighty deep, ever tossing to and fro its restless waves, but darkness resting upon its face; without light to see God, without life to feel his power or presence; without any spiritual acquaintance with him whom to know, is life eternal. But now comes an almighty change. God said, "Let there be light, and there was light." In that sublime expression is revealed the way in which God was first pleased to command light to break forth at his almighty fiat. With light, and, as if for a moment preceding it, came life; for we read, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The word "moved" there signifies literally the brooding of a bird over its nest. It is the same word as is used in Deuteronomy of the eagle when she "*fluttereth* over her young." (Deut. 32:11.) So the Spirit of God is described in the book of Genesis as brooding, or moving with tremulous motion over the face of the waters, to infuse life into chaos and impregnate earth with a living energy, as the eagle mother communicates warmth to her nest by her tremulous movements over her callow brood. Thus in the first creation light and life broke forth as if simultaneously at the command of God. In the same moment that light issued forth at his creative fiat, the Spirit of God moved with impregnating energy upon the face of the waters, communicating life and vitality to the dead mass. So in grace, light and life flow forth at the command of the Almighty; for the same God who in creation commanded the light to shine out of darkness, by the same act of sovereign power and the same display of creative energy, shines into the dark hearts of his people; and with the light that breaks into their dark minds come at the same moment the quickening operations of the Holy Ghost, who moves over their heart with his life-giving energy, as in ancient times he moved with creative power upon the face of the waters.

But let us now look at this a little more closely, for it deeply concerns our spiritual welfare, and may well lead us to self-examination, whether we have been put into possession by the Lord himself of this heavenly treasure?

1. We see, first, in it *an act of divine sovereignty*. Was it not altogether a sovereign act in the Almighty Creator to bid light to come in a moment, to illuminate the dark scene when the earth was without form and void? What a transition from the blackest darkness, for the darkness was not then, as now, tempered and mingled with scattered beams of light, but utter blackness—what a transition from the blackness of darkness to that burst of light when, to use the expression in Job, "it brake forth as if it had issued out of the womb"—"the womb of the morning." (Job 38:8; Psa. 110:3.) Could chaos with its dark and rolling waters—that wild, waste scene of confusion and death—ever have commanded light out of the firmament of heaven? Without this sovereign act of God, it must ever have been what it originally was, empty and void, a dark, dead thing, an interminable scene of vanity and confusion. So is it an act of divine sovereignty for God to shine into the sinner's heart—as much an act of divine sovereignty as when in the first creation of all things he caused the day-spring to know its place. What has a sinner done; what can a sinner do to command divine light and life to burst upon his soul? Is he not as empty and as void, as dark and as dead as primeval chaos?

2. But again, it is an act of almighty *power*. Who but the Almighty could create light? What created being, let him be the highest angel or burning seraph before the throne, could by one word have formed out of nothing that all glorious, all diffused, all penetrating effulgence which we cannot describe, but which we daily see filling air, and earth, and sea with a blaze of glory, and which we call "light?" So nothing but the power of the Almighty can give light to those who sit in darkness and in the very shadow of death. For it is as impossible for a sinner, buried in the darkness of the Adam fall, to give light to his own soul by the exertion of his own powers, as it would have been for chaos to bring forth light out of its dark bosom by the continual heaving of its tumultuous waves.

3. And yet what an act of *grace!* In primeval creation what had earth done to call forth the light of day? What good work had

chaos wrought to bring down upon the face of the waters the impregnating life and quickening energy of the Holy Spirit? Can darkness create light? Can death create life? Can sin create holiness? Can enmity create love? Can misery create mercy? It may lay a foundation for it, but can no more create it than hell can create heaven, or a devil make an angel. How, then, can a sinner raise up light and life in his own bosom? Surely it must be not only a sovereign act of Almighty power, but one of special favour, if when a sinner has been rebelling against God with well nigh every breath; when all his days he has been doing things that God abhors, living at best a life of vanity and sin, if not of open ungodliness, it should please the Almighty to communicate divine light and life to his soul.

ii. But look at this communication of divine light and life in another point of view. We have seen the *sovereignty, power, and freeness* of the gift; let us now look at the *manner* of its communication. Judging from its effects, I think we may divide it into three different periods: for I do not believe that the fulness of gospel light shines all at once into the heart. On the other hand, we find both from scripture and experience that there is a gradual increase or growth of this light; for "the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." (Prov. 4:18.) There is, I think, some analogy between the communication of this light in nature and in grace. You will bear in mind that light, as light, was created before the sun; for in creation, the first command was, "Let there be light," which was the first day's work. But the sun was not created till the fourth day. So in grace, there is first the creation of light in the soul. This is as it were the opening beam; the breaking up of the darkness of unregeneracy: the communication of that divine light whereby we see light in God's light. But what do we see in this light, for bear in mind that the sun is not yet risen; and thus for us, in a sense, is not yet created? We cannot, then, see the sun, for to us it does not shine. But what do we see as thus dimly revealed? Our lost, ruined condition; the holiness and justice of God in a broken covenant; our just condemnation as guilty sinners before his awful tribunal; the thorough helplessness and

impotency that is in us to deliver ourselves from the wrath to come; the curse and condemnation of the law, every commandment of which we have broken in thought, or word, or deed; and all this attended with a deep conviction that if we are sent to hell we only reap the just desert of our grievous crimes. Was there not something analogous to this in the first creation? When light first shone upon the world, what did it reveal? The dark waters of a troubled chaos. Creation in its beauty and glory had not yet begun. The sun was not shining then in the sky, nor the moon ruling by night; no vegetation clothed the fields; no grass, nor herb, nor tree had sprung out of the dust; no animals roamed the forest, no fish swam in the waters, no birds flew above the earth in the firmament of heaven. The light discovered nothing but the waters of a troubled chaos; and yet as impregnated by the energy of the Spirit of God they were waving with living movement and power. So when divine light comes into the soul, it reveals our lost, ruined condition, as the primeval light beamed upon, and discovered the heaving waves of a troubled yet empty chaos. But this primeval light would also reveal the firmament above, as well as the dark waters beneath. So the first shining in of divine light reveals the glory of God in a broken law above as well as our lost condition below.

2. But now comes a further creation. On the fourth day the sun was created and set in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth. But the creation of the sun did not necessarily imply that immediately it rose upon the earth. We know that before it rises to gladden all nature there is a gradual approach of its rays, making what we call twilight or the *dawn of day*. This seems to be what Peter speaks of when he bids us take heed "to the more sure word of prophecy, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts." (2 Pet. 1:19.) Thus, before the Lord fully shines into the heart to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, there is the dawning of an opening morn. This is usually some gracious discovery of the way of salvation through Christ; some opening up of the word with power, sweetness, and savour to the heart, whereby it is received in faith, hope, and

love as the truth of God, exceedingly suitable to our lost condition; some blessed refreshment from the presence of the Most High; and a bowing and bending of the whole soul, putting it, as it were, into a waiting attitude to look out for a clearer and fuller revelation of Christ.

When, then, there is some discovery of salvation in the Person and work of Jesus—not indeed sufficiently strong to bring full deliverance from guilt: to manifest the pardon of sin: to discover a saving interest in the blood of the Lamb; but a light shining upon the way of salvation, upon the doctrines of grace, upon the truth as it is in Jesus, and this received into a believing heart by the life-giving power of the Spirit—this we may call the *dawn of day*, "the day-spring from on high, which gives light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace." (Luke 1:78, 79.) By this day-dawn a good measure of encouragement is felt in the soul to see that there is a way of escape; that all is not wrath; that there is salvation to be obtained through the blood of the Lamb. This gives sweet encouragement to watch and wait for more light; it draws forth faith and prayer; it brings the soul to lie at mercy's footstool, to knock at wisdom's door in the hope that in due time the Lord will open.

But next comes "*the day-star.*" We often see soon after dawn a bright spot shining in the sky, and hanging as it were between earth and heaven;—this is the day-star, the harbinger of the sun. It is called the day-star because it is a star not of the night, but one seen in the light of the opening day. Thus there is usually a day-star in the experience of a living soul, shining brightly in the opening dawn of day; for you will observe there is a difference between the dawn and the day-star. The dawn is as if a general diffused light, spreading itself over the eastern sky. This resembles the illumination of the spiritual understanding by the diffusion of gospel light in the heart. But the day-star shines as a bright spot of light in the very midst of the day-dawn. In grace, then, this may be interpreted as significant of some bright evidence, shining as if in a conspicuous manner in the light of life

diffused in the heart. Thus, the application of some promise to the soul with divine power; the bringing into the heart of some invitation with peculiar savour and sweetness; some answer to prayer; some whisper of mercy breathed into the soul as from the mouth of God; some intimation, almost amounting to an assurance, that the Lord will be gracious; some very special season of liberty and access upon our knees; some blessing to soften and melt the heart under the preached word; these and similar manifestations of the Lord's goodness and mercy may be compared to "the day-star." For with this day-star there is almost always some discovery of Christ as the Sun of righteousness, though still, if I may use the expression, himself below the horizon. Have you never observed that, together with the day-star, and illuminating it with its bright beams—for the day-star itself derives all its light from the sun—the beams of the sun shoot themselves upward from beneath the horizon, though the glorious orb of day himself has not yet risen in his beauty and splendour?

3. But now comes the third stage of God's shining into the heart to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. This is the *rising of the Sun*—that blessed experience of the soul of which the prophet speaks: "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." (Mal. 4:2.) Blessed is the day-star; and sweet is its appearing as the sure herald of the rising sun. But as the sun outshines the day-star, so does the full light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ outshine the first discovery of mercy in a promise; for this is the revelation of Christ to the soul in the glory of his divine Person at the right hand of the Father; and with this comes a discovery of his atoning blood and justifying righteousness, and what he is as the Christ of God, able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. This glorious discovery of the King in his beauty is the full shining in of the perfect day, which gives the clearest and brightest light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But bear in mind that all the way through, from the first dawn to "the light of the morning when the sun ariseth, even

a morning without clouds" (2 Sam. 23:4), it is only in God's light we see light; and that this light, though it varies in degree, is still the same in kind and in what it manifests. Thus when the light of life first begins to dawn upon the soul, we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, though, like the weak and tender babe, we see light and scarcely know what it is we see. And yet we know it is distinct from everything we have seen and felt before. When the dawn still spreads, and "the day-star" of promise arises in the heart, it is still the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; though we cannot call that grace and that glory ours beyond sweet hope, which however firmly anchors in them. But when the Sun of Righteousness rises with healing in his wings, and shines in glorious splendour upon the soul, then there is, at least whilst it lasts, the full light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Then Jesus Christ is seen to shine forth in all the splendour of Godhead. His eternal Sonship, as the brightness of God's glory and the express image of his Person, is seen by the eye of faith, believed in, loved, and adored. His Deity, as one with the Father and the Holy Ghost in a perfect equality of Essence shines resplendently into the heart, and he is worshipped as the only true God. His once suffering humanity, as bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, but now resplendent with ineffable glory, is seen to shine forth in union with his eternal Deity, making him a suitable Mediator between God and man; for in the Mediator God draws near to man and brings man near to God. As God, our blessed Lord is equal with God; as man he is one with man. Thus as God he stands in the presence of God as one with God; as man, he came down into the presence of man as one with man; and as God-man, he now stands in the presence of God to intercede for man.

As then these divine and blessed realities are received by faith, in the glorious discovery of them through their revelation in Christ, there is communicated to the soul the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The face of Jesus Christ is seen, and the glory of God is seen in him. The pity, compassion, love, mercy, and grace of God are all viewed by the

eye of faith as shining gloriously forth in the face of Jesus Christ; for God's face itself cannot be seen. No man can see him and live. (Exodus 33:20.) "He dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see." But he is seen in the face of Jesus Christ; for "he that hath seen him hath seen the Father." (John 14:9.) He is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) and though "no man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." (John 1:18.)

Now, the shining in of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ takes the veil of ignorance and unbelief from off the heart. The apostle therefore says that "we all with open (or, as the word should have been translated, "unveiled") face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image." (2 Cor. 3:18.) The glass of which he speaks is the glass of the gospel; for it is in it that the glory of the Lord is reflected. As, then, in the glass of the gospel, as shone upon by the rays of the Spirit, we behold by faith the glory of the Lord, there is a being "changed into the same image." This is an allusion to the appearance of the face of Moses, which was changed into the image of the glory which he beheld on Sinai's top. So, as in the glass of the gospel, the soul beholds the glory of the Lord, there is that gracious and glorious influence communicated by the Spirit of the Lord, by which it is "transformed in the renewing of the mind," "from glory to glory;" that is, from the glory of the Lord without to his glorious image within, or from one degree of gracious apprehension of his glory to another sensible reception of it.

III. But having seen *what* the treasure is, and *how* it is communicated, we will, with God's help and blessing, consider now *the place* in which it has pleased God to lodge it. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." O what an unfit casket, as we might hastily judge, for such a heavenly jewel; but stop, hasty reason; suspend thy rash judgment. It is a casket in which the only wise God has seen fit for a time to lodge it. And is not that enough? Must not infinite wisdom have devised the casket as well

as the treasure? Let us seek to justify this wisdom.

1. First, then, bear in mind that whatever the casket be, it cannot impair the *beauty* of the treasure. In the tombs of Etruria, there have been found at different times some of the most beautiful jewellery ever made by the fingers of man. In the beauty of the stones, in the excellence of the workmanship, in the harmony of the colours, in the artistic taste displayed throughout, putting to the blush all modern jewellery, there have been found jewels deposited for more than 2,000 years in the closest contact with the dust of death; for they were probably attached to the neck or arms of the corpse as they had been worn in life. But when found they came forth untarnished, unsullied, so that it is said they have been worn on the same evening on the neck of a Roman Princess. Whatsoever, then, the place may be where the treasure is lodged, however unfit it may seem to hold it, it does not sully its purity and beauty.

2. Nor does it in the slightest degree diminish its *value*. When the man in the parable found the treasure buried in the field, the clods of clay underneath where the treasure lay had not diminished the value of the gold. The Bank of England cellars, where the bullion lies in millions, are doubtless dark and gloomy enough; but all their gloom and darkness do not take away a farthing from the value of the money there lodged. If, then, God has seen fit to lodge a treasure that makes us rich for eternity in what the Holy Ghost here calls "an earthen vessel," the meanness of the casket does not impair the lustre, nor detract from the intrinsic value of the jewel.

ii. But what is meant by the expression "earthen vessels?" Four things may be intimated thereby.

1. First, the *original nature* of the base material. God made man out of the dust of the earth: "Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return." Our bodies, then, which are here spoken of, are made of clay, and therefore the *very body itself* in which the immortal soul is lodged—a soul enriched for eternity by heavenly treasure—is an earthen vessel. Common was the substance,

earthy the clay out of which the body was in the first instance created; and what was in its original nature mean and low, sin has debased beneath its native material. As the body exercises great influence over the mind, we find that our souls often cleave to the dust. This was David's feeling and confession, "My soul cleaveth to the dust" (Psal. 119:25), and must often be ours; for as our bodies are earthy, so our affections as influenced by them often grovel in the very dust of death. It is true that this does not sully or diminish the value of the heavenly treasure which is in the new man of grace; but we daily carry about with us the saddest proof that our bodies are but bodies of gross and vile clay.

2. But our bodies, as being of this earthy material, are, secondly, extremely *frail and fragile*. How soon a blow by what is called an accident—a tile, for instance, falling from a roof, might lay these earthy bodies in dust! How some lingering disease or sudden stroke of apoplexy might by a longer or shorter course lay our clay house in its last resting place. In many instances how specially frail is the body of the saint of God; for the Lord often makes him feel how soon he may be dislodged from his house of clay by sending sickness into his frame, allowing pain and aches to remind him of his mortality, or taking down his earthly tabernacle pin by pin, before the whole tent falls into its native dust.

3. Again, how *unseemly* in the eyes of men are the saints of God. An earthen vessel, especially one made to be buried in the ground, is not a pleasing object: the material is coarse and the workmanship rough. It is not a splendid china, or beautiful porcelain vase, fit for the palace of kings or the cherished treasures of a national museum, but a rough, coarse vessel, such as is used for the commonest purposes. And yet this coarse vessel made of the commonest clay and the roughest manufacture might contain a priceless treasure. Persons who hoard money are fond sometimes of lodging it in the most out-of-the-way and least suspected places. Thus there might be buried in some hole in a garden a rough, coarse, earthen vessel, say an

old flower pot. It might be cracked across by accident or by the weight of the earth, and yet it might hold a thousand sovereigns. Now if that pot were placed before your eyes, you would see only the worthlessness and frailty of the material; for you could not penetrate through the coarse, mean, and perhaps dirty walls to see the treasure within. So the saints of God walk abroad in their houses of clay, carrying in their bosom an immortal treasure. God has enriched them with the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ, and thus given them a treasure for eternity; but they are in the eyes of men mere earthen vessels; so that we may truly say of them, "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter." (Lam. 4:2.) Many of them are very poor in this world's good; others are despised for want of shining abilities; others are mean in outward appearance, so as to cut very little figure amongst the high-born, the polished, and the beautiful; and others, from natural weakness of intellect (for the Lord's people often do not shine there), are scarcely able to comport themselves as men of this world do in trade or business, and therefore draw upon themselves additional contempt. But even apart from this consideration, grace never gained favour in the eyes of a worldling: he has not eyes to see its beauty, nor a heart to admire, it, could he even see it.

4. But there is a fourth idea connected with the expression—that the vessel is sometimes *leaky*. As the apostle speaks in the Epistle to Hebrews, "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip:" (*margin*—"run out as leaking vessels;" Heb. 2:1.) How leaky, in many instances, is the mind and memory! How rarely you can carry home the contents of a sermon, or perhaps any one part of it. Whilst you are hearing it, you think you will remember and meditate upon it: but alas! it is all gone before you cross the threshold of your house, and sometimes almost before you leave the threshold of the house of God.

Now why should these things be? Why should the treasure be

deposited in a vessel so coarse in material, so rough in manufacture, so unseemly in appearance, and often so cracked and leaky? The reason is given us in the last clause of our text, and one sufficient to answer every objection. It is to *display the mighty power of God*.

IV.—"That the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

O the wondrous depths of Almighty wisdom, for God thus to secure all the glory to himself! If the casket were comparable to the jewel, how the eyes of men would admire the saints of God! How they would see the glory of God shining forth in them! One day it will be so. One day these earthly bodies will be raised up incorruptible, and shine forth gloriously in all the splendour of their full conformity to the glorified body of Christ. The immortal soul and the glorified body will one day be fit companions, and the bodies of the saints will shine forth in all the glory in which Christ appeared when transfigured upon Tabor's top. But now it is not God's will that it should be so, that he may have all the glory. If we could be what we wish to be in spiritual moments, our carnal mind would take advantage of it to puff us up with spiritual pride; we should be drawn aside from a sense of our weakness, sinfulness, and helplessness, and stand before God and man as Lucifer stood in that fearful moment when pride entered his heart, and he was hurled from heaven's battlements into the abyss of hell. Therefore, that the excellency of the power in keeping the treasure from being spilt; in preserving the fear of God alive in the heart; in upholding faith and hope and love and every spiritual grace; in maintaining our standing in the midst of a thousand foes and fears—that the excellency of this Almighty power may be of God and not of us, it has pleased the Lord to lodge the treasure of his grace in an earthen vessel. And observe the force and beauty of the expression, "the *excellency* of the power!" It is not ordinary power, but power so surpassing, power so glorious, power so worthy of all the perfections of God, that his own divine excellency is impressed upon it with the brightest lustre.

Be not surprised, therefore, if you feel that in yourself you are but an earthen vessel; if you are made deeply and daily sensible unto what a frail body God has communicated divine light and life. Be not surprised if your clay house is often tottering; if sickness sometimes assails your mortal tabernacle; if in your flesh there dwelleth no good thing; if your soul often cleaves to the dust; and if you are unable to retain a sweet sense of God's goodness and love. Be not surprised nor startled at the corruptions of your depraved nature, at the depth of sin in your carnal mind; at the vile abominations which lurk and work in your deceitful and desperately wicked heart. Bear in mind that it is the will of God that this heavenly treasure which makes you rich for eternity should be lodged in an earthen vessel. We are to carry about a daily sense of our base original to hide pride from our eyes. We are to be despised by others, and by none so much as by our own selves. We have ever to feel our native weakness, and that without Christ we can do nothing; that we may be clothed with humility, and feel ourselves the chief of sinners, and less than the least of all saints. We thus learn to prize the heights, breadths, lengths, and depths of the love of Christ, who stooped so low to raise us up so high.

But all these humbling considerations and feelings will be made to work together for our spiritual good. We shall learn experimentally and feelingly from them—the only true way of learning—that Christ's strength is made perfect in weakness; we shall ascribe all our salvation and sanctification to the power of God; we shall give all the glory to him to whom glory belongs; we shall be willing for a few weeks or months or years to "bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our body;" nay, we shall be reconciled to have the heavenly treasure in our earthen vessel, in the sweet hope that when the vessel is broken and its contents shed by the iron hand of death, the treasure will not be lost, but that it will be borne on high to be safe in the bosom of God till we shall be clothed upon with a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. If blessed with this faith and hope, we shall be

reconciled to death and the dissolution of the earthly tabernacle, in the blessed persuasion that a glorious body awaits us in the resurrection morn; and that when the glorified body and the glorified soul are re-united, they will meet and embrace each other with mutual joy, and so we shall be for ever with the Lord.

Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday Evening, August 15, 1844

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." 2 Cor. 4:7

How different is the estimate that faith makes of riches, honours, and comforts from that made by the world and the flesh! The world has no idea of riches but such as consist in gold and silver, in houses, lands, or other tangible property; no thought of honour, but such as man has to bestow; and no notion of comfort, except in "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." But the soul that is anointed by an "unction from the Holy One," takes a different estimate of these matters, and feels that the only true riches are those of God's grace in the heart, that the only real honour is that which cometh from God, and that the only solid comfort is that which is imparted by the Holy Ghost to a broken and contrite spirit. Now, just in proportion as we have the Spirit of God, shall we take faith's estimate of riches, honour, and comfort; and just so much as we are imbued with the spirit of the world, shall we take the flesh's estimate of these things.

When the eye of the world looked on the Apostles, it viewed them as a company of poor ignorant men, a set of wild enthusiasts, that travelled about the country preaching concerning one Jesus, who they said, had been crucified, and was risen from the dead. The natural eye saw no beauty, no power, no glory in the truths they brought forth: nor did it see that the poor perishing tabernacles of these outcast men contained in them a heavenly treasure; and that they would one day shine as the stars for ever and ever, whilst those who despised their word would sink into endless woe.

The spirit of the world, and the views that the flesh takes are not altered now. Nature ever remains the same, and can never understand or love the things of eternity; it can only look to, and

can only rest upon the poor perishing things of time and sense. By this test, therefore, we may in a measure try our state. What, for instance, are our daily and hourly feelings about the things of time and sense, and what about the things of eternity? Which of the two press with more power on our minds, which occupy more of our thoughts, which are laid up more warmly in our affections? And just in proportion as the solemn things of eternity, or the things of time and sense, occupy our mind; just so much as our hearts are fixed upon heaven or earth; just so much as we are living to God, or to ourselves, in the same degree is the strength of our faith, and the depth of the work of grace upon our conscience.

The Apostle, in the text, speaks of "*a Treasure;*" and he tells where this treasure was lodged, "*in Earthen Vessels.*" And he gives us also the Reason why it was lodged there, "*that the excellency of the power might be of God, and not of us.*"

If, then, we look at the text in these three points of view, and consider—1. What *the treasure* is.—2. In what *vessel* it is lodged.—and 3. *Why* it is lodged there, we shall, if God enable us, perhaps see something of the mind of the Spirit in the passage before us.

I.—Our first business, then, is to examine—*What this treasure is.* For the Apostle says expressly, "*We have this treasure.*" But in order to understand what he means by the expression, we must look back a little to what he had been speaking of in the preceding verses. He says (4:6), "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. *But we have this treasure.*" This, then, is the treasure—*God shining into the heart to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ.* Wherever, therefore, he has so shined into the heart as to give that light, to bestow that knowledge, to communicate that grace, *there* is the treasure: and where "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" has never so shined, *there* this treasure is altogether wanting.

But to understand the expression, "*treasure*," we must bear in mind, that, in ancient times, money was for the most part hoarded: it was not, as in our day, invested, and put out to interest; but generally locked up and carefully preserved, as jewels, coin, or bullion. Thus, we read of "the treasures of the king's house, which Shishak took away, (1 Kings 14:26); and of "the treasuries" which King Hezekiah made. "And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels." (2 Chr. 32:27.)

1. Treasure *makes a man rich*. This is the leading idea connected with the word. So spiritually, the man who possesses this inward light shining into his heart is rich indeed; and in the possession of it his wealth consists.

2. But there is another idea connected with the word "treasure." Treasure was often *hidden*. We read, for instance, of "treasures hid in the sand." (Deut. 33:19); and the Lord compares the kingdom of heaven to "treasure hid in a field." (Matt. 13:44.) It was the custom of wealthy men in ancient times, through fear of robbery and violence, to conceal their treasures by burying them in the earth. The Apostle seems to have an allusion to this in the text, "We have this treasure *in earthen vessels*;" it being the custom to put the treasure, when thus buried, into earthen vessels, in order to keep it safely, and prevent the gold and silver from being scattered about.

But what is this treasure spiritually? 1. One part of it is *light*. The Apostle expressly says, "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." This light springs from the Spirit's inward revelation of the truth of God with power to the conscience. There is always light in a new-born soul, which distinguishes it from those dead in sin. As the Apostle says, "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." (2 Cor. 4:3, 4.) When a man is walking in the darkness and death of unregeneracy, he has no true light. He may indeed have a false light, as the light of presumption, delusion, or vain-confidence; but all such borrowed light is worse than darkness; as the Lord says, "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt. 6:23.) There is very much of this false light abroad in the world. Men's judgments get notionally enlightened, as we read, Heb. 6:4: "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened." This light resides in the carnal mind, and has its seat in the judgment; but there is no unctuous power, no divine feeling attending it. It is not the light of the Holy Ghost in a regenerate heart, but a dry light, floating merely in the brain. It is not the light "sown for the righteous;" nor "the shining light" that beams upon "the path of the just;" nor "the light" that, together with "truth," God "sends out to bring us to his holy hill and to his tabernacles." (Psa. 43:3.) No conviction of sin, no humility of soul, no meekness of spirit ever accompanies it. This dead and dry light never touches the conscience, never penetrates through the veil spread over the heart, never sinks deep into the soul; it never brings a man upon his knees to cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" It never discovers to its possessor the hypocrisy, pride, presumption, and deceitfulness of his heart; it never shows to him the holy character of God, and gives him in his light to see light.

The only saving light is the light of God shining into the soul, giving us to see and know "the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." A man may have the clearest light in his judgment, and yet never have the penetrating light of the Spirit producing conviction in his soul; he may have the soundest knowledge of the doctrines of grace, and see the harmonious scheme of salvation; and yet never have seen a holy God by divine teaching, nor have ever felt the spirituality of God's righteous law condemning him as a transgressor.

But "the light of life," as the Lord calls it, is sure to guide its possessor aright. If we have it not, we shall be sure to go astray; we shall be entangled in some error, plunge into some heresy, imbibe some doctrine of devils, drink into some awful delusion, or fall into some dreadful sin, and "concerning faith make shipwreck." A false light is something like the light which Pirates hold up to entrap ships to their destruction; or like the fires, which the "wreckers," those dreadful characters in Cornwall, used to kindle on their iron-bound coast, in order that the mariner might mistake them for some friendly light-house, and run his vessel on the rocks, where those heartless wretches plundered it. A false light can but wreck us on the rocks of presumption or despair. But the light of divine life in the soul is accompanied with all the graces of the Spirit. It is the light of the glory of God, the light of Jesus' countenance, and the light of the Spirit's teaching, and therefore an infallible Guide and Guard; as the Apostle says, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things." (1 John 2:20.) And this infallible pilot will guide the soul to whom it is given safe into the harbour of endless rest and peace.

2. But the treasure, of which the Apostle speaks, not only consists of light, but of *life* also. Light and life go together. Where light is imparted, life is communicated; and it is in the enjoyment of divine life, as much as in the possession of divine light, that this heavenly treasure consists. A man may have much light in his judgment, and no life in his soul; but if he have life in his soul, he must have a measure of light in his judgment; though he may not be so clear in the doctrinal knowledge of the scheme of salvation as many that have light in the judgment, and no inward, spiritual life.

But, wherever there is life, there will also be *feeling*. This is the sure evidence of life: for just in proportion to the depth and reality of life, will be the depth and reality of feeling. Some condemn all feeling: and say, "Away with your frames and feelings." But what awful language is this to come from the lips of men! For if we have no feeling, what religion have we? We have not a grain more of religion than we have of feeling. For instance;

if sin lie upon my conscience, can I know anything of the guilt of it, except I feel it? If pardon be revealed to my heart, can I know anything of pardon, if I do not feel it? If I am in bondage, is there not a feeling of bondage? And if in liberty, is there not a feeling of liberty? Can we touch an object without feeling? Can we see an object without feeling? Can we hear a sound without feeling? Can we move a single step forward without feeling? What is the greatest misery of a paralytic? Is it not that he is without feeling? Is it not his cry, "O that I could have some feeling in my paralysed limb, or paralysed side!" There is death in it, because there is no feeling in it. How awful, then, it is to hear ministers saying, "Away with your frames and feelings!" when we have no more true religion than we have of feeling? If I fear God, I fear in feeling; if I believe in God, I believe in feeling; if I love God, I love in feeling. If I rise to the highest point of assurance, I rise there in feeling; and if I sink to the lowest depth of despondency, I can only sink there in feeling. In fact, I know nothing but by feeling. Just in proportion to the depth of the work of the Spirit on my conscience, will be the depth of feeling in my soul. You wives and husbands, what would you think of your partners telling you they loved you without feeling? You parents, can you love your children without feeling? or you children, can you love your parents without feeling? When love is in exercise, we find there the deepest feeling; and when love is not in exercise, there is the absence of feeling. When we are in trouble, are we not troubled in feeling? and when we are glad, are we not glad in feeling? To say, then, "Away with your frames and feelings," is to cut down all vital godliness. It is like a man at work in a garden, who should pull up all the flowers, and leave only the weeds; or cut down every fruit-tree, and spare all the nettles, thistles, and brambles. So to cut down, or attempt to cut down frames and feelings, (for being the work of the Spirit, they never can be cut down) under the idea of setting up a faith without them, is but to pluck up (if the hand of man could do so) every fruit of God's planting in the soul, and leave nothing but the thorns, thistles, and briars of vain-confidence and presumption. O that we had more feeling! It is this which condemns us, that we have so little of it. Is it not wretched to have no feeling under the word?—to be

as hard as the seats we sit upon? And, on the contrary, when we hear with feeling, is it not sweet to our souls? When we read the word, is it not blessed to read with feeling? When we pray, is it not sweet to pray with feeling? When in conversation with God's people, is it not sweet to converse with feeling? And when attending to ordinances, and partaking of the Lord's supper, is it not sweet to be engaged in them with feeling? How miserably shut up and cold the soul is when it has no feeling! And how condemned the conscience is, when we go through these things in a hard and vain-confident manner.

A main branch, then, of this "treasure" is *life*. And wherever there is life, there will be feeling in proportion to the depth of that life. By this life we feel a fear to offend God, and have a desire to please him; by this life we groan under the weight of sin; by this life we breathe out our desires after the manifestations of his mercy and grace; and by this life we receive into our heart and conscience the Lord of life and glory. The work of the Spirit of God is to communicate this life, and to keep it bright and burning in the soul; when desponding, to revive; when drooping, to raise up; when cast down, to comfort; and from time to time to keep it alive by pouring in the oil of his own heavenly grace.

3. But another branch of this heavenly treasure is, *the fear of God*; as we read, "*The fear of the Lord is his treasure.*" (Isa. 33:6.) And O, what a treasure is this! Treasure, as I have hinted, in ancient times was generally hidden; it was concealed from the eye of man, hoarded up, and not brought out ostentatiously to view. Wealthy men of old hid the knowledge of their treasures, lest they should be spoiled of them by the hand of violence. So spiritually, the fear of the Lord is hidden in the heart, and lies deep in the soul; it is not spread out ostentatiously to view, but is buried out of sight in a man's conscience.

But though hidden from others, and sometimes even from ourselves, this "fear of the Lord" will act as circumstances draw it forth. There may be times and seasons when we seem almost hardened and conscience seared; sin appears to have such power

over us, and evil thoughts and desires so carry us away, that we cannot trace one atom of godly fear within; and the soul cries, "What will become of me! Where am I going now! What will come next on such a wretch as I feel myself to be!" But place him in such circumstances, say as befell Joseph, then he will find that the "fear of the Lord," is in him a fountain of life, a holy principle springing up in his soul. Thus, this fear, which is a part of the heavenly treasure, acts when most needed. And the more the life of God is felt in the soul, the more the fear of God flows forth as a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death. The more lively the grace of God is in the soul, the more lively will godly fear be in the heart; and the more the Spirit of God works with power in the conscience, the deeper will be the fear of God in the soul.

Now, there is a fear "which hath torment," a slavish fear, which devils and carnal men have, and which is cast out by love; (1 John 4:18) and there is another fear, filial or godly fear, a member of the new man, an effect of divine teaching, a fruit of the Spirit. This godly fear love does not cast out, but strengthens. The highest angel must stand in fear of God. The great and glorious majesty of Jehovah must cause even those pure and bright spirits to fear before him. The seraphim, whom Isaiah saw in the temple, "covered their face." (6:2.) However high, then, faith may rise, fear will be its constant companion; the greater the faith, the stronger the fear; the more sweet the confidence, the more will fear work with it. So that, the higher the soul rises in blessed confidence, the higher will fear mount up with that faith, so as to keep it from ever soaring on the wings of presumption. Fear is, as it were, a ballast to faith; and thus, however high faith may mount, godly fear and holy reverence of God will mount up side by side with it; and though faith may penetrate into the very presence of God, it will not be deserted by this blessed companion; for reverence and godly fear will accompany it even to the throne room of the King of kings. The Apostle therefore says, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a

consuming fire." (Heb. 12:28, 29.) It is this blessed companion that so distinguishes true from false faith; the confidence that God gives his people, from the daring presumption of those dead in a profession. These have no filial fear, no reverence of God, no trembling apprehension of his dread Majesty; but they make to themselves wings of vain confidence and presumption, and soar aloft on these self-constructed pinions, till they fall from the heaven of their own imagination into the awful ocean of never-ending woe.

This filial fear dwelt in the human nature of Jesus. "The Spirit of the Lord," we read, "shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge *and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord.*" (Isa. 11:2, 3.) With every other grace of the Spirit, the "fear of the Lord" was in Christ's human nature. So that, in proportion to the fulness with which he was anointed, was the fulness of the holy fear that dwelt in him.

4. Another part of this heavenly treasure is, *faith*. For it is only so far as God gives us faith that we can spiritually realize the things that the Lord has prepared for those that love him. There is this difference between the faith of the operation of the Spirit of God, that dwells in a regenerate heart, and vain-confidence—that true faith ebbs and flows in the soul, but vain-confidence stands always on a level. Faith is a fountain that gives out, more or less, gushing water, but vain-confidence and presumption are always at one and the same stand. They resemble the water in the London Docks, which has no ebbings and flowings like the River Thames, but is shut in by gates, so as always to preserve the same level. And you know what is the nature of water that neither runs, nor ebbs and flows; it is always stagnant, and often stinking. And so with vain-confident professors: they have no afflictions, and no consolations; are never cast down by the temptations of Satan, and never raised up by deliverance and manifestations. Their religion preserves one constant level; they can always believe, and always confide, always see their interest,

always talk about religion, and always say, "My Father and my God." Their soul knows nothing of the ups and downs that God's people experience.

True faith I may call the *grand tidal wave* of the soul. I will endeavour to explain the expression. We see the River Thames day by day ebbing and flowing. What causes this change? You answer, "it is produced by the sea in the Channel alternately coming up and retiring." It is a true explanation. But what makes the sea of the Channel alternately come up and retire? There is what is called, "a grand tidal wave," that comes across the Atlantic Ocean, which, as it ebbs and flows, affects all the minor tides of the neighbouring seas; and thus the tide of the Channel, and that of the River Thames, ebb and flow in unison with this huge Atlantic wave. In the same way faith is the tidal wave of the soul; and all the graces and fruits of the Spirit ebb and flow just as faith rises, or just as faith sinks. If faith rises in the soul, all the graces and fruits of the Spirit rise with it; light increases, life is deepened, the fear of God strengthened, hope brightened, and love augmented. And when this great tidal wave of faith falls in the soul, all the minor tides of the Spirit's graces fall in unison with it. Thus when faith recedes and becomes low in the soul, all the other graces of the Spirit sink with it; consolation ebbs out altogether, hope recedes to a narrow streamlet, life dwindles to a scanty current, and love is reduced to a shallow channel. And as in the Thames we see, at low tide, the muddy banks which the stream has forsaken, so as faith sinks to a low ebb in the soul, there seems little else left but the mud and mire of corruption. But what makes the grand tidal wave itself move? There is a cause for that also. It is drawn up by, and obeys the attraction of the sun. And is not this true spiritually of the grand tidal wave of faith in the soul? Is it not drawn up by the Sun of Righteousness, as the natural sun draws up the wave of the ocean, and makes it ebb and flow? And when that glorious Sun ceases to draw up faith, does it not ebb and sensibly sink in the soul, as the natural sea sinks when the sun recedes from it?

5. *Hope* also—I mean a "good hope through grace," arising out of

the Spirit's work in the soul and from a divine testimony in the conscience, a hope that rests not upon the opinions of men, but upon the mercy of God—this "good hope through grace" is also a part of the heavenly treasure.

6. And so with *Love*; for the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, producing love to the Lord and love to the Lord's people, makes a man rich indeed. This divine gift is, indeed, a conspicuous part and main branch of the heavenly treasure which God puts within the soul.

In fact, grace, with all its various fruits, communications, and gifts; especially, Christ in the heart, the hope of glory, revealed and made known there by the power of God, form this treasure. He who possesses it is rich indeed. And though he be a pauper, whose lot is to live and die in a Union Workhouse; to be thrust when dead into an elm shell, and buried at the expense of the parish, with no follower to his lowly grave, and no tombstone to mark the date of his birth and death; yet the riches of this poor despised man far exceeds those of the most opulent banker that rolls in his carriage, or of the wealthiest peer who lives and dies an enemy to sovereign grace.

II.—But the Apostle tells us *where* this treasure is lodged: "We have this treasure *in earthen vessels*." These earthen vessels are our bodies, those miserable tabernacles of clay; as we read, "For we know that if our *earthly house of this tabernacle* were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Cor. 5:1.) But what an unsuitable receptacle for such a treasure! What a mean casket for such a jewel! Christ in the heart, the hope of glory; light, love, and immortality; the earnest and the first fruits of eternal bliss, and of that glory which will make the saints shine brighter than the stars for ever and ever;—that all this unspeakably rich treasure, which neither the tongue of men or angels can describe, should be lodged in a poor, crippled, aching, diseased, corruptible body! O what a disparity between the casket and the jewel! What a difference between the precious treasure and the contemptible

vessel in which it is deposited!

But what do we understand by the expression, "*earthen*" vessel? It means a vessel made of clay, common clay; an earthen pitcher, such as stands in every poor man's cottage. What do we gather then from this idea?

1. *First*, that of *great meanness*. What vessel can be so common as one made of clay? It is not a porcelain, or china vase that the Apostle speaks of, compounded by all the skill of Wedgwood, and gilded and painted, such as a nobleman puts for ornament on his mantelpiece; but a common, earthen vessel, made of baked clay. Is not this true in grace? Whom for the most part does the Lord cause to be partakers of this treasure? Those whom men admire? The beautiful, the noble, the learned, the wealthy? Few of such are the Lord's people; but he has chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith; those who have nothing to recommend them in the eyes of the world, and possess nothing in outward appearance to attract the admiring sense and reason.

2. But again, if we look at the expression "earthen vessel," it denotes something *frail*. How soon the earthen pitcher is broken at the well! Our poor tabernacles, how frail they are! How soon can sickness cut them down! A piece of falling timber, a blow from a passing carriage, may at once break to pieces this frail tabernacle! Health, strength, and vigour are no security: a raging fever in a few days may cut off the strongest man, or what is called "an accident" may in a moment deprive him of life. I believe, for the most part, the Lord, in his providential dealings with his people, makes them know the frailty of their clay tabernacles. Very few of the living family have strong healthy bodies; nearly all of them are afflicted with some ailment or disease; and many have lingering complaints, so as scarcely to know a single day's ease from pain, so that nearly the whole of their lives they are kept alive by miracle, and yet are immortal till their work is done.

3. Another idea is that of *corruption*. Earth, clay, dirt, are words

nearly allied to each other; the expression, "earthen vessel," may well then refer to our earthly, fallen, sensual nature.

4. Another idea contained in the figure may be, that the earthen vessel *leaks*; it cannot hold wine or milk put into it. Now, is not this true with respect to the good things which God puts into the heart? If we have a sweet frame, we cannot keep it; if we have a blessed feeling we cannot retain it; if we hear well under a sermon, it soon leaks out. At least it is so with us in the country; though I believe in London they have a patent method of glazing their vessels to prevent their leakage; for I understand there are preachers and professors here whose strength, wisdom, comfort, and confidence never leak out. I myself have never yet discovered this secret; I have not yet learnt how to compound this patent glaze; for I find the sweetest feelings soon leak away, and leave the soul as dry as ever.

III.—But the Apostle tell us, *why* it is, that the treasure is put into earthen vessels—*"that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."* That is the reason which the Holy Ghost gives, why the treasure is put into the earthen vessel. If they were put into golden vessels, then "the excellency of the power" would not be of God: gold being a vessel unconsumable by fire, would of itself keep the treasure unharmed. If the casket were indestructible and unconsumable, it would not want the power of God to preserve the treasure there. But it is put into an earthen vessel, into a frail tabernacle, a poor weak body, a feeble frame, for this express purpose, that the casket may not glory in its power to hold the heavenly treasure. If we had power in ourselves to retain what God gives; if we could keep the faith that God communicates, maintain the hope that he inspires, preserve alive the love which he sheds abroad, nurture the sweet frame, or cherish in our bosoms the divine sensations that God the Spirit enkindles there, "the excellency of power" would be of us; and we should "sacrifice to our own net, and burn incense to our own drag." We should not know whence the power came; we should not believe that God was the author and finisher of faith in the soul, and of every atom of hope and love in the heart. But when

we find and feel that the treasure is in an earthen vessel, defiled with sin; in a frail heart, perpetually leaking out the wine which God communicates, then we begin to learn that grand and important secret, that "the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us." If we see the light, we know it must come down from God into our conscience, for we cannot create nor keep it. If we feel life, we cannot preserve it. If we find faith in exercise, we know not how to retain it. If we have hope, we are sure that God is the author of it, and that he too must keep it alive. If we have any love, God, we know, gave it, and he alone can keep it in lively exercise. But were the casket at all in proportion to the treasure it contains; if the Spirit of God dwelt in a pure and spotless soul, free from frailty, imperfection, or backsliding, so that there were no workings of a depraved nature and of a sensual, filthy heart, we should begin to think that "the excellency of the power" was of us; and we should glory in our own strength, wisdom, righteousness, and knowledge, and the actings of our own faith, hope, and love. But this the Lord will not suffer. "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." (Jer. 9:23, 24.)

But when the Lord puts this treasure into *earthen* vessels, and we find that except the Lord keep alive his work in the soul, according to our feelings, it goes out; that we have no more power to retain it, than we had power at first to create it; *then* we learn to ascribe to him every good we receive; and that wretched presumption, self-righteousness, and self-conceit of which our hearts are full, get their death-blow. It becomes stamped on our feelings that "the excellency of the power" is not of ourselves; that what we are, we are by God's making; what we have, we have by God's giving; and what we know, we know by God's teaching.

But observe the words, for they will bear looking at: "*The excellency of the power.*" It does not merely say, "power," but "*the excellency of the power.*" As though the Apostle would call our minds to observe the excellency, the surpassing excellency of this power. It would not require (so to speak) so much power to be displayed on God's part, were we not what we are. If we were not so deeply sunk in carnality, it would not require "the excellency of the power" to make us spiritual. If we were not so buried in the world, it would not shew forth the excellency of God's power to make us heavenly-minded, and draw our affections upward. If we were not so full of unbelief, if our hearts did not continually breed infidelity, questionings, doubtings, and fearings, it would not require such "excellency of the power" of God to communicate the gift of faith to the soul. If we never desponded through the temptations of Satan, the besetments of our vile nature, and the many difficulties met with in the way, we should not feel that we required "the excellency of God's power" to keep alive a good hope in the soul. If we never felt cold and dead in our affections, and as unable to bring forth one spiritual desire as to create a world, we should not want "the excellency of the power" displayed in communicating to our souls heavenly love and affection. If we had no trials and perplexities, and did not find that we could not muster up a grain of patience to bear them, we should not feel our need of "the excellency of the power" to support us under them. If we were never distressed in our minds, and felt that we had no power to speak peace or comfort to our souls, we should not want "the excellency of the power" to be of God to comfort us. And so we might say of every other grace. So that the more we are led into this divine secret, that this treasure is in "earthen vessels," and the more we feel the disparity between the casket and the jewel, the more we see "the excellency of the power" of God; and how that excellency is displayed in the various circumstances by which we are surrounded; in the leadings of God's providence, and in his dealings with us in grace. God is a jealous God; and he will not share his glory with man: he will have all the glory to himself. But you and I are such base wretches, that we would rob the Lord himself of his glory, if he did not teach us otherwise. If he did not

open up to us the depth of our corruption, and shew us the depravity that lurks and works in our carnal minds: if he did not cover our faces with shame; if he did not put us in the furnace to burn out our pride, and drag us through the water to drown our hypocrisy; if he did not humble us under a daily sense of our frailty and feebleness, we should soon want to sit down on the same throne with the Lord, and share the glory of salvation with him. But when we carry about with us such repeated evidences of our base original, and see and feel what earthen vessels the treasure is lodged in, we come to this conclusion, that we have no light, life, faith, hope, love, nor any one good thing unless God give it us, and work it in us; unless it come from his hand, and is wrought in our soul by his divine operation. And thus we learn, that "the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us." But if I could always keep a sweet frame, or nurture a pleasant feeling; if I could always command the Spirit of God; if I could go when I pleased to the Bank of heaven, draw a cheque, and receive over the counter the amount I wished, how could I know that "the excellency of the power" is of God? But the more deeply we sink into creature helplessness, and the more experimentally we are acquainted with creature weakness, the more we learn that "the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us." It is to teach us this, that we so often feel the chisel and mallet, chipping and hacking off all the patent glazing that presumption and vain-confidence would fain smear over our vessel. And is it not a mercy to have this "covering which is not of God's Spirit" stripped off? to know nothing except what God teaches us; and to have nothing from day to day, and from hour to hour, but what God works in us?

But there is one more remark to which I must call your attention, and that is, that *the treasure is not defiled by the earthen vessel*. Gold and silver, those precious metals, take no injury, receive no spot of corruption from the vessel in which they are contained: let them be buried in the damp earth, no tarnish or rust form upon them. So spiritually, the grace of God in the heart, surrounded as it is with corruption, is not tarnished by it; the heavenly treasure is not contaminated, though lodged in an earthly vessel. Christ in

the heart is not defiled by the inward workings of depravity, and by the base thoughts that strive perpetually against his grace, any more than the gold of the Bank of England is defiled by the dark and damp cellars in which it is stowed. And what a mercy it is, that our corruptions cannot tarnish the grace of God; that our unbelief cannot mix with, and adulterate the faith of God's elect; that our despondency cannot spoil and ruin a gospel hope; that our deadness, darkness, coldness, and rebellion cannot mingle with and defile the love of God in the soul! This heavenly treasure remains still as unpolluted and pure as when God first put it there; being a part of "the divine nature," it remains uncontaminated by the filth and corruption that surround it. Is not this a mercy for God's tried people, that spiritual knowledge, living faith, gospel hope, heavenly love, and the fruits and graces of God's Spirit in the soul can never be defiled; but, like the streams of a fountain, are ever gushing forth in pure water? What a blessing it is, that the pure grace of God in a man's heart cannot be contaminated by the filthy streams that are dashing from a vile nature against it, like the torrents of water from a fire-engine against a burning house, but remains as pure as when God the Spirit first breathed it into the soul.

Now, may not this clear up to some poor child of God here why it is that he is so tried and exercised; why he has so many desponding thoughts, why his soul at times sinks so low, and why it is that he is so tossed about, harassed, burdened, and plagued with the darts of infidelity; why he feels so little Godward; and why he feels so much of nature, sense, and reason working in him? It is because you have the treasure in an earthen vessel. That is the reason. But do you not sometimes find that there is a treasure in your heart, something you would not part with for a thousand worlds? Something spiritual, something heavenly, something holy, something blessed, something that lifts up your heart Godward, something that brings eternal things near; and something that at times enables you to trample upon the world, all its riches, all its honours, and all its pleasures? If you feel this, you have a treasure, though lodged in an earthen vessel, that "the excellency of the power may be of God," and not of you; that

he may have all the glory, and that you and I may not be able to take one atom, one grain of praise to ourselves.

And this, too, is the reason why so many of God's people carry about with them a frail, weak, and afflicted tabernacle;—that they may not take pleasure in the things of time and sense; and to shew them that their affections are not to be set here below, but where Jesus sits, at the right hand of God.

I here close my labours for this year among you, this being my Farewell discourse. And I do sincerely desire that the Lord may bless Zoar; for I have felt, I believe, a measure of spiritual union and communion with the Lord's people who attend here. My soul's desire, then, is, that the Lord would shine upon, and be with you; that he would come up with the men of God whom he is pleased to send to stand up, from time to time, in this pulpit; and manifest more and more, that he is present here to make the place of his feet glorious, and to bless you of a truth.