

THE LESSER EPISTLES



LIGHT AND TRUTH:
BIBLE THOUGHTS AND THEMES IV

BY HORATIUS BONAR



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By Horatius Bonar, D.D.

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I.

The Substitution And The Deliverance

"Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from the present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father."—

Galatians 1:4.

Paul writes with authority, as the bearer of a divine commission and the speaker of divine words; there is no hesitation, yet there is no boasting. In no sense is his apostleship a human one; it is neither of nor by man, neither its source nor its channel human. It is heavenly, and therefore authoritative. He comes in Christ's name and in the Father's. He is the representative of both; he derives his authority from both. He does not speak like an ancient sage, 'I think,' or 'I suppose,' or 'I guess;' but 'I know.' God has taught him, called him, lent him out; and he speaks accordingly. He does not compromise his position, nor apologize for what might be called his 'intolerance,' nor admit the possibility of his being wrong. 'I am God's messenger, Christ's apostle; I know it. He speaks with certainty, as one who is telling God's mind in God's words,— as one who claims to be believed, because delivering an authentic message from God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.

Then, with apostolic authority, he gives his blessing, wishing for the Galatian brethren (backsliders though they were) that free love and peace which come from God the Father, and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. In that blessing everything was wrapped up; for he who has the free love of the Father and the Son, has everything.

In our text (verse 4) we note three things: the great propitiation; the great deliverance; the great purpose. We take the last first, as it is the source of all.

I. The great purpose.—'According to the will of Him who is our God and Father.' The coming of the Son, His giving Himself for our sins, our deliverance from the world, are all the fruits and developments of a divine will, an eternal purpose, 'the good pleasure of His will.' Respecting this purpose let us note,—

(1.) It is a purpose of love.—'God so loved the world, that he gave His Son.'

Christ did not come to procure or purchase this love, but to show it, and to carry it out. 'God is love,' and His purpose corresponds to this. That purpose is often viewed as stern and severe; as if its object were to limit the love; as if it took advantage of us at every point; as if it were anxious to repel us, or to find out reasons why we should not be saved, or to discover some flaw in our faith which would give God the opportunity of casting us away. How unlike the love of God! How unlike the Shepherd seeking His lost sheep, or the Father seeking His lost son! But God's will is love, not hatred: 'Herein is love, not that we loved Him, but that He loved us.' How unutterably gracious, tender, pitiful, towards our world is Jehovah!

(2.) It is a purpose of wisdom.—The wisdom of Godhead is here; a wisdom surpassing far that which is exhibited anywhere else. 'It is the wisdom of God.' The Father's purpose in sending Him, was the embodiment and the manifestation of infinite wisdom.

(3.) It is a purpose of righteousness.—Righteousness is in it all; yet not a righteousness that is against the sinner, but for him. God's righteous will is the revelation of His grace, and His grace is the revelation of His righteous will. There is no conflict between the two; for this righteousness is not remorseless severity, but the righteousness of loving-kindness and tender mercy.

(4.) It is purpose of power.—It is the will of Omnipotence; it embodies irresistible power. 'Who hath resisted His will?' It shall succeed, and be carried out in every part. This power is not that of a tyrant; for Jehovah is no Moloch nor Baal, but the loving Father, who has no pleasure in the death of the sinner. That power is not against the sinner, but for him. It does not frown on any; even to those who resist it, it stretches out the hand of grace, offering help. God's purpose does not hamper, nor narrow, nor modify His grace. It is not the purpose of an enemy, or a hater, or of one seeking to take advantage of our weakness.

II. The great propitiation.—This propitiation is here described—(1.) As Christ's gift; (2.) Christ's gift of Himself; (3.) Christ's gift for our sins.

(1.) Christ's gift: He gave!—He gave freely; He gave lovingly; He gave gladly; His was a free-will offering in the highest sense. He is the great giver. Sometimes we read of the Father giving, and sometimes of the Son. In both cases it is a gift. The basis of propitiation is a free gift; the gift of divine love.

(2.) Christ's gift of Himself.—Sometimes we read of the Father's gift of the Son, —'He spared not his Son, but delivered Him up;' sometimes we read of the Son's giving Himself. The Son's gift of Himself was like that of the Father, 'an unspeakable gift.' The Father so loved the world as to give His Son, and the Son so loved the world as to give Himself. He gave Himself to 'become flesh,' to be born, to live, to die for us. His gift of Himself did not stop short of death. He was willing to die as well as live for us. His was love stronger than death.

(3.) Christ's gift for our sins.—It was as a sacrifice that He gave Himself; not merely to benefit the sinner in some general way, but to expiate sin by blood shedding. It was as a sacrificial gift, that He came into the world and went up to the cross. 'By Himself He purged our sins;' He 'put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.' It is as the great and divine sin-bearer that He presents Himself to us, having finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness; so having borne our sins, that He has left nothing for us to bear, and nothing for us to do, in securing remission. What He has done, obtains the pardon for us; and God has given us such a testimony to this completed propitiation, that simply in crediting it, we enter into favor. Along with the testimony there is the promise, that 'whoever believes has life;' still it is the belief of God's testimony that secures the favor. These two ought to go together; but sometimes we find men saying, We believe, but we don't know whether we are justified. Well, it is the believing the testimony that brings the pardon; but it is the belief of the promise that brings the sense of pardon. Why should we take the former without the latter? Is it not better not only to be safe, but to know that we are so; not only to credit the testimony, but to grasp the promise annexed to it? The former saves, the latter makes us feel safe. By the former, God is satisfied; by the latter, we are satisfied.

III. The great deliverance.—'That He might deliver us from this present evil world.' There are two worlds (or ages): this present age, which is evil, and the future or coming age, which is good. To this present age we all belong by nature. It is at once our birthplace, our home, and our prison. This present world is altogether evil: 'The whole world lieth in wickedness.' By birth we belong to it, and we walk 'according to the course of this world,' until the Spirit of God turns our feet into the narrow way. Christ's object in dying for our sins was, that He might draw us out of this Egypt, this Babylon, this present evil world; for

they who belong to it are not only under wrath just now, and void of peace or hope, but they are heirs of eternal sorrow and despair. This deliverance is in all senses great,—great because it required the death of the Son of God; great because of the evil delivered from; great because of the glory bestowed. Nothing less than the sacrificial death of the Son of God could deliver us. That which He has done, makes it a righteous thing that the prey should be taken from the mighty, even the god of this world. Consider 'this present evil world' as a prison; the sacrificial death of Christ was needed for the opening of its gates, and bringing forth its prisoners. Consider it as a lazarus or hospital; this same death was needed ere the medicine could be prepared and administered to the sick, or one cure effected. Consider it as a shipwrecked vessel; this same death was needed to provide the lifeboat for the rescue of the perishing mariners. Consider it as a great snare, or spell or palace of enchantment; this death was needed to break that spell, and to disenchant the palace, and to bring forth the victims of the snare. Nothing less than that sin-atonement death, that sin-bearing sacrifice, could accomplish such deliverances. All must be done in righteousness. The evil which had fallen on the world was righteous evil,—deserved punishment; and the undoing of that evil must be righteous too.

But now that the great substitution has been accepted, the way is open, and the rescue all provided for. God's love is finding its way into the recesses of the dark world, and bringing out one trophy after another. The good Shepherd is going after His stray sheep, and the woman is, with lighted candle, seeking her lost silver. God's love is opening doors and hearts, curing diseases, loosing chains, breaking snares, setting captives free. It speaks, it knocks, it beckons, it beseeches, it constrains. 'Come forth,' 'Escape for thy life,' 'Forsake the foolish, and live,'—such are its words. O dwellers in an evil world, hearken and obey! Leave your lusts, your vanities, your sins, your sorrows, your snares, and betake yourselves to God. He has a world for you, far better than the present; a holy, peaceful, blessed, glorious world. Quit your present haunts of death and sorrow; become heirs of joy and life, through Him who gave Himself for our sins.

It is an evil world, this present world of ours! The sun still shines on it; but the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not. It is a busy, lighthearted, laughing, pleasure seeking world. But sin is here, and pain is here, and broken hearts are here, and weeping eyes are here, and death is here, and the grave is here. Oh! in spite of all its laughter and vanity, it is an evil world. And

the great proof of its evil is, that it cost the death of the Son of God to deliver you from it. Can that be a small evil which needed such a death, and such a Deliverer? Quit that world, then, this very hour. It will do you evil, and not good; it will bring death, and not life,—sorrow, and not joy, to you. Quit that world; come out and be separate. Give yourselves to Him who came to deliver you from it, and who stretches out His hands to you all day long, asking you to allow Him to deliver you. He yearns over you; and with sincere earnestness proffers to you His love, His friendship, His great salvation. Consent, O man, consent! His desire is to bless, and not to curse; to save, and not to destroy.

II.

Apostolic Jealousy For A Free Gospel

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto, another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have receive let him be accursed."—

Galatians 1:6-9.

The thing which strikes us most in these verses, is Paul's jealousy for the purity and freeness of the gospel. He estimated everything as it bore upon its glad tidings. Of that gospel he was never weary; and whatever interfered with its good news he condemned. He needed that gospel for himself; and he knew that the world needed it. Men could do without the sun more easily than they could do without the gospel. In order to bring out the meaning of the whole passage, let us take up the following points:—

I. The one gospel.—There never have been two gospels. There is not an Old Testament gospel and a New Testament gospel. There is not one gospel for the Jew, and another for the Gentile,—one gospel for the first century, and another for the nineteenth. It is but one gospel, as there is but one cross and one Saviour. Many ages, but one gospel; many sinners, but one gospel; many prophets and apostles, but one gospel. As our earth has had but one sun, so it has had but one gospel Nor does it need more; that one is sufficient. The message which it brings to us concerning God's free love in Christ Jesus His Son, suffices for all, ages, and for all men, and for all nations.

II. Christ's gospel.—It is the gospel of Christ (verse 7); and this, both because it contains the divine good news concerning Him, and because He Himself has sent it out. 'Glad tidings' Christ came to preach to us. These He not only declared, but He embodied them in His person, and in His great work upon the cross. He who brings a true report concerning Christ and His cross, tells the

true gospel; and he who, in his report, adds anything to, or takes anything from, what God has testified concerning His Son, mars Christ's gospel. And he who simply believes that true report, is saved by that which he believes; for the gospel is the gospel of salvation (Ephesians 1:13). Of this gospel Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the circumference and the center. Apart from Him there is no gospel at all.

III. The gospel of the grace of Christ.—It is specially to the 'grace of Christ' that the apostle refers (verse 6)[1]. The gospel, then, is the good news of Christ's free love: 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though He was rich, for our sakes became poor.' From Bethlehem to Golgotha we see the same 'grace,' in word and deed, in all His dealings with the sons of men; riches of grace deposited in Him, and pouring themselves out of His fullness upon this needy and sinful earth. Fullness of grace in Christ Jesus,—this is what we preach, and this is what the sons of Adam (in their various sinfulness) need. It is large, wide, free, manifold grace, according to the wants and guilt of the millions of this sinful and sorrowful world.

IV. Paul's gospel.—He speaks of it as 'the gospel which I preach,' 'our gospel,' nay, 'my gospel,' identifying it with himself. He is not arrogating anything to himself in so speaking; he is merely proclaiming his confidence in the good news which he preached, as alone divine. Paul's gospel and Christ's gospel were one.

V. A complete gospel.—These verses declare this most emphatically. It is complete; repelling all additions, and refusing all subtractions; perfect in all respects; requiring nothing at the hands of man; so complete and perfect, that Paul himself would not utter it in the enticing words of man's wisdom, lest he should be adding anything to it, or presenting it in a form which might suggest that without such ornaments and recommendations it would be imperfect. How many since then have, by their additions of argument, and eloquence, and glittering words, seemed to assume the imperfection of the naked gospel? The gospel, they think, needs adorning, else it will not find its way into human hearts! The cross is too bare and hard; it needs to be beautified, and softened, and carved, and decked with flowers, else it will not attract! This, says Paul, is to make it void; and terrible are the words he uses here to condemn these corrupters or perverters of the gospel: 'Let them be accursed.'

Man has always set himself to subvert or pervert the gospel. He cannot be trusted with it for an hour. He is always adding to it, or taking from it, or altering it. The natural heart abhors the simple and pure gospel. Even the renewed heart is often misinterpreting it, or even sometimes questioning it. It is so utterly opposed to all human goodness; it makes so much of God, and so little of man.

This perversion is very easily done, and does not imply a denial of Christ and His grace. These Galatians did not deny Christ. They admitted all that the apostle said about Him. They merely wished to add a little to the gospel. Believe in Christ, they said, but add to this the keeping of the Mosaic ordinances. A slight addition was all they wanted.

But the apostle saw the danger of this small addition. It destroyed the whole gospel. 'If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.' In how many ways we neutralize the gospel, by adding something of our own in order to make it more complete! Except ye feel as well as believe, ye cannot be saved! Except ye can produce certain marks and evidences of regeneration, ye cannot be saved! Thus men make void the cross. They slide from the rock. They fall from grace. (Galatians 5:4.)

Let us take the gospel as it is. Let us receive the 'report' in all its simplicity. Let us admit God's free love in all its largeness. Let us rest on the grace of Christ.

III.

Living Upon The Son Of God

"I live by the faith of the Son of God."—

Galatians 2:20.

Through the law we die; through the cross we live. The law kills; it kills even to itself: 'We, through the law, are dead to the law.' But this legal death produces or issues in a divine life; we die to the law, that we may live to God; we are crucified with Christ; yet we live; this crucifixion (or death) produces life; and yet this new life is not our own,—it is that of Christ; who dwelleth in us, and liveth in us, so that the life which we live in the flesh, we live by faith on the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us. This is the love that passeth knowledge; this is the gift that transcends all gifts.

Thus Christ is our life; its spring or fountain; its root; its storehouse or treasury. We live not upon ourselves, but on another; all that we have, and are, and hope for, is derived from that other.

I. We live upon His person.—His person, like His name, is wonderful. It is both divine and human. It contains all that is excellent in the creature, along with all that is excellent in the Creator. His person is the great vessel of fullness, in which is contained all that is needed by the neediest of souls. It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell. In Him is the perfection of all perfection, the glory of all glory. On this glorious person we live. We draw our spiritual life out of Him. We live by faith upon Him. In receiving the Father's testimony to His person, we draw in the life which is in Him for us. We use Him. We partake of His fullness. The virtue that is in Him flows out to us. Out of His fullness we receive, and grace for grace,—like wave upon wave.

II. We live upon his work.—The great feature in that work is substitution, atonement, propitiation. It contains many things; but this especially. 'Christ died for our sins.' He 'gave Himself for us.' He was 'made sin for us.' It is this aspect of His work that so specially suits us; for what we require is one to stand in our

stead, to represent our persons, to bear our sins, to furnish us with a righteousness. His work upon the cross presents us with all these,—His finished work, His accepted sacrifice, His precious blood, His completed expiation on 'the accursed tree.' On this work we live daily. It is a quickening work; a work the knowledge of which is life to the dead soul. To disbelieve that work, or to lose sight of it, is death; to believe it, and to keep our eye upon it, is life and healing. The sight of it, or the thinking about it (call it by what name we please), draws in life; we live in and by looking. This work contains the divine fullness provided for the sinner.

III. We live upon His love.—It is love such as men saw on earth when He went about speaking the words and doing the works of grace. It is love (or grace) which comes out so specially from the person and the work; the love of Christ; love without measure; love that passeth knowledge. It is love, infinite, free, suitable, unchanging. The knowledge of this great love is life and peace. Jesus loves! 'As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love.' How quickening and comforting is love like this! We have thus spoken generally of what we get out of Christ's living fullness. But let us now ask what this living upon Christ does for us. What do we specially get?

(1.) We get strength.—In looking, we are strengthened with might in the inner man. Out of the depth of weakness we look, and are made strong. Connection with the person, the work, the love of Christ, communicates the divine strength. We lean upon His arm.

(2.) We get peace.—The sight of Him whose name is the Peacemaker, pours in peace. It is a peace-giving sight. We get peace by the blood of His cross; for He is our peace. Each fresh look communicates fresh peace,—the peace which passeth all understanding.

(3.) We get sympathy and consolation.—He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. In all our affliction He is afflicted. He sympathizes with us; He goes down to the lowest depths of our sorrow; He comforts us in all our tribulation.

(4.) We get health.—The sight of Him is healing. As we remember Him or think of Him, health flows into us. The fragrance of His name is medicine. To think of

Him, is to inhale the health. Thus our cure proceeds; thus our diseases are banished.

(5.) We get holiness.—Contact with Jesus is sanctifying. It is faith which brings us into contact with Him, and it is by faith that we are purified. We live by faith on the Son of God, and are by Him made holy. Thus it is that we are taught to hate sin, and thus we learn to seek holiness, and to delight in all progress therein. Christ says to us, Be holy; His cross says to us, Be holy; His love says to us, Be holy.

(6.) We get eternal glory.—If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him. 'Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood,' sing the saints in heaven, 'and hast made us kings and priests unto God: and we shall reign on the earth.' Oneness with Him in humiliation leads to oneness with Him in glory; the glory to be revealed when He comes again.

IV.

The Holy Spirit, And The Hearing Of Faith

"This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"—

Galatians 3:2.

It is the Holy Spirit that is the life of a church, and the life of a soul. No Spirit, no life! It is through this Spirit that the man awakes,— opens his eye, his ear, his heart. This Spirit is first with the sinner; revealing the truth to him, and enabling him to believe it. Not self nor man, nor the flesh is first; but the Holy Ghost. It is He who moves upon the face of the waters.

But there is another side of the question which our text brings before us; viz, the receiving of the Spirit after believing, as the result of 'the hearing of faith.' In neither is there any visible illapse, or audible voice, or perceptible touch; anything contrary to or out of the region of our faculties; still both are real. It is to the second that our text refers. And the question to be solved is this: Does He come in connection with the law or the gospel? Is He received by working, or by believing? Does the preaching of the law, or the preaching of grace, bring Him? The apostle appeals to the experience of the Galatians, when first he came to them preaching the gospel. It was in connection with that gospel which he preached that they received the Spirit; and that gospel was not the gospel of working, but of believing. The Spirit came down on them when he delivered his message of grace, and they received that Spirit in receiving the good news.

The apostle refers to one thing only here, as the result of a received gospel,—the Spirit. But in like manner are all the blessings of the new covenant received. Thus is Christ Himself received: by 'the hearing of faith.' Thus is pardon received: by 'the hearing of faith.' Thus is life received: by 'the hearing of faith.' 'So we preached,' says he, 'and so ye believed.' It is not as workers of good works, or doers of God's law, but as listeners to His gospel, that we are receivers of His blessings. It is not as workers, but as listeners, that we are receivers of His Spirit. 'Hear, and your soul shall live;' 'Hearken unto me;' 'Listen, O ye isles;' 'Blessed is the man that heareth me;' 'He that hath an ear, let him hear;'

'Hear, ye deaf.' 'He that heareth my words.' 'Blessed are they that hear.'

I. The Holy Spirit is God's special gift to us.—(1.) He is the promise of the Father. (2) He is the Church's special birthright. (3.) He is in the hands of the risen Saviour. (4.) In Him are all the gifts needed by the Church as a whole, and by each saint. In the Spirit all is contained that we need. The Father is most willing to bestow Him; the Son is most willing to shed Him down; He is most willing to come. We need Him much. As the earth without rain and sunshine turns to barrenness, so is it with the Church or soul without the Spirit. But still He is 'ministered,' or 'given,' or dispensed in a particular way,—God's way,—the way that will honour the Father and glorify Christ.

II. He is not received in or by working.—None of God's gifts are thus received; least of all the Spirit. The law does not procure us the Spirit. Works do not contribute to our obtaining it. We do not serve in order to obtain the Spirit, but we obtain the Spirit in order that we may serve. First the Spirit, then work; not first work, and then the Spirit. The works that we do without the Spirit, or previous to our receiving the Spirit, are in themselves poor and unprofitable, nor can they in any way secure the Spirit for us.

III. He is received by the hearing of faith.—The expression is a peculiar one. It is not simply 'hearing,' nor 'faith,' but the 'hearing of faith,' that obtains for us the Spirit. What does it mean, then? Not that faith which leads to hearing, but that hearing which leads to faith (or believing). It is in listening to the divine word that faith springs up; and then the Spirit comes in and fills us with all His gifts and graces. No doubt the Spirit must work in order to our hearing and believing; but then He works most fully after that we have believed. It is the believing soul that is the vessel for receiving all His fullness. The Holy Ghost then does not come,—

(1.) By works—Works cannot win, or buy, or deserve. He is the free Spirit.—(Psalm 2:12.)

(2.) By chance, or at random.—There is no chance work in the mission of the Holy Ghost.

(3.) By miracle, as at Pentecost.—It is the same Spirit, but not by open miracle.

(4.) By mere sovereignty.—God is sovereign; yet He gives the Spirit in an appointed way, and according to promise.

But in believing, and by believing, in proportion to our faith. The simpler and stronger our faith, the more of the Spirit.

Let us believe for the Spirit. Not simply believe and hope that by and by the Spirit will come, but believe for Him; that is, earnestly and believingly desire Him, and desire more of Him. Our unbelief hinders Him, grieves Him. Let us beware. Only believe, and be filled with the Spirit.

The age thinks it can do without the Spirit. Let the Church watch against this blasphemy. Let her keep hold of the Lord's promise, the promise of the Father. Let her prize the gift; long for more of it. Let every saint seek more of it. Let our cry be continually, More of the Holy Spirit; more of His fullness; more of His gifts and graces!

Not human intellect or genius, but the power and wisdom of the Holy Ghost! Study and culture may do much for the mind in widening and filling it; but more is needed. Man's faculties, well-disciplined according to the progress of the age, may raise him to no inconsiderable height; but only the divine Spirit can lift a fallen being out of the region of darkness and evil into sympathy with 'the age to come,' into communion with the living God.

V.

The Curse Exchanged For The Blessing

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." —

Galatians 3:13,14.

The law does not save, it does not justify, it does not bless. If we are to be saved, to be justified, to be blest, we must look elsewhere. A broken law makes a lost sinner; and what the law once does, it cannot undo. It overthrows, but cannot rebuild. It imprisons, but cannot deliver from prison. It carries only the key of entrance, not of exit. Sinai has the thunder and the terror, not the good news and the grace.

I. The curse of the law.—The curse is God's sentence against the evildoer. It is the utterance of His holy anger. He speaks in accordance with the law which He has given. It is properly the curse of the Lawgiver, of God Himself; but the law is represented as proclaiming the curse; the sentence due for the transgression of its statutes. The law touches no one that does not deviate from it; but the moment that there is such deviation, it seizes on the transgressor. Then its curse comes forth. Nothing less than the curse,—the strict, judicial curse or sentence; and nothing more. It knows no human passion; it calmly gives out its sentence against the offender. That sentence is death. 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die.' 'The wages of sin is death.' 'Thou shalt surely die.' And in that word death how much is included, both immediate and eternal!

That death implied the wrath of God; it implied shame and anguish; it meant bondage, and darkness, and unrest; it shut out all possibility of happiness or peace; it pointed to separation from God and goodness; it reversed all that is included in that blessed word, 'life,'—the life of the body, the life of the soul.

II. Redemption from the curse.—The words affirm such truths, as these—

(1.) Deliverance.—From all to which the curse subjected us, present or future,

bodily or spiritual; from the bondage, the exile, the imprisonment, the shame, the woe, the death, the wrath; from all this there is deliverance, deliverance as complete as it is free.

(2.) Deliverance by purchase.—A heavy price has been put upon the sinner's head; and it must be paid in some way, else the full curse must be poured out on him. But the price has been found; the ransom has been furnished; the purchase-money has been paid; the message is, 'Deliver from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom.'

(3.) Deliverance by a substitute.—The payer of the ransom must coin the purchase money out of his own person. He must take the offender's legal place, bear the offender's legal burden, endure the offender's legal curse. The curse must be exhausted by a substitute,—the just for the unjust, the blessed for the cursed. The ransomer and the substitute must be the same.

(4.) Deliverance by Christ.—He is the lover of the lost. He is the pitier of the cursed. He is the ransomer of the captive. His own right hand and His holy arm have gotten Him the victory. Christ is the deliverer, the ransomer, the substitute.

(5.) Deliverance by Christ crucified.—The Substitute must hang upon the tree before heaven and earth. He must die our death of shame and anguish. Thus He is made a curse for us; and as such He is crucified, and as crucified He hears our guilt; nay, not our guilt only, but our punishment, our doom, our curse. Christ crucified is our Deliverer. The cross is the key that opens the prisoner's door; that unlocks and unbars the gates of death and hell. The cross has done the work. It has given righteous release to the guilty captive by propitiating offended holiness, and bringing round the law to be upon the sinner's side.

III. The exchange of the blessing for the curse.—It was the curse once, nothing but the curse; it is the blessing now, Abraham's blessing, Jehovah's blessing. The removal of the curse is not enough. The blessing must come in its place, else the work is incomplete; grace would have but half its triumph; the love of God to man would have been a poor thing indeed. To open the prisoner's door, but leave him to starve, in hunger and cold and nakedness; to wander in a wilderness without a home or friend,— this would have been doing little for him. But God has not thus left His work incomplete. He has not only taken away the curse, but

supplanted it with the blessing. And this conferring of the blessing is as free and complete as is the removal of the curse. It comes to us simply in believing. We are not to work for blessing, but to get it free, in receiving the divine testimony regarding it. In believing we are blest! Believing expels the curse, and introduces the blessing. It removes the wrath, and draws down the love. Abraham got all he had, simply in crediting what God told him; so we get all blessing,—pardon, life, joy, the inheritance,—simply in giving credit to the good news which the Father has sent to us concerning His beloved Son.

(1.) The curse of the law is no empty threat.—It is terribly real. 'The wrath of God abideth' on him on whom that curse lies. Flee from the curse. Escape for thy life! It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

(2.) The blessing is no idle promise.—It is sure and true. He who gives that promise cannot lie. Nor does He wish to escape from His obligations.

He is not trying to get up excuses for denying us what we seek, as we seem at times to imagine. He snatches the best of all our approaches and applications, and regards in tender pity the faintest expression of a wish for blessing.

(3.) The way of obtaining this blessing is no difficult or costly thing.— It is simplicity itself. It is the easiest of all easy things; and only our self-righteousness makes it difficult. To let go our selfrighteous rope, and drop into the extended arms of Jesus,—that is all!

VI.

The Stoppage In The Heavenly Race

"Ye did run well; who did hinder you, that ye should not obey the truth?" —

Galatians 5:7.

A brief, strange, sad history is contained in these words; the history of an apostolic Church; the history of Christian men.

Fair beginning, but woeful end; yet we must not call it end, for in all likelihood many of these Galatians returned to their first love and first faith. Still the words are sad; these Christians were not what they once had been; and the apostle's paternal (maternal we might call it, ch. 4:19) heart was bowed down with sorrow at their departure from the faith,— their stoppage in the race so well begun.

So has it ever been with creature-hood. Such is its inherent tendency,—decline, decay, death. To Godhead alone pertains perpetual stability, needing no external prop or help. Angels left their first estate. Adam fell; and creation went down along with man. Man being in honour, did not abide; and now all creation groans. The blessing did not abide; and in its place came the curse. Israel once ran well. 'I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals.' But Israel went back. The early Churches ran well; but soon they left their first love. Declension is written everywhere in all the records of the Churches. Our Church courts may not discern or avow this; their minute books may contain no record of apostasy. Yet apostasy is there; the running well, and then the stoppage,—the sad and fatal stoppage!

I. The race well begun.—The Acts of the Apostles is the record of such beginnings. At Jerusalem, Samaria, Antioch, Ephesus, Derbe, and many other places, we see the race well begun. Glorious beginnings indeed! Ah, these primitive startings, these noble outsets, how they put us to shame! The simple faith; the fullhearted joy; the buoyant fervor; the exulting liberty; the separation from the world; the glorying in tribulation; the unity of faith and fellowship; the

love of the brethren,—what a spectacle!

II. The wearying.—Strength for the race is needed, hourly strength, superhuman strength; for it is no earthly race, but something lofty, supernatural, divine. Forgetting the supernal source of strength, we betake ourselves to the internal or the simply external. And so we weary. For only God can supply the power which keeps us running. By Him only shall we run, and not be weary.

III. The slackening.—Becoming weary, we soon slacken our pace. Forgetting the source of strength above, we become slower and slower; gradually, perhaps,—almost imperceptibly; but still with diminished speed. Instead of increasing our swiftness as we move on, we slacken it. Oh this slackening of speed in the Christian race! How sorrowful, yet how common!

IV. The halting.—The inevitable issue of the slackening is the halting or stoppage. There must be motion, either onwards or backwards, either downwards or upwards. The first arrest of speed is the beginning of a downward movement, which, unless prevented by grace, will end in complete stoppage and abandonment of the race.

This 'running well' is in connection with the truth; this slackening and halting is in connection with error. 'Who hath hindered you, that ye should not obey the truth?' The starting-point in the race was 'the word of the truth of the gospel.' With this the Galatians began, and with this they went on for a season. The good news of the righteousness without works of the law sent them off at full speed; as at Pentecost, when the three thousand started in the same race, under the influence and power of the same wondrous gospel. For the good news, believed by them, brought liberty, release from guilt, disburdening of the conscience, elasticity of spirit, joy of heart, strength and vigor to the whole being. What is there, like the truth of God, in His gospel, for lifting a man up, and setting him forward in the race of God?

Departure from the truth is the beginning of our failure in the race. As the truth is the animating or energizing influence, the quickening and strengthening principle; so every departure from the truth is so much taken from our strength and zeal and energy. It may be a small defection at first, but it will introduce the evil; for 'a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.' We cannot let go truth

without suffering loss; we cannot receive a falsehood without suffering greater loss. The end is the 'strong delusion.' And this is true of a Church as well as of an individual believer. No man can estimate the extent of the evil done by, the loss of a single truth. The keystone of the arch is not always the largest stone. The most valuable coin is not necessarily the biggest in size.

The departure of the Galatians from the truth was a peculiar one.[2] They did not deny Christ or His gospel, His blood, or cross, or righteousness. They simply added a little bit of the law to Christ's gospel. They wished to append circumcision to the gospel. This was subverting the whole gospel, says the apostle. This little addition was the transformation of gospel into law; of grace into work.

Are not many perversions of the gospel like this? We say, 'The gospel is not of itself enough to give us peace; we must have feelings, evidences, convictions, experiences; not only faith, but a consciousness of faith; nay, a consciousness that our faith is of the right kind.' All these additions are subversions. Jesus only. That is our resting-place. Not feeling, nor prayers, nor convictions; but Christ alone! 'Nothing in our hands we bring,' either at first or any after time. We take the cross just as we find it; ourselves just as we are. Thus, taking as true the good news of the finished sacrifice, we rest there. We need nothing else. All beyond this is Galatian error; the subversion of the cross; the stoppage of the race.

VII.

Reproductive Good And Evil

"He that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

Galatians 6:8.

"They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk; the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up."—Hosea 8:7.

Everything said or done by man is a seed,—good or bad,—the product of something past, and the parent of something future; the end of one series, and the beginning of another.

It is not merely that judgment and recompense are in store for us; but, apart from the judicial aspect of the thing said or done, there is the inherent nature flowing out of something, and flowing into something else corresponding to itself; like produced by and producing like. This is the law of the universe; the seed produced by and producing a tree, or a flower, according to its nature. (Genesis 1:2) In the case of the murderer, there are the inward remorse and wretchedness, as well as the sentence of condemnation.

But our two texts teach us more than this. There is a higher law. Not merely does the good produce the good, but it produces something better than itself—the seed, the tree with all its fruit. The bad not merely produces the bad, but something worse than itself,—the bad seed, the worse fruit. This is the awful truth taught in the two passages above: 'He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap (not merely what is fleshly, but) corruption,'—flesh in its worst and most loathsome state. Again, 'They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.' Thus nothing comes up exactly as it is sown, but either better or worse. We sow not that body that shall be, but bare grain; and that bare grain bears something corresponding in nature, but very much greater in all respects than itself. It reproduces itself on a larger and completer scale.

Men seldom count on this. They may admit that their sin will find them out, though not always; or that bad may lead to bad; but they refuse to recognize this as a universal rule and law. They don't see why, though they have sown the wind, they might not reap the calm; why, though they have sown war, they might not reap peace; why, though they have sown disease, they might not reap health; why, though they have sown darkness, they might not reap light. But God's law will stand; the progress of evil is downward, not upward; the conflagration is the effect of the spark. God, we know, does step in to arrest this; He interferes in grace to stay the development of the evil, and to bring good out of it. But this only confirms the law, just as pardon confirms the law: 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die.'

Let us look at some Scripture instances of sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind. We shall find that the way of transgressors is hard.

There is Adam. One sin; but what consequences! Expulsion from Paradise, and a whole tempest of evil let loose upon our world. There is Cain. He begins with envy at Abel his brother, and he rushes on to crime and misery. There is Saul, king of Israel. He disobeys, and straightway all disaster comes. Rehoboam begins with pride, and ends with the loss of half a kingdom. Judas begins with covetousness, and ends with the crime of crimes, and the woe of woes. Such are some of the ways in which men have sowed the wind and reaped the whirlwind.

All great crises or calamities in a nation have come out of a course of previous evils, some of them apparently small. Error spreads, lesser evils are allowed to go on, good is discouraged, religion kept in the background, the Sabbath despised, the Bible disowned. All these work their way into the heart and soul of a nation, till it becomes thoroughly corrupted. Then the volcano bursts forth; the crisis comes; the kingdom is overwhelmed with woe. They sowed the wind, and they reap the whirlwind. Church decorations, are they not the seed of superstition? Yon cross hanging on a female neck, is it not the seed of Popery? That book of wild speculation, is it not the seed of infidelity? That speaking evil of dignities, is it not the seed of revolution and lawlessness? And are not all the events and errors of the present day preparing for the 'strong delusion' with which the world is to be led captive in the last days?

Such is God's law,—simple, righteous, terrible, inexorable. Modern progress

cannot arrest or alter it. The science of the last days cannot separate between the sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind. All man's efforts are vain to alter the character of evil, or to stay its productiveness. It is the true Pandora's box; the single drop of poison that impregnates the whole surrounding air; the small spark that kindles the vast conflagration; the little breeze that gathers into the howling storm.

I. Beware of sin.—Any kind of sin. Do not touch it, or tamper with it. It goes on from bad to worse. Hold back from it in all shapes. Do not call it a light thing. See how dreadful it is! What consequences!

II. Beware of error.—God's truth is steadfast. It is clear and definite. Let us not trifle with it, or treat it irreverently. Let us not put light for darkness, or darkness for light. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

III. Beware of undervaluing past lessons.—Scripture is full of these. The world's history teems with them. Do not say they are obsolete; not suited to an enlightened age like ours. God is one and the same forever; evil is one and the same forever. Learn the awful consequences of sin, present and eternal.

IV. Follow righteousness and truth.—'Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.' Keep the eye on these; they are seed as well as fruit. Sow, sow, sow! And if you want to know where the good seed is whose fruit is everlasting life, go to the great Sower. Get seed from Him. Be a fellow sower along with Him, and reap everlasting life for yourself and for others. Remember, 'He that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly.' Sow not to the flesh, but to the Spirit, and reap the glorious harvest. The sowing may be in tears; the harvest will be with gladness.— (Psalm 126:5.)

VIII.

The Cross And The Double Crucifixion

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." —

Galatians 6:14.

The words of this verse literally run thus: 'From me, however, far be it that I should glory, save in the cross;' and the form of expression reminds us of the frequent phrase in the Psalms, 'But as for me;' so calm, yet so decided; so, simple, yet so dignified. Others may glory in the flesh, or in forms, or in rites; but as for me, the cross is my only boast; all that I rejoice in centers there; it is my gain and my glory, it is my solace and my song. He lays great stress upon this 'I' or 'me.' Though the whole world were uniting to glory in other things, he could not; he would be inexcusable. He had a thousand reasons for rejecting every other boast,—more reasons than any other man. And he knew well what he was saying in this boast.

Let us take up here, the cross, the glorying, and the double crucifixion.

I. The cross.—It is not the literal piece of wood that he is speaking of, nor any figure or imitation of it, such as men in all ages have made for ornament or worship,—a piece of ecclesiastical furniture, or an article of female dress. It is the essence of the cross that he speaks of; the great truths represented by it; salvation by a crucified Christ; God's way of justification through the death of a sin bearer. The sacrifice for sin upon the cross, the burnt-offering upon the altar; it is this that he keeps before his eyes, and would have us keep before ours. It is the slain Lamb which he holds up to view. Connected with the cross there is death, but there is also life; there is weakness, but there is also strength; there is poverty, but also riches; shame, but also glory; defeat, but triumph too. The cross, as it stood on Golgotha, has long since gone into dust; but that cross was a symbol, like the desert pole and the brazen serpent. That cross and that serpent embodied in them mighty truths; truths which were to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness; truths which the natural man despises and rejects, but which, to the new man, are the gladdest and most glorious of all glad and glorious things. It is as the embodiment of these things that the cross is here

held up to us. Without these the cross is nothing save a piece of Hebrew wood, in no respect more precious than the other crosses erected at its side. Take away from it the sacrificial blood shedding, the propitiation for sin, and it is useless and worthless. The cross is mighty and venerable and glorious solely because of what it reveals concerning God, amid His way of saving the lost by providing a Saviour for the guilty. The cross is God's verdict against sin; His exhibition of righteousness; His declaration of love to the sinner; His method of removing guilt from the condemned, and imparting life through death to every one who is willing to take life at His hands.

II. The Glorifying.—Paul's opinion of the cross had undergone a wonderful change. The cross was once the lowest object in his estimation, now it is the highest. He glories in it. This implies such things as these:—

(1.) To think well of it.—Once he had thought evil of it; now he thinks well. His estimate is changed,—reversed. He admires what he disesteemed.

(2.) To speak well of it.—He commends it to every one wherever he goes. He has not a good word to say for himself but he has good words without number for the cross. He dispraises self and the flesh and the world; he praises the cross. It is the tree of trees.

(3.) To boast of it.—It is to him the one object of boasting; all other boasting is excluded for ever. In it he exults as one who has found a treasure. He calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me.' And if men ask, What is thy cross more than another cross? he answers, My cross is the cross of crosses; there is nothing like it, so perfect, so admirable, so glorious; in it I have found the love of God, the pardon of sin, the life of my soul, the peace of my conscience, an everlasting kingdom.

(4.) To trust in it.—It is the tree of life, under whose shadow he sits down. It is the treasure-house of all riches; it is the fullness of all grace and blessing. It presents a resting-place to his weary soul. It invites and attracts and welcomes. Everything about it is fitted to remove distrust and awaken confidence. It is the end of fear and doubt; the producer of all happy, trustful thoughts. It is the place of light and peace. No wonder that he gloried in it. Let us learn to glory. The more we look at it and understand its meaning, the more we shall trust it, and in

trusting it find rest to our souls. We cannot add to it, and we cannot take from it. It is perfect. Let us be satisfied in knowing that it is what it is,—the place of propitiation and of peace.

III. The Double Crucifixion.—The cross crucifies Paul; it crucifies the world to Paul. In crucifying Paul it crucifies the world, and in crucifying the world it crucifies Paul. They are crucified to each other. Paul is nailed to the cross, and becomes an object of contempt and hatred to the world. The world is nailed to the cross, and becomes an object of contempt to Paul. For the crucified object becomes, by being nailed to the tree of shame, a thing of degradation,—a 'curse and an hissing.' To be nailed to a cross was to be made a dead thing, a cursed thing, a shameful thing.

Thus it was mutually with Paul and the world. Each was dead to the other; they were mutually irreconcilable. The world saw nothing in Paul but vileness and meanness; Paul saw nothing in the world but the same. And it was the cross of Christ that had produced this reciprocal feeling of separation and abhorrence. It was a double crucifixion. That double crucifixion was the key to the apostle's life. It set Christ between him and the world. It set the grave between him and his former self. Crucifixion with Christ had crucified him to the world and the world to him. Thus the old man was crucified; the flesh and all things pertaining to the flesh were crucified; and only out of resurrection could anything good or holy come. All that came short of resurrection came short of the glory of God.'

(1.) A Christian is a decided man.—The cross of Christ rejects all halfheartedness; nay, renders it impossible. There was no compromise upon the cross, when the Father smote the Son, and the Son consented to be smitten; there can be none in those who are nailed to it.

(2.) A Christian is an unworldly man.—He was part of the world; he is so no longer. He has come out from it and become separate, and touches no more the unclean thing. He has bid farewell to the world and its vanities.

(3.) A Christian is a man of heaven.—He has set his affection on things above. He has gone up to be with his Lord upon the throne in the heavenly places. His heart and his treasure are above.

How glorious is the cross! How safe are they who have taken refuge there! It is

the cross of the Divine Substitute. It stands forever, outliving ages and generations, like Egypt's pyramids and palms. Its substitutionary value does not alter, and its efficacy for salvation to the chief of sinners is liable to no failure, no shortcoming. Its potency for shelter and deliverance and pardon knows no diminution; it is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We may be transgressors of no common order, both as to duration and enormity; we may have very superficial convictions of our own sinfulness, and very feeble thoughts of the sufficiency of the cross; we may have little faith, much unbelief; little light, much darkness; little repentance, much impenitence: still the sufficiency of the cross is infinite. Like the wide arch of heaven, it throws its canopy over the broadest circle of transgression and unworthiness. He who is willing to take shelter beneath it, whatever he may be, shall find it sufficient. To sit under its far-reaching shadow is certain life and safety; to sit anywhere else is certain wrath and doom. That shadow avails or takes effect in the case of all who, crediting God's testimony concerning it, consent to be indebted to it for security and peace. For faith in the cross is no work or merit, which a poor sinner must toil at till he has secured enough to give him the benefit of the shelter. It is simply the relinquishment of all other pretended shelters, and the willingness to allow this divine shelter to be extended to him by the God who has provided it for the sinner. Whosoever will, is our proclamation. God does not mock you by providing a refuge and then throwing hindrances in your way, or refusing to remove existing obstacles out of your way. He provides the glorious shelter; He removes all obstacles without; He presents you with His own heavenly Spirit (better and more accessible than all self-power) to remove all hindrances within. It is in all respects a wondrous cross, for security, for sufficiency, for accessibility to the sinner. Its value is divine, and that is infinite; its sheltering canopy is wide,—wide as the world; wide as the sinner's utmost sin and ruin; wide as heaven and hell; wide as earth and sea; wide as the wrath of the Judge; wide as the love of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

IX.

Access To The Father

"For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." —
Ephesians 2:18.

God's earthly dwelling at first was Paradise, and there He held fellowship with Adam. Soon the friendship was broken, and man was driven out; and, since that, God's dwelling has not been with man, and man's dwelling has been outside the Paradise of God. As sinners, men have been shut out from God, for 'the foolish shall not stand in His sight.'

Not that man ever really wanted back to God. As a refuge from something worse,—a shelter from hell,—he would have preferred heaven; but not as a place which he could rejoice in as his home. It was God that wanted man back to Himself, and to His Paradise.

Yet God could not in righteousness take man back at once. Though He desires his return, yet He 'makes Himself strange,' and keeps him at a distance; shutting up Paradise with the flaming sword, and afterwards drawing the thick veil in front of His own mercy seat, as if to hide both His grace and His glory.

Yet all along He taught men that there was a way of approaching Him; that His love had provided this; and that it was by means of sacrifice; for without shedding of blood there could be no remission, no access, no entrance, no acceptance to the shut-out sinner. Life must be given for life before man could be restored.

Man's great desire ought to be to find his way back to God; for to be shut out must be misery as well as death. The moment that the human heart, through the Spirit's touch, awakes, it turns in the direction of God. Formerly it said, 'Who will show us any good?' Now it says, 'Oh that I knew where I might find Him, I would come even to His seat!' God all along met this longing of the awakened soul by the declaration, that there was a way of approach; but that there were obstacles for a season, until the great sacrifice should be offered up. This season

of delay was the time during which God taught man the great truth of sacrifice, and directed his attention to its meaning and importance.

All this has passed away. The veil has been rent in twain, and access to God, entrance into the holiest, freely granted to all, Jew and Gentile, the far off and the near; for neither in respect of sin, or the pardon of sin, is there any difference between them. National differences are unknown; and no man can lay claim to a freer or bolder entrance than another. As sinners, all were kept out; as sinners, all are invited to come in.

It is 'access' that we all have, says the apostle; and this means not only an open door, but entire liberty of entrance; nay, a welcome; nay, an introduction to God; such an introduction as a friend at court gives, into the presence of the sovereign.

The apostle's statement gives us three points of discourse, and these connect themselves with the whole Godhead in its three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, for each of the blessed Three is concerned in the matter; and we learn here not merely the love of Christ, but the love of the Father and the Spirit. To whom, through whom, by whom, we have access; these are the apostle's three heads.

I. To whom.—To 'the Father;' to Him whose name, in the fullest sense of the word, and in all different aspects, expresses paternity or fatherhood. He is the Father, as the first Person of the Trinity, the representative of Godhead. He is the Father of Spirits, and 'we are His offspring.' He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; His Father and our Father. The name expresses well our relationship to Him by creation (Adam is called 'the son of God'); but still better our relationship by redemption. It lays the foundation for our childlike confidence, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

Our access, then, is not an imperfect one; it is not to an outer circle, or a colder region, or to less perfect confidence, or to fewer privileges. We get as far in and as far up as before; we get into relationship with the same blessed Being; we are made to taste as much love, nay, more; we are placed on a higher level; made possessors of a nobler and more enduring glory; made more truly sons of God, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus. The prodigal's reception by his father is a specimen of our reception by ours. Love, and joy, and song, and

fatherly embraces,—these are our portion in returning to Him whose name is Father.

This access, too, is free; for fatherhood is by its very nature generous, as well as unselfish. Its love is as liberal as it is tender. The access is for those who need it, not for those who deserve it, or are qualified for it, or can buy it. All who were 'shut out' are invited in, simply as those who are without or far off. The right of entrance is complete; and at the entrance itself there is no barrier, no half open gate. Come then at once. The Jewish worshipper would not have taken long to cross the threshold of the Holiest when he saw the veil removed, and was told that he might go in. It would have been but a single step. So with you. It is but a step, no more. Enough has been done to secure entrance and introduction for you: go in; draw near boldly; whether Jew or Gentile, whether laden with few or many sins. Go in without hesitation, for all are welcome. Go up to Him whose name is father, for He waits to receive His wanderers. The veil is rent, and there is no hindrance. Soon there will be; for not merely shall there be a veil, but 'a great gulf fixed,' where none can ever pass. Make haste, then, and go in.

II. Through whom.—Through Christ. He is the veil, the door, the new and living way. 'No man cometh unto the Father but by me.' We must draw near in a lawful and righteous way; and mere love could not take us in. It might wish to do so; but it could not open the gate, nor make it safe for us to enter, or right for God to receive us. Jesus Christ has carried out the plans of love, and this not simply by 'taking flesh,' but by dying. His blood has removed the hindrance which love could not remove; it has opened the gate, and prepared the way. Law had laid an interdict on the sinner's approach; and so long as this was in force, to go in was to die, and not to live. But through the death of the Son of God, the interdict has been recalled, and the way opened; for He, by His offering up of Himself has accomplished the purpose for which the interdict was laid on. That sentence of exclusion was not arbitrary, but righteous; it was not a thing of caprice, but of necessary law. It was to preserve the foundations of the universe, to maintain the right order of creation, and to bring out the whole character of time just and holy Jehovah. The sinner's exclusion answered these ends to a certain extent; but Christ's taking the sinner's place of exclusion, and bearing the sinner's penalty, did this far more effectually.

The great sacrifice has met law and righteousness at every point. It has unfolded

the character of the Lawgiver as essentially holy, and set against all sin. It has shown that His presence is the Holy Place into which no sin can enter, and where the unholy cannot dwell. It has shown that God's love is not mere indifference to sin, or easy good-nature, or unwillingness to carry out justice to the full; that, on the contrary, no considerations,—not even love to His own Son,—will induce Him to modify His law, or relax its penalties, or deal leniently with sin, or come into contact with the unholy. It has shown that the divine glory is above every other consideration, and that with the full manifestation of that, nothing can be allowed to interfere. Thus, in consequence of time great propitiation on time cross, the interdict has been recalled, and entrance provided for the sinner. God no longer needs to keep him at a distance; He can now deal with the unworthiest in the way of reconciliation. His love can get full vent, and can go forth unstraitened and free.

In consequence of the great sacrifice for sin, the sinner no longer feels a guilty conscience to be a bar to his approach. He has now heard of something which clears his conscience, and gives him confidence. He may come as he is, and he may come with boldness. That which he once saw in God only terrified and repelled; that which he now sees, removes all fear, and draws him nigh. He sees in Christ the remover of all obstructions; the new and living way; the way, and the truth, and the life. This cheers him. He sees in Christ the sinner's claim, the sinner's merit, the sinner's recommendation. He takes Him as such, and is glad. He sees in the name of Christ the sinner's plea and passport. He uses it as such, and goes with it to the Father.

What access, what liberty, what boldness is this! How free the invitation! how wide the welcome! how sure the reception! All, all are bidden, nay, besought to come! The gate stands ever open: at the gate the ambassador, to beckon you in; and over the gate the inscription, enter. The way in is sprinkled with blood, that you may walk on it in safety; for otherwise the earth would open and swallow you up. Will you not, then, go in? As freely and as confidently as Adam before he fell, or as any angel above goes into the presence of God, you may go, though a sinner all over. Go, then, go in; go up to the mercy seat; go straight to God. He will not turn you out, nor disallow your claim, nor withhold His love.

III. By whom.—The Spirit, the one Spirit, the whole Trinity has to do with our return and reception. The Father throws open His presence chamber, the Holy of Holies where He dwells; the Son provides the way for our restoration,

by answering in His death all the ends that could have been served by our exclusion; and the Holy Spirit conducts us into the Father's presence, along the new and living way.

It is this Spirit that makes us feel the misery of exclusion, and to desire re-entrance. For the excluded sinner is not alive to the peril or the sadness of his banishment. He is content with it, and prefers it greatly to the presence of a Being whom he does not love, and whose acquaintanceship would only increase the weariness of life. 'What is God to me,' he says, 'but a being with whom I have no sympathy; whose nature, laws, feelings, joys, are quite uncongenial to anything in me? If He gets His way, I cannot get mine; if His will is right, mine is wrong; if He hates sin, then He hates what I love; if He wishes His creatures to be like Him, then He wishes me to be what I abhor being, and am determined not to be. Nearness to Him would be hell; and, bad as this world is, to bring Him into it would make it ten times worse; and my only hope of happiness is to get as far from Him as I can; to keep Him out of my soul, and to banish Him from my thoughts.' But when the Holy Spirit comes to a soul, He reverses all this. He makes the shut-out sinner alive to the sadness of the exclusion; He shows him that it is the want of God that is his misery; that his soul was made for God, and that in the absence of God from the soul there can be no more true joy than there could be light in the world if the sun were quenched. Then the sinner begins to long after God and to desire access. Then he puts his hand into that of the Spirit, and says, 'Oh lead me in, oh lead me back to God; life is not worth living if God is not in it; existence is a blank if God be not its center; there is no joy for me save in the living God.'

The Spirit then shows us the way,—the new and living way,—so sure, so free, so blessed, so suitable. Then He takes us by the hand, and leads us in. Nay, He comes in, and dwells in us as the Spirit of adoption. He fills us with divine light, and sheds abroad in our hearts all the love of God.

Thus begun, our intercourse is carried on by the same Spirit, in the same way, with the same continual reference to the blood; for, from first to last, the blood is made use of by the Spirit for maintaining confidence in us unbroken. Never does He leave us, nor allow us to lose sight of the blood. It is through Him that communion between the soul and God is maintained. He draws forth the feelings of the soul to God, and pours back the feelings of God into the soul; keeping up a real, close, living fellowship; making us conscious of a vital

contact of the soul with God; not the mere intercourse of words or sentiments, but the living intercourse of spirit with spirit,—our spirit with the great Father of spirits; the communication between person and person, friend and friend. The Spirit helpeth our infirmities; teaches us what to ask, and how to ask it; makes intercession in us, and for us; calls forth in us the groanings which cannot be uttered.

This Spirit is one. From the beginning it has been so; one Father, one Mediator, one Spirit. Not one Spirit for one age, and another for another; one for the Jew, and another for the Gentile; but one Spirit for all ages, dispensations, nations: 'By one Spirit we are all baptized into one body.' It is one Spirit of adoption; one Spirit of confidence; one Spirit of prayer and intercession; one Spirit of fellowship; one Spirit of joy, love, hope, faith, and holiness. The same Spirit that is in Christ is in the Church, and in each saint. The fruits of this one Spirit are the same everywhere; the same conviction of sin, the same repentance, the same faith, the same love,—all evidences of the one great, pervading, all-working Spirit.

And this Spirit is Love; love as truly as the Father and the Son. The Father loves, the Son loves, and the Spirit loves! In the threefold Godhead there is the One Love. God is love!

Accept, then, His love. Put your hand in His, and let Him lead you in to the Father. He is willing to do it. Refuse Him not.

Grieve not the Spirit. Quench not the Spirit. In putting Him away, you put away everything; for without Him there is no knowledge of and no introduction to, the Father or the Son!

X.

The Unsearchable Riches Of Christ

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." —

Ephesians 3:8.

Here we have the keynote of Paul's ministry. The burden of the good news which he proclaimed among the Gentiles (such is the full meaning of the word 'preached') was this, 'The unsearchable riches of Christ.' The treasure-house, which 'had been hitherto only opened to the Jew, was now thrown open to the Gentile,—to the whole world. 'Ho, every one!' was the apostolic trumpet-blast. 'Come, partake of the riches, all ye Gentile poor. Gold, silver, precious stones are all here for you.'

The connection of riches with Christ strikes us greatly when we remember that in the Psalms Messiah is always spoken of as the 'poor and needy' One; though rich, for our sakes becoming poor; His riches being hidden; men seeing no beauty in Him, no form nor comeliness.

This was Paul's estimate of Christ after he had known Him at least twenty-five years,—his calm, deliberate estimate; not the excited language of a new convert. These years had raised, not lowered his estimate; and, more than ever, he counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord.

'Riches,' 'richly,' 'rich,' are favorite words with Paul. Again, and again, and again does he use them in connection with God and His love, with Christ and His fullness. For all is 'riches,' infinite and endless fullness of every excellency and blessing in the Godhead,— Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. There is no poverty with God.

The word 'unsearchable' carries us back to Job 11:7, 'Canst thou by searching find out God? Psalm 145:3, 'His greatness is unsearchable;' Isaiah 40:28, 'There is no searching of His understanding.' It does not mean that the riches of Christ

are as forbidden fruit, which it would be profanity to search; nor that they are so mysterious and unintelligible that searching is useless; but that, in regard to them, such search is illimitable, absolutely endless and inexhaustible. Every hour we may dig up or pick up new treasure, but the end of such discoveries can never be reached. The 'treasure-trove' in this field is eternal.

We may take a comparison from the three following objects, or regions of creation: (1) Time unfathomable ocean, not the tenthousandth part of which has been measured or searched by man; (2) the mines of earth, full of gold and silver and precious stones, of which but a few fragments have as yet come to the surface; (3) the immeasurable firmament, with its vast depths of blue, and its innumerable stars. These may convey some idea of the 'unsearchable riches;' though, after all, what do even such glorious resemblances convey to us?

Words like these take for granted our world's poverty. Yes, our world is poor; humanity is poor; the sinner is poor. We are far poorer than we have the least conception of. Laodiceans are we all,—'wretched, poor, miserable, blind, and naked.' It is to such a poverty-stricken race that the apostolic message goes out concerning the unsearchable riches of Christ; it is to such a world that He says, 'I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich.'

We cannot speak fully of these unsearchable riches. Let us merely note a few things:—

I. The unsearchable riches of His person.—He is the one possessor of all that is excellent in both God and man. All uncreated perfection is in Him, and all created perfection too. Everything in the universe that can be called 'riches' is in Him,—riches of beauty, riches of wisdom, riches of holiness and power and truth. There are two special parts of Scripture where the excellency of His person is celebrated,—the forty-fifth Psalm and the Song of Solomon. 'Thou art fairer than the children of men;' 'All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia;' 'Thy name is as ointment poured forth;' 'I am the Rose of Sharon;' 'My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand;' 'His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars;' 'His mouth is most sweet; yea, He is altogether lovely.' The riches of His person are unsearchable; they cannot be numbered, nor measured.

II. The unsearchable riches of His work.—The work which was given Him to do was one which contained in it materials of infinite value; of infinite suitableness for our lost world, nay, for the universe; for all beings and things in heaven and in earth. His great work in life and death and resurrection was the work of the surety, the substitute, the sacrifice, the sin-bearer. In this sin bearing work, which began at the cradle, and ended at the cross, when He said, 'It is finished,' is the work which contains unsearchable riches. From Leviticus and the Psalms the Jews must have known something of the riches of Messiah's work; and we, from the Epistles to the Romans and the Hebrews, gather much more. The riches contained in that work for the needy sinner are beyond measure. All, all he needs is there,—pardon, cleansing, peace; life, healing, strength, holiness, and joy.

III. The unsearchable riches of His glory.—He is now crowned with glory and honour. All power is His in heaven and earth; and hereafter this shall be unfolded when He comes as Judge and King. That glory to be revealed is the unfolding of His unsearchable riches; and the book of Revelation gives us glimpses of that glory. What the glorified Christ is, and what He is yet to be, the heart of man cannot comprehend. There will be unsearchable riches of glory.

But we cannot enumerate the many things which go to make up these riches, or in which these riches are seen. They are 'numbers without number.'

There are riches of love, riches of grace, riches of kindness, riches of wisdom. And all these riches are for us. We preach this to all. 'To them that believe, Christ is precious,' or, 'this preciousness belongs.' To him that worketh not, but believeth, all these riches appertain. He presents them to a needy world. He counsels each poor Laodicean sinner to take them freely.

XI.

God's Boundless Power To Bless

"Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us."—

Ephesians 3:20.

In the fourteenth verse we see Paul upon his knees. His closet door is open, and we overhear his 'strong crying and tears.' He kneels before the living God; and this God is (1) the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and (2) the Head of the one family, earthly and heavenly.[3] The measure of his desires and requests is, 'the riches of His glory.' The petitions themselves are, (1) 'to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man;' (2) 'that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith;' (3) that we maybe 'rooted and grounded in love;' (4) that we may be able to comprehend the immeasurable and unknowable love of Christ; (5) that we may be 'filled with all the fullness of God.'

What petitions are these! Each in itself a heaven. He that has the answer to even one of these has blessing inconceivable. We need not be at a loss for petitions, so long as we have these. We need not weary of prayer, so long as we have such a prayer as this. Think of all these requests going up to the throne, borne upon the sweet incense of the golden altar, or of the golden censer of the High Priest. Let our souls be steeped in such desires; and as we utter them, may we not only get the answers to each, but be so pervaded with their spirit, that we shall be transformed into the likeness of that for which we pray!

And now we come to the doxology at the close; so full and large, so glorious and divine; which, like a thousand Amens, expresses our assurance of being heard in all these vast petitions, seeing that He of whom we ask them is so infinitely great and loving, transcending all human thought and desire and conception. We take the words just as they stand. This will best bring out the fullness of the heavenly utterance.

1.To Him who is able.—He is the Mighty One, the Mighty God, the Lord God

Almighty. Hear how this word 'able' is used. 'He is able to subdue all things unto Himself' (Philippians 3:21). 'He is able to succor them that are tempted' (Hebrew 2:18). 'He is able to save to the uttermost' (Hebrew 7:25). 'He is able to keep us from falling' (Jude 24). It is with the mighty God that we have to do; mightier than ourselves or our foes; mightier than earth or hell; omnipotent.

2. Able to do.—To effect or work out or accomplish things for us. His power to do is (1) creating energy, (2) preserving energy, (3) strengthening energy, (4) quickening energy, (5) comforting energy, (6) sustaining energy, (7) conquering energy. His arm is full of power. He 'doeth wonders.' He worketh in us, and for us, and by us; and that resistlessly. Who or what can resist His power to do? Who is stronger than He?

3. Able to do what we ask.—Is not this much, even though it went no farther? Our God is able to grant our requests. It was no vain promise that He made to us. 'Ask, and ye shall receive.' He is able to fulfill that promise. What we ask is in His power to give. We cannot ask too much for omnipotence like His.

4. Able to do what we think.—Thinking is more than asking here. We may think of many things which we dare not ask for. But here is a word that takes in not merely the 'groanings which cannot be uttered,' but the thoughts which have never clothed themselves in words of desire. What you think, He is able to do. Is not this a wide range for us in our approaches to God? Yes; our God is able to do for us what we think, even when we do not ask, even when we feel as if we dare not ask. Power beyond our petitioning, nay, power beyond our thoughts, is His. What encouragement is this! And who is there upon earth, whatever be his sin or helplessness, that is beyond the reach of power like this?

5. Able to do above what we ask or think.—Not merely up to the measure of our asking and thinking, but above it and beyond it. Our asking and thinking may be large and high; but this power to do is larger and higher. Oh foolish hearts of ours! We limit the Holy One of Israel; we limit both His power and His love; we limit His promises, and His faithfulness to these promises. Let us believe in His omnipotence; let us 'take hold of His strength,' trusting it always in its divine sufficiency. It is enough for us. It is on this we continually lean, and it is this that we grasp in our closets, when on our knees before the Mighty One

of Jacob, the Holy One of Israel.

6. Able to do above all that we ask or think.—It is not one great petition that is referred to, but many; nay, all. All that we ask or think! What a range or sweep of blessing! What a compass of fullness is here! Each word of the apostle here widens and widens the circle; raises and magnifies it.

7. Able to do abundantly above all.—Thus the apostle rises and rises in his great idea here. He would set forth the power of God in His ability and willingness to bless. We may ask much and think much; perhaps feeling that we asked too much and thought too high; that we ought to have been more moderate and modest in our requests; and that if we get the tenth part of what we ask, we shall do well. Not so. He is able to do 'abundantly above all we ask or think.' Is not this good cheer? Is not this a word in season to the troubled, doubting soul?

8. Able to do exceeding abundantly above all.—He rises still. Words seem to fail him. He heaps word upon word, to tell the omnipotence of the prayer-hearing God. 'Exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think!' What an expression for vastness and majesty! Could human language go higher than this? Does it seem extravagant? Ah! it is in reality too low and narrow to declare the fullness, the largeness, the excellency of the power of God toward us. There is no exaggeration here; no hyperbole. All is true; for it is with almightiness that we are transacting,—the almightiness of infinite love.

And this is the God with whom we have to do! A God of infinite power; and that power at our disposal, at our command; that power all on the sinner's side; ready to come forth at the sinner's faintest cry! The feeblest sigh of the helpless soul, conscious of nothing but sin and weakness and unbelief, avails to draw out and draw down all this glorious omnipotence! It is for sinners. It is the weak and the worthless that are invited to partake of it. It is power that they need; and this power is at hand. Their cry may be very feeble, but it touches the hidden spring of power. That power comes forth in all its fullness, in answer to the weakest sinner's weakest sigh.

XII.

The One Spirit And The Many Gifts

"There is one Spirit...He gave gifts unto men."—

Ephesians 4:4, 8.

"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." —

1 Corinthians 12:4-6.

Let the above passages be read together; or rather, the whole of the two chapters of which they are part. In the fourth of the Ephesians we may be said to have the fountainhead, and in the twelfth of Corinthians, the stream an ascended Christ the fountainhead the Spirit, with all His diverse gifts, the stream. We take the two chapters together, dwelling more upon the latter than the former.

Ezekiel's 'wind,' or 'breath,' is represented as shaking the whole valley of dry bones, moving over the face of dead Judaism, as it shall do in the latter day. So the Pentecostal 'rushing, mighty wind' shook, first of all, Jerusalem, and then went from city to city over the earth, shattering the dumb idolatries of Greece and Rome. Of this Pentecostal Spirit and His gifts (specially in reference to Corinth), the apostle begins to speak fully in connection with the circumstances and history of the Corinthian Church (1 Corinthians 12:1).

Gentile idolatry was lifeless and voiceless. The gods of Greece were 'dumb idols;' yet by these dumb idols these Corinthians were swayed hither and thither, without reason, or conscience, or knowledge (by these idols, and to them). Heathenism was a silent, speechless system. What a contrast between this and the neversilent voice of the living God and His ever-moving Spirit! Dumb priests, dumb altars, dumb sacrifices, dumb temples, dumb worshippers,—of these was Paganism made up.

With Pentecostal life and power came the Spirit of speech into Europe, and went

over all the earth. The living God was not dumb. He was lifting up His voice everywhere, and speaking in every city. In the hearts and through the lips of believing men He spoke, and spoke with irresistible power; and the soul or burden of His speech or testimony was, 'Jesus is the Lord.' Among Jews it was, 'Jesus is the Christ;' among Gentiles, 'Jesus is the Lord.' Should any one, then (he says), after professing to be a Christian, be led to pronounce Jesus accursed (to renounce Christ), the Spirit of God is not in him; and whoever confesses Jesus as Lord (turning from his 'lords many'), gives evidence that he speaks by the Spirit. There was no dumbness, nor routine, nor frozen uniformity and monotony in the worship of the living God, as exhibited in the Church of God. It was no flat, icy lake, but a boundless sea, with its bright living waves, its 'endless smiles.' Variety there was, yet oneness also; speech there was, yet well-regulated; power there was, yet divinely controlled and directed. Let us mark the apostle's statement as to this, for it introduces, in a most striking way, the three Persons of the Godhead; just as in Ephesians 4:4-6, where we have (1) the Spirit; (2) the Lord; (3) the God and Father.

I. Diversities of gifts, yet the one same Spirit.—Innumerable branches, blossoms, fruits from one tree. The one same Holy Spirit has been in the saints from the beginning,—from Abel downward; a living Spirit, a speaking, energizing Spirit. Not one Spirit for the Old Testament, and another for the New; not one for patriarchs, another for prophets, another for apostles, and another for individual saints; but one Spirit always and everywhere. It is into one Spirit that we have been baptized. This one Spirit is, properly speaking, the gift,—the one great gift. But this one divine gift subdivides itself into innumerable others; all of them true, spiritual gifts, flowing out from the Spirit, who is their Author; each gift differing from the other, yet all of them bearing marks of their parentage, and all contributing, each in its own way, to the building up of the body of Christ. All these gifts may not be needed in every age, or in every Church, or in all circumstances; but here is the mighty storehouse, or arsenal, divinely full of all that the Church needs, and at her disposal,— at the disposal of each saint. It is 'like the tower of David, builded for an armory, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.'

II. Diversities of administrations, yet the one same Lord.—The 'administrations' refer to the channels through which the gifts flowed out and were distributed over the Churches (what we call now 'organizations'),—the

various servants, and services, and helps, and workmen of every kind, as well as assemblies, smaller or greater, where these came into play (see Ephesians 4:2; Romans 16:1-12). These were the agencies, or instruments, through which the various gifts unfolded themselves, and were daily employed in the edification of the whole body, and of individual members. All these, however many, were under the regulation, and by the direct appointment of Christ Himself. Each member had some gift which he was to exercise; not one was to be idle, or dumb; and all these issued forth from their common Head and Lord, Christ Jesus, in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell, and out of whose fullness there comes forth continually, through all ages, the supply that the body needs,—'grace for grace,' or 'grace upon grace,' like wave upon wave. Yes; one Lord and Head; Jesus, who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood; ever full, ever watchful, ever tender, ever loving, ever liberal with His gifts. We are 'complete in Him.' As, then, we connect the gifts with the one Spirit, so we connect the distribution or dispensation of these gifts with our one Lord. We go to Him for constant supply. We realize, in all that is said or done in the Church through His instruments or agents, Christ Jesus Himself speaking, and acting, and ruling, and counseling,—Christ sowing the seed (Matthew 13:37), or walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, and fulfilling His promise, 'Lo, I am with you alway.' One Church, one body, one living temple, one Lord and Head; yet out of Him flowing an infinite variety of gifts, administered in diverse ways, according to His pleasure; for all power is given to Him in heaven and on earth; and His one Lordship, one Headship, one Kingship is that to which we must trace all blessing, whether for the Church or for the world. He is our one Prophet, our one Priest, our one King, from whom all these ministrations come.

III. Diversities of operations, yet the one same God.—The ultimate Fountainhead of power or 'energy' is God, the Father, of whom are all things, and to whom are all things. It is He who worketh all these things through all these instruments. How forcibly would words like these concerning oneness come to a Greek, who, in his former days, had known what it was to have 'gods many;' a god for every place, and for every work, and for every house; Jupiter, or Mercury, or Mars; the gods of the woods or hills, or the household gods of time family! Yes; one God working all in all. The King eternal, immortal, and invisible, the only wise God. To trace every motion, every action, every word to Him! 'Every good gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of

lights.' It is with one God that we have to do; on Spirit, one Church, one God.

How this simplifies and elevates religion! How it dignifies all worship, concentrating our whole devotions and acknowledgments in, and connecting them with one infinitely great and glorious Being.

What, then, has our service, our worship, our religion been? Has there been in it a direct dealing with this one God—Father, Son, and Spirit? Is this the aim and the substance of our prayers, our praises, our whole religious life? Is that life a constant series of reverent yet happy and satisfactory transactions with a God whom we know and trust, and in whose free love we repose? How this thought lifts and humbles.

He wishes to be thus transacted with by sinful men. He presses His friendship on them. 'Acquaint now thyself with God, and be at peace.' He truly desires to bless; He bids us welcome at any time; He opens the doors of His divine storehouse to us; He entreats us to avail ourselves of its fullness and variety; He wishes to be approached for blessing, and that by time most sinful of the sons of men. The fullness of the Spirit is for us, without money or price; without previous fitness or worthiness. In this bestowal of the Spirit, He shows Himself the Lord, merciful and gracious, saying to each empty child of Adam, 'Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.' An empty heart and an open mouth is our only qualification.

In dealing with Him for blessing, we take for granted His free love. We accept His estimate of the great propitiation, on the footing of which we draw near. Our perception of that sacrifice, and of our need of it, is imperfect; but, taking His estimate of it, and of our own need of it, we proceed to transact with Him. That sacrifice, whose value transcends all conception as much as it exceeds all guilt, avails for us. Under its protection, with it as our recommendation, we go to this gracious Giver; all misgivings as to our own demerit quieted and satisfied by the knowledge of this precious offering; all doubtings as to our obtaining what we need removed by the thought of Him whose grace is as free as it is boundless; the grace of Him who is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.

XIII.

The Church Of God

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that He, 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."—

Ephesians 5:25-27.

Let us take up this passage under the four following heads:—(1.) The Church; (2.) The love; (3.) The gift; (4.) The purpose.

I. The Church.—The word corresponds to our 'assembly,' or 'congregation;' a company called together by public proclamation. It is an Old Testament expression, frequently used in the Psalms, the words 'congregation of the saints' (Psalm 149:10), being the same as 'the Church of the holy ones.' The adoption of this phrase identifies the Church of the Old Testament with that of the New. Both are one. Of this one Church, the 'cloud of witnesses' (Hebrews 12:2) are the representatives. This Church has both a divine and a human aspect. In its human aspect it is 'the seed of the woman,' 'the seed of Abraham,' the 'redeemed from among men;' it is a body composed of men, not of angels; of sinners, not of the holy. In its divine aspect it is the eternally chosen of the Father; its names all written in heaven before the foundation of the world; the bride and body of the eternal Son; the offspring of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven; the temple of the Holy Ghost; the royal priesthood; the heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. This body of sinful men, who owe their election to the Father's will, their redemption to the Son, their renewal to the Holy Ghost, is that which is called the Church—the one Church, the one family, the one temple, made up of innumerable living stones from every region under heaven.

II. The love.—'Christ loved the Church.' As it is written elsewhere, 'God so loved the world,' so here we read, 'Christ loved the Church.' Christ loved the holy angels, but not so as He loved the Church. Christ loved the young man, but

not so as He loved each member of His Church. Christ loved Jerusalem, pitied her, wept over her, but not so as He did His Church. His weeping love over Jerusalem was called forth just by those things in Jerusalem which showed she was not the Church. Yet whatever love there may be in Christ to others, it is not the same in kind, or in efficacy, as towards His Church. He loved her in a special way. 'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave to his wife.' There is a friend's love, a brother's love, a father's love, a husband's love.

Christ's love comprises all these, but is specially the last; that last is the most peculiar of all. It is—

(1.) Free.—Uncaused by anything good in us; irrespective of love or loveliness in us; not attracted by our righteousness, nor repelled by our unrighteousness.

(2.) Boundless.—Breadth and length, depth and height, are altogether immeasurable. As to extent, and as to duration, without any bounds; from eternity to eternity.

(3.) Inconceivable.—It passeth knowledge. It is beyond all human thought, in every sense and way.

(4.) Unchangeable.—Whom He loveth, He loveth to the end. He is faithful and true. Who can separate us from the love of Christ? It is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

(5.) Efficacious.—It is not in vain. It accomplishes what it is set upon. It is omnipotent love; love between which and its object nothing can intervene; between which and its large desires nothing of righteousness or sovereignty can interpose. It is absolutely and unconditionally efficacious. It rests not till it has glorified its object.

III. The gift.—He gave Himself. The Father gave the Son, the Son gave Himself on behalf of the Church. It is literally, 'delivered Himself up for it.' He gave Himself up to God, to justice, to law, to Judas, to Pilate, to the cross. The word here does not refer to 'gift' properly, but to presentation or deliverance of Himself. He saw the wrath coming on the Church, and He stepped forward that it might expend itself on Him. 'Christ bath redeemed us from the curse of the

law, being made a curse for us.' He gave Himself up that we might not be given up. He, His own self, bare our sins, in His own body on the tree. This is the pledge, the measure of His love. Greater love hath no man than this. He loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.

IV. The purpose.—This is twofold, one part pertaining to the present, another to the future; one connected with His first coming, the other with His second.

(1.) The present.—'That He might sanctify it, having cleansed it with the washing of water by the word.' Here are two things: (1.) The cleansing (or purifying) it with that washing of water which comes through our belief of the word, as in John 15:3, 'Ye are clean through the word I have spoken,' and Ezekiel 36:25. Thus we are washed or cleansed by the word, and so are clean in God's sight. (2.) The sanctifying or setting apart for God's service, as saints, consecrated ones.

(2.) The future.—'That He might present it to (or set it beside) Himself, glorious, the Church, which has no spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing, but holy and without blemish.' This refers to His second coming, when we shall be like Him, seeing Him as He is. Thus, then, the Church is (1) to be set beside Himself, made to sit with Him on His throne;—(2) glorious, not vile or humbled as now, but glorified, like Himself;—(3) the Church without spot, that is, the Church spoken of in the Song, 'No spot in thee;'—(4) the Church without wrinkle; no wrinkle like that of the crushed or folded leaf, or like that of age and sorrow;—(5) the Church without any of such things,—any shade of spot or wrinkle, or any such defects as are found on earth;—(6) holy and without blemish; holy without and within ; not only consecrated but pure;—without blemish; not only *ἀνεγκλητος*, unchallenged, but *άωος*, without anything to challenge or blame.

Such is the beginning and the end of the Church's story. It begins in love, and it ends in the everlasting kingdom.

XIV.

The Love And The Glory.[4]

Ephesians 5:25-27.

The Church is not a nation, nor a kingdom, nor a country; it is a company of sinners chosen of God, and gathered out of every nation and kingdom and country. Nor is it a company belonging to this age or the other, but to all ages from the beginning. They who compose this company owe everything they are, and have, and hope for to the Father's eternal love and choice. They are what they are, and they shall be what they shall be, simply because of the will of God. They are born, 'not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God' (John 1:13).

It is of this company that the apostle is speaking here, giving us some glimpses of their wondrous history, past, present, and to come. The whole of this history is connected with Christ; and all that the Father has made them and done for them, has been through Christ Jesus. Let us look into this.

I. The grace.—'Christ loved the Church.' This clearly means that He loved her with a special love, beyond and above that wherewith He loves ought else. He loved her not merely with a compassionate, but with a complacent love. He loved her as a husband loves his wife; and because of this love He gave Himself for her. It is a special love and a special gift, for a special and definite end. The gift flows out of the love; and both are directed toward the one object, the Church of God. The gift is the measure of the love, and it is the love that gives its value to the gift. It is a free and boundless love, beyond all length, and breadth, and depth, and height; an unbeginning and an unending love; a love that passeth knowledge.

II. The gift.—The gift is 'unspeakable.' There is nothing like it in earth or heaven. What Christ gave was not something belonging to Himself, nor a part of Himself, but His all—Himself! What an infinite all! It is the all of alls; for He is God, of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things. It is God giving Himself. It is a divine gift. It is the all of God;—the all of the creature, and the

all of the Creator; for He is both as the God-man. He gave Himself. He did this when He entered the cradle of Bethlehem; He did it when He ascended the cross of Golgotha. The gift and the grace are infinite.

III. The preparation.—This preparation is with setting apart or sanctification; and this sanctification begins with the cleansing with the washing of water by the word, or more exactly, 'with that washing of the water which is effected by the word;' as Christ said, 'Now ye are clean through the word which I spake unto you.' The passage, literally rendered, reads thus: 'In order that He might sanctify her (having cleansed her with that washing of water which is by the word).' Thus we have the whole process described; and this is not exactly the same as might appear from our translation. For the first step is the 'cleansing,' or 'purging,' which carries us back to the Levitical 'cleansings,' and to David's reference to these, 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.' This cleansing is with the 'washing of water.' But then this washing is said to be, not the application of water to the body, but by 'the word,' which, as soon as received, makes the sinner clean; clean in the eye of God, clean in the eye of the law, and clean according to the ordinances of the temple; clean as a man, clean as a worshipper. It was to this that Ezekiel referred when he said, 'Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean.' It was to this that our Lord referred in the passage already quoted (John 15:3); and also when He said, 'If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me...Ye are clean' (13:8-10). It was to this that Paul referred, 'But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified' (1 Corinthians 6:2) and also so frequently in the Epistle to the Hebrews, when he speaks of the purging of the conscience, and of the washing with pure water. It is, then, by the word—that is, by the truth believed—that we are cleansed or washed; and then there follows the sanctification, or consecration, or setting apart: for 'washed and sanctified' is the apostle's order in this great process of preparation. All this refers, in the first place, to the believing man's standing as an accepted worshipper, because of the great sacrifice which secures our acceptance; but from that moment the inward process begins, the renewing of the whole man after the image of the perfect One; and what, is spoken of one is true of the whole Church, and what is spoken of the whole Church is true of every member.

IV. The presentation.—Thus the words literally run, 'That He might present it to Himself glorious—the Church that has no spot or wrinkle;' that is, the

Church which was described ages before in the Song of Solomon. It is, then, for glory and honour that she is destined; she is to be the glorious one, as the bride of such a Bridegroom. Of her it is written, 'The King's daughter is all, glorious within' (Psalm 45:13); and in Canticles we have a description of her glory. He glorifies her, and then He presents her to Himself, or sets her down at His side, places her with Himself upon His throne. This is the presentation! Not the presentation of the bride to the Bridegroom—that would not have suited the apostle's statement as to the love of husbands—but the Bridegroom's reception of His bride after the marriage; His giving her His throne to sit upon; His leading her, leaning on His arm, into the marriage hall, and setting her down beside Him at the marriage supper, as it is written, 'The King hath brought me into His banqueting house, and His banner over me was love.'

V. The perfection.—She whom He loves and honours is not merely fair and glorious, but absolutely perfect and spotless. She is (not merely a church, but) 'the Church' so long predicted;—the Church or bride of whom David sang (Psalm 45), and whom Solomon described: 'Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.' She is here described by these four words: (1) Without spot; (2) without wrinkle; (3) holy; (4) without blemish. Each of these signifies a kind of perfection; all of them together a complete and absolute perfection, such as that of the Bridegroom Himself, who is the Lamb without blemish and without spot, the Holy One; holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. In order to the securing of this absolute perfection for His bride the Church, the heavenly Bridegroom 'gave Himself' for her, whom He had loved with an everlasting love. Perfection, complete, absolute, eternal, in soul and body, is the destiny of the Church, to be realized when Jesus comes again; and this same perfection is the hope of each member of that Church, that is, of each believer on the name of the Son of God.

The process is going on just now; it is going on in the addition of members to the Church; and it is going on in the growth and fruitfulness and holiness of these members. It is going on today among our selves. Christ is preparing His bride; and she, the Lamb's wife, is making herself ready—ready for the day when she shall be brought forth as a bride prepared and adorned for her husband.

We have but the love and the espousals here; the marriage is yet to come. It is

for that we are waiting; for not till then are we complete in holiness, or glory, or joy. Let our prospects tell upon our present life, and help to mould us into the image of Him, whom not having seen we love, and for whose arrival we are looking with earnest hope and longing. The arrival of the Bridegroom, the marriage supper, the marriage song, the marriage joy, the inheritance, the kingdom, the crown, the glory,—these are the ingredients of our hope; 'a hope that shall not make us ashamed;' a hope, because of which, 'God shall not be ashamed to be called upon God.' O blessed hope, regarding which, neither on our part, nor on God's, shall there be ought of disappointment, or regret, or shame! Infinitely glorious and perfect, like the flower opening each rich bud into the full, eternal blossom; like the river, swelling, and deepening, and sparkling in its gladness, as it passes into the ocean; like the sweet spring, glowing into the sweeter summer; like the fair morning twilight blushing out and on, into the cloudless, sorrowless, everlasting day!

O marriage of the Lamb, O marriage day, O marriage feast, when will ye come? When shall absence end, and presence begin? When shall the bride and the Bridegroom meet, and look each other in the face,—the one the chief among ten thousand, the other the fairest among women? When shall the gates of the great festal hall of the New Jerusalem be thrown open, and the ransomed of the Lord pass through in triumph? When shall we clasp hands again with each lost dear one on the immortal shore? O time, flee away! O day dawn! O song begin! O glory shine! O sorrow and sighing flee forever away! 'Surely I come quickly is the Bridegroom's watchword: let the bride's response ever be, 'Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus.'

XV.

The Armor And The Battle

"Put on the whole armor of God."—

Ephesians 6:2.

Jerusalem was the city of armor for Israel; for her captains and her mighty men there was 'the tower of David, builded for an armory, whereon there hung a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men' (Cant. 4:4). There were 'Solomon's three hundred shields of beaten gold' (1 Kings 10:17). There was Hezekiah's 'house of armor' (2 Kings 20:13). There was 'the armor of the house of the forest' (Isaiah 22:8). There were Solomon's 'valiant men, of the valiant of Israel, who held swords, being expert in war: every man having his sword upon his thigh, because of fear in the night' (Cant. 3:7, 8).

The heavenly Jerusalem has her armory too. Of this the prophet spoke: 'The Lord hath opened His armory, and hath brought forth the weapons of His indignation' (Jeremiah 1:25). It is to this heavenly armory that Paul so often points, when reminding us of the conflict and the triumph. He speaks of 'the armor of light' (Romans 13:12), of 'the armor of righteousness' (2 Corinthians 6:7), and, in the passage before us, of 'the whole armor of God.'

It is to battle that we are summoned the moment that we believe. All at once we are translated, not to paradise, but to a battlefield, and there placed face to face with our hellish foes. 'Fight the good fight of faith,' is the war note with which our Captain cheers us on.

For this battle strength is the first thing needed. But where is it to be found? Not in us, nor in the creature; not in human wisdom, or fleshly sufficiency. Only in Him who hath bought us, and called us, and washed us. 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.' Here is the source and secret of our strength. Here is a fullness truly divine and heavenly, and yet as accessible, as much within our reach, and at our disposal, as if it were our own; for it is at the disposal of One who loves us better than we love ourselves.

But strength is not all we need. We require weapons and armor; for the battle is no common one, and the enemy is the leader of the principalities and powers of darkness, who himself needs no armor, seeing he is invisible and invulnerable; who is not only powerful and skilful, but has every kind of weapon at command—the snare, the wile, the sword, the dart, the fire. His object in the present day is to persuade us that he does not exist, that we have to fight no such battle, that we need no sword nor shield, that we can do without anything beyond our own human power and skill. But the divine warning assures us that our enemy still lives and rages and deceives; that he is most to be feared when most invisible; that his last delusions will be his worst, when, as an angel of light, he comes into the Church to mislead by falsehoods, so beautiful, so attractive, so intellectual, so like the truth—it may be, so evangelical,—that, if it were possible, the elect shall be deceived.

It is the 'whole armor' or panoply of God that we are to put on, that we may 'withstand' and also stand. 'For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal' (2 Corinthians 10:4). Flesh and blood, beings or things of earth, may be sometimes alarming foes; but these are nothing to the principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, the spiritual wickednesses in high places. A girdle we need, and this is given us,—the girdle of truth. A breastplate is provided,—the breastplate of righteousness. A shield is required, and here it is—the shield of faith, to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one. A helmet we must have, and that is not lacking—the helmet of salvation, which covers our head in the day of battle from the, fiery strokes aimed at this vital part by the spirits in 'high places.' A sword we must have, and it is presented to us,—the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Shoes (or sandals) we must have, to protect the feet in the rough, slippery battlefield, and they are at hand,—'the preparation of the gospel of peace.'

Here are some of the weapons and pieces of armor which we find in the tower of our David, builded for an armory; and we take down these from among the thousand bucklers, the shields of mighty men, according to our need. With these shields of gold provided by our Solomon, we cover ourselves, girding our swords upon our thigh (like our Captain, Psalm 45:3). Our 'Leader and Commander' teaches our hands to war, and our fingers to fight; so that a bow of steel is broken by our arms; nay, and we become 'expert in war;' we are strong,

and do exploits (Daniel 11:32). We become as the 'valiant in Israel;' ever girded, ever armed, ever watchful, 'because of fear in the night' (Cant. 3:5).

For this is our night—the world's day, but our night—and we are exposed perpetually to 'fear in the night,' from the god of the night, the ruler of this world's darkness. Night is full of fear. Again and again we ask (in our weariness and long waiting), 'Watchman, what of the night?' And as yet the answer has only been, 'The morning cometh, but also the night;' the morning will come, but the night must first be exhausted. Then the day shall break, and the shadows flee away. Then Satan shall be bound; the battle finished; the victory won; the conquerors crowned (Revelations 3:21); our weapons laid aside; the sword turned into a ploughshare, and the spear into a pruning-hook; the bow broken, the chariot burned in fire.

I. We must fight.—There is no choice here. Whether we will or not, we must fight; for we are thrown upon a battlefield, and if we fight not, we perish. Woe be to the man that thinks there is no need of fighting now; that there is no danger and no enemy. Fight the good fight of faith.

II. We must know our enemy.—Not flesh and blood. Not the world merely, but the god of this world, Satan with all his legions. Him we have to encounter face to face. Let us not mistake the foe, nor undervalue either his skill or his strength. He has been the Church's enemy from the beginning; he is so still; he will be till he is bound. The field on which we fight is strewn (as Bunyan says) with the shivers of Apollyon's broken darts. We may know it by this to be the old battlefield.

III. We must fight with God's weapons and armor.—Nothing less will do. Satan in his subtlety would provide us with armor against himself— paper shields, wooden swords, spears of reed. He persuades us that we can combat evil by the appliances of modern intellect and science and civilization. Let us beware. To try to suit religion to the spirit of the age, is to play into Satan's hands. Only divine weapons will avail in a battle with the powers of darkness.

IV. We must fight in faith.—By faith we fight, and by faith we stand (2 Corinthians 1:24). As men believing in Him who died and rose again, we fight. As men believing in the power and love of our Captain and King, we fight. As men who know that they are to be made more than conquerors, we fight. It is the fight of faith.

V. We must fight bravely, and to the end.—We must not turn back in the day of battle. We have no armor for our back. We must face the foe. 'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.' And this must be to the end, however long the warfare may be. The prize is not to the conqueror in one field, but to the conqueror at last.

XVI.

The Apostolic Trumpet Blast

"Stand therefore."—

Ephesians 6:14.

"Be vigilant."—

1 Peter 5:8.

"Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."—2 Timothy 2:1. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity."—

1 Corinthians 16:13, 14.

We throw all these passages together as bearing upon one point, as summing up the needful exhortation for Christian men.

As soldiers the apostle says to us, 'Stand,' and 'Stand fast;' flee not; be brave; keep your ground. As sentinels he says to us, 'Be vigilant;' never off your guard for a moment; never giving way to slumber. As teachers and witnesses he says to us, 'Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.'

It is specially the last of the four passages above that we mean to notice, but in connection with the varied exhortations contained in the rest. We shall find them all bearing on each other, and all of them summoning us to a life of courage, and vigilance, and hardihood, and persevering energy. No softness, no sloth, no cowardice, no sheathed swords, no turning back in the day of battle, no shrinking from the heat and burden of the day.

The passage in Corinthians gives us five decided and solemn watchwords. Each of them seems to issue from a trumpet that never knew what it was to give an uncertain sound; each of them summoning the Church to deeds of hardness and daring.

I. Watch ye.—The servant takes up the Master's words; for these are specially Christ's words, and of the twenty one times that they occur in the New Testament, twelve are in the Gospels. The Lord saw that His Church would need such a word, as her watchword and motto. Our tendency is to be off our guard, to fall asleep; therefore we are exhorted to watch. We are to watch against things both within and without. We are to watch constantly. One unwatchful hour may work unspeakable evil, to ourselves and to others. Were a pilot to fall asleep at the helm, or the keeper of the lighthouse, or the engine man on one of our expresses, what would be the consequences? We are to watch—(1.) Against ourselves, our unbelief, our carnality, our indolence, our selfishness, our covetousness, our bad temper, our vanity, our worldliness. (2.) Against the world, its errors, its follies, its gaieties, its temptations, its open sins, its novels, its theatres, its ball-rooms, its parties of pleasure, its idle companionships. (3.) Against Satan, his sophistries, wiles, delusions, arguments, fiery darts. Against all these there must be vigorous, honest, brave, incessant, uncompromising watchfulness. No truce with the enemies of Christ; no friendship with the seed of the serpent; no alliance with this present evil world.

II. Stand fast in the faith.—The word here is simply 'stand;' maintain your position; and the stress is laid on 'the faith,' the things most surely believed. The exhortation takes for granted that we have believed; and it calls on us to adhere to the truths which we have thus received. It is not of the quantity or quality of our own faith that the apostle is speaking, but of the excellency, and fullness, and trueness, and sufficiency of the things believed. For it is out of these, and not out of our own acts of faith, that we extract all the peace and strength and holiness to which we are called by the gospel. This 'standing' is not founded on ignorance, but on knowledge. It is intelligent and reasonable. It is not obstinacy, or crotchety adhesion to one's own notions. It is large minded, large hearted cleaving to what is revealed, and so ascertained to be true, divinely true. 'Stand fast' in these days, when so many are falling, or stumbling, or departing from the foundation. 'Stand fast;' but be sure that it is in 'the faith,' the old apostolic faith.

III. Quit you like men.—This is literally, 'be men,' or 'be manly;' very different from 'muscular' or materialized Christianity. Your creed is the creed of men, not of babes; so let your walk and bearing be, your whole life, your conversation, your recreations, your literature, your tones and looks. No cant, no

whining, no simpering, no effeminacy, no sentimentalism. Let all about you be erect and manly. Be manly, ye calm; be manly, yet gentle; be manly, yet polite and courteous. A true Christian should be the manliest of men. His Christianity should be robust and healthy. Such was Paul, such was John, such was Peter. Such was Knox and Calvin and Luther. God's design in conversion, and the Holy Spirit's work in indwelling, is to make us thoroughly what God, when creating us, meant us to be,—men, true men, in dignity, in integrity, in nobleness of bearing, whether of soul or body. I remember the remark of one regarding a young man newly converted. He said, 'His conversion had improved his very gait, and given him a free and noble bearing, which he had not before.' So let it be with us. Popish saints are all pictured as hanging the head to one side, looking demurely and askance on time ground. So let us not be; but erect, looking upward, with joyous, steadfast eye.

IV. Be strong.—The word denotes vigor and power, whether of soul or body. It is the word used of John and of Jesus: 'The child grew and waxed strong in spirit' (Luke 2:40). We are to be strong in every way and in every sense; strong in mind, strong in will, strong in purpose, strong in faith. Not feeble, cowardly, compromising, yielding, vacillating, timid; afraid to face danger, or difficulty, or toil, or loss, or shame. 'Endure hardness a good soldiers of Jesus Christ' (2 Timothy 2:3).

A true saint is no coward, no mere soldier on parade; but ever ready for the field; not turning back in the day of battle. Christian strength is a real thing. Christian vigor is one of those things by which we glorify God. Christian bravery is that in which we are followers of primitive saints, of martyrs, reformers, and covenanters. While men deride us as professors of the 'soft theology,' let us show what true strength is; enduring hardness, and fearing no foe.

V. Let all your things be done with charity.—Solomon's exhortation is, 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might,' Paul's is, 'with charity.' Both must be remembered. The love and the might must go together. Let love pervade everything, even your strongest words and most energetic deeds. The one need not exclude the other, nay, they mutually help; the love makes the might the mightier, and the might makes the love more loving. Love one another. Love the brethren. Love all men. Let us go forth each day in love, to

work the works and speak the words of God. Let all men see that we love, and that the love of God reigneth within. Watch, stand fast, be men, be strong, yet, above all, be loving! Love is the best of gifts, the inmost excellent way. We have been loved, let us love. Let us put away all hatred, strife, wrath, unbrotherliness. Let us be kindly affectioned one to another. Let love make us brave, liberal, noble; yet not soft, timid, effeminate, childish, either in word or deed.

Let these apostolic trumpet blasts sound loud and far through the great Christian camp. Let them rouse into vigilance and vigor the whole Christian host. The old enemy still marshals his hosts against the saints of God; he still launches his fiery darts, the artillery of hell. He braves us to the conflict. And we must fight and watch and toil; our swords unsheathed, our panoply clasped round us, our faces to the foe. No thought of coward flight. No wish to come to terms with the enemy. On on! Fight the good fight of faith. The Captain will soon be here; and His appearance on the battle field will be the ending of the campaign, the signal for victory. Then comes the conqueror's recompense; the warrior's wreath of triumph; the song of victorious battle; the entry of the bannered host through the gates into the city.

XVII.

A Preached Christ

"Christ is preached."—

Philippians 1:18.

Sometimes we read of 'preaching peace;' 'preaching the gospel;' 'preaching the kingdom;' 'preaching the word;' 'preaching remission of sins;' 'preaching the faith;' 'preaching the cross:' here it is 'preaching Christ,' as elsewhere 'preaching Jesus,' 'preaching the Lord Jesus.'

All these things then we preach; all these you hear—peace, the gospel, the word, the kingdom, remission, the faith, the cross; but, above all, Christ Himself in whom all these things are treasured up, in whom is the fullness of all of them.

It is not merely truth, or opinions, or a creed, or a speculation that we preach, but Christ Himself; the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Nor is it certain things about Him that we preach, but Christ Himself—presenting Him to men as He presented Himself when He said, 'I am the Light of the world; I am the bread of life.'

In so doing, then, we preach—

I. Christ's person.—God and man; the Word made flesh; David's Son, David's Lord; King of kings, yet a servant; Lord of lords, yet a worm and no man. In this person there is, perfection—perfection as a whole, in the wondrous union of the divine and the human; perfection in the parts— perfection in the divinity, perfection in the humanity; perfection in the holiness, perfection in the love; perfection in the power, perfection in the goodness; perfection through the fullness of the indwelling Spirit; perfection in the sight of God and man. Perfection in every movement of that glorious person, in every word and deed.

II. Christ's name.—His name is Jesus, Immanuel, the Christ, the Son of God. It is a name above every name. The naming of that name is proclaiming

the gospel of Christ; for that name contains glad tidings; it is the name of names; His name is as ointment poured forth. With the voice of a trumpet we sound His name abroad, that the whole earth may hear it, and rejoice in it. Of itself that name is good news, the joyful sound.

III. Christ's life.—He dwelt among us; doing and speaking grace. His whole life was a gospel; each part of it, even the least, was good news. In His going out and coming in we have the good news. Miracles, parables, sermons, all contain the good news. His whole life is the fullness of glad tidings for time sinner. 'This man receiveth sinners.'

IV. Christ's righteousness.—He was the Righteous One, fulfilling the law for us; working out for us and presenting to us 'the righteousness of God.' A divine righteousness for, the unrighteous is that which we preach. Jesus the Just One, living, suffering, dying for the unjust. A spotless, seamless, glorious raiment, instead of our tattered, filthy rags; perfection for imperfection; glory for shame; justification for condemnation.

V. Christ's blood.—By blood-shedding and death He has accomplished the infinite work. Life has been given for life, and the sentence of death reversed. Blood has been shed; the blood of the everlasting covenant; the blood of reconciliation and atonement and cleansing; precious blood; the blood of the Lamb without blemish and without spot; the blood of the mighty sacrifice; the blood shed for many for the remission of sins; blood which pacifies the conscience, which cleanses the whole man.

VI. His resurrection.—He died and rose again. He is now time risen One; and as such we know Him. His grave is empty, for His work is done, and the Father has proclaimed Him His only begotten Son. The work is done; the seal is set; the message has gone forth. He is risen. All testimony to Christ embraces a testimony to His resurrection! For that resurrection is for us, nay, it is ours.

VII. His ascension.—He has ascended on high, leading captivity captive. He has returned to His Father and our Father. His work on earth was done; His words on earth were spoken. He has now "ascended; and is now exalted, a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins. As the ascended One we preach Him.

VIII. His intercession.—He ever liveth to intercede for us. He is the High Priest above; the Advocate with the Father. He pleads for us; and Him the Father heareth always. In love and power He intercedes; for His is an advocacy which cannot fail—it is a mighty intercession; an intercession in which the Father delights; an intercession which gives us the assurance of present and eternal security.

IX. His second coming.—'Behold, He cometh with clouds.' 'Behold, I come quickly.' 'Behold, the Lord cometh, with ten thousand of His saints.' These are some of the intimations given us concerning an event which (with its accompaniments) occupies a very large portion of Scripture; so large, that one wonders how such a very prominent truth could have been so little preached and so little believed. The early Christians were full of it; but later ages have almost dropped it from their creed, or reduced it to a minimum as an object of faith. The Church of the first century delighted in it; the Church of the nineteenth turns from it with coldness, or aversion, or dread. But if we would preach a full Christ, in all the completeness of His work from first to last, we must preach a coming Christ as well as a Christ who has come. We must preach His second and glorious advent to judge and to reign; to smite Antichrist, to restore Israel, to bind Satan, to convert the world, to deliver creation, to set up His holy kingdom, and to make all things new.

Once and again in this chapter the apostle enforces his preaching of Christ by reference to his bonds. Paul the preacher was Paul the prisoner—'the Lord's prisoner.'

In order that we may fully see the force of this twice repeated expression, let us call to mind the circumstances of the case. He was not actually in a Roman dungeon. By the kindness of the praefect Burrus, he was not thrust into prison, or confined within the Praetorian barrack, but was allowed to stay in his own hired house; though Roman law demanded that he should still be treated as a prisoner, and guarded by soldiers,—one soldier by day and two by night. To these he was chained by the arm constantly; so that, whatever might be the kindness of the perfect, he was exposed continually to the rudeness of the soldiery, who had no sympathy with him in any point, and who were not likely to soothe, but rather to aggravate his trials.

Thus far fettered, though not otherwise hindered, he held conferences with his fellow Jews, he preached and he wrote, or at least dictated, several of his epistles. We find him throughout his marvelous history in various circumstances and postures; sometimes tossed upon the deep; sometimes pleading before a judge; sometimes walking along the Asian sea-beach, the waves of the Aegean breaking at his feet; sometimes let down in a basket from the window in the wall of Damascus; sometimes standing on the stairs of the temple, or the tower of Antonia, addressing a Jerusalem crowd; sometimes journeying at dead of night, with a company of horsemen, on the road between Jerusalem and Caesarea; sometimes in the jail of Philippi, singing praises, with his feet fast in the stocks; sometimes standing up on Mars' Hill, before an audience of Athenian philosophers, announcing Jesus and the resurrection; sometimes on the sands of Miletus, kneeling down and praying with his friends, while they hung about him, and kissed him, and wept sore at their last farewell; sometimes at Malta, standing on the shore of the bay, and shaking off the viper by the fire, or healing the father of the governor; sometimes marching along the Appian Way to Rome as a prisoner, through the Pomptine Marshes and by the Alban hills; and sometimes, as we see in the Epistles to Philemon, to the Colossians, to the Ephesians, a prisoner of Christ, with the Roman chain upon his aged arm.

When the old heathen was pleading for his brother's life before Athenian judges, he held up his arm, the hand of which had been lost at Salamis when fighting his country's battles. This action was the most resistless of his arguments, and won his cause. In the expressions made use of in these epistles—'prisoner of Christ,' 'remember my bonds,'—we have an argument equally irresistible and touching. We seem to hear the clanking of the chain, as he subscribes his name to each, for he does not write them all with his own hand, but makes use of the pen of some ready writer. With what power do his arguments and persuasions and exhortations come to us, thus enforced and carried home by the sound of his chains! And when standing up to preach in the Christian assemblies at Rome, among beloved brethren, how overwhelming must have been his discourses, as, lifting up or extending his fettered right hand in the fervor of his heavenly eloquence, he showed and shook the chains wherewith he was bound for his beloved Lord, and, by their sight and sound, won for his words the completest victory that Grecian orator ever won in the Areopagus of Athens, or Roman in the Forum of the seven hilled city! It has been said that when all other pleadings

fail, we can tell men of the argument of Paul in tears; but have we not here an argument equally resistless and not less moving,—the argument of Paul in chains?

Thus it was in chains that Paul preached Christ. As an ambassador in bonds he pleaded with men. His, chains, no less than his, words, said, 'Be ye reconciled to God.' What a preacher! What an ambassador! What sermons! What epistles! And thus Paul writes and preaches still! Let us read, let us listen, let us drink in his blessed eloquence. Let not such apostolic pleadings be in vain. Paul was in earnest, if ever man was in earnest. Is Jesus less so? Paul was sincere and honest in his dealings with men. Is Jesus less so? Could we have gone to Paul, and gathered confidence as we looked upon, or touched his chain? And shall we go to Paul's gracious Master with less confidence in His sincerity and love? If the prisoner's chains increased our confidence, shall not the nails 'of the cross, and the soldier's spear, and the crown of thorns increase our confidence in Him who came not only to preach the gospel, but Himself to be the gospel of the grace of God?

XVIII.

The Apostolic Only

"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ."

Philippians 1:27.

Only! Was this all? Yes, all, in the sense of its being one chief, main thing; pre-eminent above others. As he says for himself elsewhere, 'This one thing I do;' so here, he says to them, Only! Ah, what stress he lays upon a godly life, a consistent walk! Whatever be your earthly lot, be it joy or sorrow; whatever your gifts, your privileges, your enemies, or your friends—keep this in special remembrance, as if it were the one thing in life; be men of one idea, one desire, one purpose—live a holy life! How earnestly does the apostle inculcate this!

The word 'conversation' is a peculiar one. It does not mean speech or intercourse; it refers to our general deportment or manner of life as citizens—our citizen-life. We have a double citizenship; earthly and heavenly. We are still men in the flesh, citizens of earthly cities; and in the living of this citizen-life, we must not forget whose we are;—we must remember the gospel, and Him whose gospel it is. Our heavenly citizenship we must ever keep in mind, and walk worthy of it; for we are citizens of no mean city—of the joyous city. Let our whole life, with all its goings out and comings in, in every relationship, civil, social, domestic, be 'as becometh the gospel.'

It is by the gospel that the apostle would have us test ourselves, and mould our life. It was with the belief of this gospel that our life began; thus let it go on. The gospel lifted us up to a higher level; let us remain there, or rather, let us ascend still higher. To bring out this, let us see what sort of gospel it is that we have come into the possession of.

I. It is a gospel of peace.—Let us who have believed it walk at peace and in peace; possessors of peace, and makers of peace. Let peace be written on our forehead and speak out in every word, look, motion. Let us be witnesses for peace; living symbols of peace; seeking the things which make for peace, and

which will commend, to all who see or hear us, the peace of God.

II. It is a gospel of liberty.—It has brought us into liberty, and broken our yoke. Let us walk as freemen; our whole lives a witness for true freedom. Let our citizen-life be the life of liberty. The Son has made us free; let us see that we be free indeed; that we commend to the bound world the liberty of Christ.

III. It is a gospel of gladness.—There is no gloom in it; and there ought to be none in those who believe it. It should make our faces shine,— shine all over, so that we may make all men see and feel what a happiness it contains. Walk worthy of this happy gospel. Let men see what a treasure you have within. Rejoice in the Lord. Let your joy be ever full, and overflowing. Let your whole life, your citizen-life, your whole deportment, be an exhibition of this happy gospel.

IV. It is a gospel of light.—There is no darkness in it. It is all light; all like Him with whom the light dwelleth, who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all. Let us shine; let our life be a bright one. Let our whole demeanor be brightness, like that of the gospel which we profess. Let our ways and words be all brightness. Let us be children of the light and of the day. Our dwelling is in a dark world. Let not that darkness mar or absorb our light, but rather intensify and enhance it. Let each day's darkness in the world be met with new brilliance in us. Let us bring out the contrast nobly; and so have our conversation as becometh the gospel of light.

V. It is the gospel of holiness.—A holy gospel; a gospel concerning deliverance from sin; a gospel meant to secure holiness; a gospel which embodies the holiness of a holy God. All in and about this gospel is holy. Let our conversation, our citizen-life, be as becometh this gospel. Let us exhibit it, adorn it by a holy life. An inconsistent life is a scandal, a reproach against the gospel. Let us be consistent, circumspect, watching our ways and words. Let it be seen that we are citizens of the holy city.

VI. It is the gospel of Christ.—He is its all; its sum and burden. The news which are so good are about His person and His propitiation; His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, His second coming. We are to walk as becometh such a gospel! We are to live as men who believe in such a Christ as

this! If this thought were ever before us, should we not be more on our guard against all sin, more intent on advancing in holiness? Shall we not seek to honour the gospel of Christ? Shall we trifle with it, or treat it as a common thing?

VII. It is the gospel of the kingdom.—It brings us the good news of the heavenly, the everlasting kingdom. It points us to the open gate into it. It makes us heirs of it. In that kingdom is the city of which we are heirs; the city which hath foundations, into which nothing that defileth shall enter; where all is perfect, glorious, divine; the New Jerusalem. Let us remember our heirship, our citizenship, and walk accordingly. With such a hope, let us be holy; let us set our affection on things above; let us hold fast; let us be faithful; let us live here as sons, kings, priests; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

XIX.

The Better Resurrection

"That I may know Him, and the bower of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." —

Philippians 3:10,11.

Resurrection! this has been the Church's hope from the beginning. Not what men call the immortality of the soul, but resurrection—the rising up of that very thing which had fallen down. This was revealed from the first, being included in the promise regarding the woman's seed. It is no later revelation, but one which patriarchs and prophets knew and rejoiced in.

The New Testament expands the truth, and shows us two resurrections,—unto life and death. It shows us the 'better resurrection' (Hebrew 11:35); the 'first resurrection' (Revelation 20:5); 'the resurrection from among the dead' (Philippians 3:2). Resurrection unto glory everlasting is that which is proclaimed as our hope.

The first or better resurrection, then, is our goal or recompense; that which the apostle kept in view, and which we are also, like him, to set before us in our labours and sufferings. How are we to reach this recompense? The question here is not as to salvation. That was settled at once, on believing. He speaks of reward, or degrees of glory. Are we to be barely saved, 'so as by fire,' or to have the conqueror's reward? Are we simply to get into the kingdom, or to have an abundant entrance?

The different steps by which the apostle was pressing on to the attainment of this reward are thus given.

I. Knowing Him.—'That I may know Him.' The 'knowledge of the Christ' was from the beginning the great desire and ambition of the saints. It was first the knowledge of the woman's seed, then of Abraham's seed, then of David's seed; or, generally, it was the knowledge of Messiah throughout the ages that they longed for. They 'saw Messiah's day afar off, and were glad.' By 'His

knowledge' it was that the Father's 'righteous servant justified many' (Isaiah 53:2). It was this knowledge that was the basis and the essence of all wisdom. The world's true philosophy (though it knew not) lay here. In the knowledge of the Messiah was contained the knowledge of the true God—of His love and grace, of His truth and righteousness, of His holiness and power, of His wisdom and greatness. No man had seen God at any time; but the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He declared Him. Thus wrote the apostle of the 'light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' To know Him, then, was to know God; to know His name was to know the name of God; to know His love was to know the love of God. 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' And more than this, to know this Christ of God was to have pardon and peace; to know Him was to have eternal life; to know Him was to become a son of God, and an heir of the glory. How much was included in 'knowing Him!' Hence Paul's longing, which only eternity could satisfy, was, 'That I may know Him.' Hence his exulting declaration, 'Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.'

II. Knowing the power of His resurrection.—There is a twofold power here referred to. (1.) The power contained in, and flowing out from, His resurrection. For as the cross is the place of power, so also is the tomb. Resurrection is a thing of power, and the empty grave of Christ is the exhibition and pledge of that power. (2.) The power contained in the truth concerning resurrection. Resurrection truth is truth of special efficacy in awakening, in quickening, in transforming. The risen Christ is He who is possessed of all power; and the Father, in raising Him, gave proof of the greatness of His power towards Him, 'according to the working of His mighty power.' Resurrection realized by us, is one of the most powerful of all facts or truths. In realizing it, and in studying it, we receive power from it to live the life of risen men. The power of a risen Christ flows into us, as we enter more fully into its meaning.

III. Knowing the fellowship of His sufferings.—A Christian is (in believing) brought into fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. He gets the benefit of these surety sufferings of the great Substitute, and thus he shares them. But more than this, he himself is a suffering man, called to a suffering life; and in every pang or sorrow he is made to feel his oneness with his suffering Lord. Though the sufferings of the Master were, in respect of their sinbearing end, and

object, altogether isolated and peculiar, yet, considered simply as suffering, they are shared by the disciple. Thus the Master and the disciple are identified in and by suffering. Suffering links us to the suffering One; and each grief deepens our sympathy with Him, and draws out the feeling of oneness or partnership (fellowship) with Him, as the Man of Sorrows. Have we not much to learn of this? Let each sorrow lead us straight to the Man of Sorrows; and while He tells us that in all our affliction He is afflicted, let us feel that in all His affliction we are afflicted. This sense of fellowship in suffering is quickening and sanctifying and comforting. It helps, as it were, to ripen us, to fit us for that which Paul had in view—'the resurrection from the dead.' It is a stepping stone to the exceeding and eternal weight of glory. 'If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.'

IV. By being conformed to His death—Paul 'died daily,' in the persecutions he endured, and was thus daily brought into the likeness of Christ's death. He 'carried about with him in his flesh the dying of the Lord Jesus.' His life was an hourly miracle; he seemed to have far more to do with death than with life. In this continual dying he was made conformable to Christ's death. All that his Master passed through he did, and 'filled up that which was behind of the afflictions of Christ;' drank the 'afterings' of His cup of sorrow (Colossians 1:24); passing through much tribulation to the kingdom.

Thus he pressed on to the glory of the first resurrection, and reigning with Christ. These storms of earth only quickened his pace and strengthened his resolution.

XX.

The Heavenly Citizenship

"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."—

Philippians 3:20.

These two concluding verses give us these four points for our meditation 1. Our present state; 2. Our hope; 3. The change; 4. The power.

I. Our present state.—'Our conversation is in heaven.' They who are thus entitled to speak are those whom the apostle calls 'saints in Christ Jesus' (1:1). They are those who 'worshipped God in the Spirit, who rejoiced in Christ Jesus, and who had no confidence in the flesh' (3:3). They were men who had received the divine testimony concerning the Son of God, and who could say, 'We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.' Their belief of that testimony had altered their state in many respects. It had brought them forgiveness and life. It had knit them to God in a new relationship, and filled them with His love. But it had done more. It had called them out of a present evil world, and broken the links which had fastened them to it. It had made them strangers upon earth, and cut them off from companionship with its evil. But in so doing it had given them far more than it had taken away. It had severed earthly ties only to fasten heavenly ones. It had city of which we have become the citizens withdrawn them from earthly citizenship only to make them citizens of the New Jerusalem. It is to their new ties, their new relationship, their new home, their new city, that the words refer: 'Our conversation is in heaven.'

Take the word 'conversation' as meaning 'manner of life,' 'habit of being,' or 'citizenship,' the substantial meaning is the same. It implies that they had become connected with heaven in the same ways, and at the same points, in which they had formerly been connected with earth. Heaven, the heavenly city, its heavenly citizens, its heavenly customs and manners, were now to them what earth, and earthly cities, and earthly citizens, and earthly customs and manners had been. They now stood in the same connection with the New Jerusalem, its laws, its occupations, its companionships, its influences, as they had formerly done with the city of their earthly habitation, its laws, its usages, its employments, its

fellowships. The words would then simply mean, 'we are now citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem.'

It is from this new connection that the apostle derives so many of his arguments for holiness and consistency of life. He calls on us to view everything from this point, and to act accordingly. The old evil maxim, that we are to do at Rome as Rome does, has here a good application. We are to do at Jerusalem what Jerusalem does. We are to leave behind us our old habits, our old vanities, our old sins, our old companionships. All to us must be new. We must live according to the laws and manners of the new country which we have chosen, of the new city of which we have become the citizens.

A believing man is the citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem, a citizen of no mean city. As such he is called upon to act and speak and live. Let this be a safeguard in the hour of temptation. With this answer the seducing arguments of pleasure, or vanity, or worldliness. Our conversation is in heaven. I have already taken up my dwelling in the heavenly city, I cannot come down, I cannot stoop to anything unworthy of it.

II. Our hope.—The coming of the Lord is our hope and expectation. Out of that very heaven into which He has gone, out of that heaven in which our conversation and citizenship are, we expect Him to come. Thus, that heaven to which we have become united, contains in it everything pertaining to our present joy or future hope. Our treasure, our blessedness, our glory, all are there. Above all, He, who is more to us than treasure, or blessedness, or glory, is there. Hence our eye turns, in wistfulness and longing, to that region where everything that our heart yearns for or delights in is contained. As, during the darkness of night, we turn our eye to the east, knowing that the sun will rise there; so it is upward to the heavens, our true east or orient, that we look, knowing that it is there the Sun of Righteousness is to arise.

The word 'look' is, in the Greek, a very strong expression, for which we have no single word. It does not mean a mere look, or glance, or turn of the eye, but the prolonged, persevering, earnest gaze of expectation. Just as Mary and Martha, when they knew that the Lord was in Jerusalem, would be continually looking towards Olivet, in the expectation of seeing Him coming over the hill to their house; so, with the same continued and wistful waiting, does the saint turn his eye to the heavens, whence he knows that his Lord is to appear. The word

occurs seven times in the New Testament, and always in connection with the same event or hope. 'Waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God' (Romans 8:19) 'waiting for the adoption, even the redemption of the body' (8:23); 'then do we with patience wait for it' (8:25); 'waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Corinthians 1:7); 'we wait for the hope of righteousness,' i.e. for the hope which the righteousness gives us (Galatians 5:5); 'unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time' (Hebrews 9:28).

He for whom the Church is thus earnestly looking, gazing upward into heaven, is peculiarly and minutely designated here 'the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.' He is 'Lord,' as Jehovah, God over all, Lord of lords. He is Christ, as the Messiah promised to the fathers, the anointed One, the man filled with the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus, as the true Joshua, the deliverer from sin, the leader into the inheritance, the fighter of our battles. He is Saviour, not merely because of what He did upon the cross, when He came the first time, but because of the salvation which He brings with Him, in the day when He comes to complete what is as yet only begun,— deliverance of the Church and of Israel out of the hands of enemies; deliverance of time body from the power of the grave; deliverance of time earth from the curse and from the dominion of Satan.

Are you expecting the Lord? Are you living in this expectation? Is it a deep-seated, abiding, cherished hope? Is it a hope that tells upon your character, your life, your daily actings in public or private, your opinions, your whole man? Does it quicken you? Does it purify you? Does it keep you separate from the world? Does it keep you calm in the midst of earth's most exciting events, or most untoward changes? Does it give you a new view of history as well as prophecy? Does it show you the vanity of time's politics, human schemes of reform and earth regeneration, the sinfulness as well as hollowness of man's principles of mere expediency, by which he would govern the world without a Bible, without a Christ, and without a God? Let your belief in the Lord's coming be a calm, steadfast, earnest, unfluctuating belief that influences your whole being, and spreads its glorious brightness over your whole life, turning all its shadows into sunshine, and making you to see a meaning, a purpose, and an order in the most untoward events, the most disorderly and confused of earth's scenes. Let your expectation of the Lord's coming be a calm and healthy one; not one that excites, but one that tranquillizes; not one that unfits for duty, but one that nerves you more firmly for it; not one that paralyzes exertion, but one

that invigorates you for it; not one that makes you indifferent to present duty, but one that makes you doubly in earnest about everything that your hand findeth to do; not one that stops liberality, and prayer, and work, but one that increases all these a hundred fold; not one that dwells exclusively on the future's dark side,—the judgments that are at hand,—but one that realizes the glory and the joy of Messiah's approaching victory and triumphant reign.

III. The change—'Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His own glorious body.' Let us notice here these things:

1. The thing to be changed.—It is our 'body;' for that will be the only thing in that day needing change. What importance does God attach to the body! How different from the indifference with which many profess to regard its future interests! He who made it knows its value, and always represents it as precious—a thing cared for by Him. The name here applied to our body is peculiar. 'Vile' is not the right word; but simply 'the body of our humiliation,' the body which we have in this our low estate. As Christ had a body suited to His humiliation, which hungered, which thirsted, which was weary; so have we a body of humiliation.

2. The nature of the change.—The word change is the same as is elsewhere translated 'transform:' 'Satan is transformed into an angel of light.' It implies an alteration in the whole frame and appearance and constitution of the body; so that, while still the same body, it will be gloriously altered, so that all that is poor and feeble and carnal shall pass away. 'Flesh and blood,' i.e. in its present state, 'cannot inherit the kingdom of God.' The body, in its state of humiliation, is unfit for its future abode. It must be transformed and transfigured.

3. The model of the change. This model is nothing less than the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. 'We shall be like Him,' not merely in our spirits, but in our bodies too. Nor is it the body of His humiliation that we are to be conformed to, but the body of His glory, for so the words should run. It is the body which He now has in His glory, and which He shall, have hereafter when He comes to be glorified in His saints; it is this body of His exaltation, this body of His glory, that is to be the model of ours. Our body of humiliation is to be transformed into the exact resemblance of the body of His glory.

4. The Author of the change.—It is Christ Himself. Sometimes it would seem to be the Father: 'Them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.' But here it is Christ that works the change. He transforms. He who says, 'Behold, I make all things new,' is the Author of this glorious transfiguration. We are not only to be made like Him; but He to whose likeness we are fashioned, is the worker. He who made the body at first, now remakes it in His own glorified likeness.

What a prospect! This body weighs us down, and adds so often to our burdens. It is feeble and weary. It is sickly and pained in every part. It needs such care, such attendance every hour; food, and rest, and sleep, and medicine! Then all this shall be over. It shall be a glorious body, suited for an inheritance, fitted for those who are to sit with Christ upon His throne, and to be citizens of the New Jerusalem which cometh down out of heaven from God. In a land of sickness and pain and weariness, how comforting, how blessed the prospect of having this body transformed and glorified! With what longings should we anticipate the resurrection! With what joy should we contemplate the change that is to be wrought on our mortal bodies at the coming of the Lord! It is no slight matter this, though it concerns the body. God does not think it a trifle; nor does He count it carnal to lay such stress upon the body's weakness or the body's strength. He has so made us that we cannot do otherwise. We may bear up under bodily pain and languor, but we cannot help being influenced by the body, nor feeling what a difference the right state of our body would make upon our soul. It was meant to be a helpmeet; and so it would have been, had mortality and disease not hindered it; so it shall be again, when mortality and disease have been expelled from it. But just because it was meant for a helpmeet, so is it the more a burden and a hindrance by reason of sin and weakness. And when that which was meant to be a helpmeet thus becomes a hindrance, how grievous must the hindrance be! It is as when one's own household turns against him. It is as when the soldiers in the army mutiny and attack their general.

Ah, yes! the aches of the body are not things to be despised; nor is the deliverance promised to it in the day of resurrection and transfiguration a thing to be undervalued. What a difference to our whole man, our whole spiritual being, will the renewal of the body make! Thus Richard Baxter wrote respecting this: 'O my soul, thou shalt never more lament the sufferings of the saints, never

more condole the Church's ruins, never bewail thy suffering friends, nor lie wailing over their deathbeds or their graves; thy body will no more be such a burden to thee; thy pains and sicknesses are all cured, thou shalt be troubled with weakness and weariness no more; thy head is not now an aching head, nor thy heart now an aching heart; thy hunger, and thirst, and cold and sleep, thy labour and study, are all gone. My face will not wrinkle, nor my hair be gray; but this mortal shall have put on immortality.'

IV. The power.—This change is to be a work of power, and it will be specially seen to be so by the suddenness with which it is accomplished. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

The kind of power to be put forth is also stated here. It is that kind of power, or 'energy,' or 'in working,' whereby He is able to subdue all things to Himself. He is the Mighty One, the Almighty One. He is able to do the work He has undertaken, and ere long He will show this. His predicted ability to subdue all things to Himself proves that He is able to transform the bodies of His saints. He is the great subduer of all enemies—His own, God's, and ours. 'I have overcome,' is His assurance to us. He has already won the victory, or at least the most important part of it. He is yet to do more. He is to subdue all things to Himself. Every enemy He is to put under His feet. Having already led captivity captive, having triumphed over principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, nothing remains but that He carry out His victory to the uttermost. He vanquishes and binds Satan; He destroys death; He unclasps the fetters of the grave; He strips off the covering cast over all nations, removes the curse, and makes all things new. Every enemy on earth or in hell is compelled to yield. And He who thus is able to subdue all things unto Himself, will He not be able to transform this mortal body?

Learn from all this such lessons as the following:— Saint of God!

1. Live as a believer in the Lord's coming.—Read what Scripture has said about this, and live accordingly. It is not for nothing that the Bible has said so much about that event. It was meant to influence you. Let it do so. It is no common event. It is not one out of many other things, in the future, equally important. It is the one mighty event which towers above all the rest,—the sun

which by its light obscures all other lights, however bright in themselves. Look for that blessed hope. Love the appearing of Christ.

2. Live as a believer in the resurrection of the just.—The first thing connected with the Lord's coming is the resurrection of the saints— your own resurrection, if you be asleep before He comes; your own change, if you be living when He arrives. Books innumerable have been written about death, few of resurrection. This is not the Bible way. Resurrection there is much more prominent than death. So let it be in your meditations. Think much of resurrection—of the change that is to pass upon the body when the Lord comes. We know little of what this body really is, what it is capable of, how glorious it may be made, till then. It will be a glorious body like His own. Let that thought be dwelt upon. Let every ache speak to you of resurrection. Let every weary limb or muscle speak of resurrection. Let every illness speak of resurrection. Let each deathbed of a saint speak to you of resurrection. Live as men who believe in a risen Lord, and in a coming resurrection for yourselves.

Sinner of earth!

1. See your loss.—You lose all present joy coming from this hope of glory. You lose a share in resurrection. You lose the inheritance. You lose a dwelling in the New Jerusalem. You lose an eternity of joy and honour. How heavy your loss! How irrevocable! You cannot make up for it. You cannot cancel it. An eternal loss! How sad the thought! The loss of life, the loss of peace, the loss of Christ, the loss of glory, the loss of all that is worth losing! How unspeakably grievous!

2. See your doom.—Your 'end is destruction,' 'everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord!' That which man calls ruin or destruction may not be after all very dreadful; but that which God calls destruction must be unutterably terrible! Poor lost soul, what a doom!

3. See the deliverance.—There is still life for thee; eternal life, life through Him who died. And we preach to you Christ crucified, Christ dying, Christ buried, Christ rising again. In receiving God's true record of these things concerning Christ, you may have deliverance from the second death, and life through His name!

XXI.

The Strength Of Weakness

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." — Philippians 15:13. "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."—

2 Corinthians 12:9.

The first of these verses might run more exactly thus: 'I am strong for all things, in Christ who maketh me powerful.' Here is the exchange between Christ and Paul;—Christ takes Paul's weakness, as He took Paul's unrighteousness; Christ gives Paul His strength, as He gave Paul His righteousness. Here weakness and strength are put in their proper places, and traced to their separate sources. It is to them that have no might that God gives the increase of strength. There is nothing that we can do, if Christ strengthen us not; there is nothing that we cannot do, if He strengthen us. We are responsible for strength, not because we have it, but because He has it for us. Infirmities are ours; strength is His. It is out of weakness that we are made strong. Our weakness is our strength; our strength is our weakness. 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.' 'In the Lord have we righteousness and strength.' 'In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.'

This passage (in Philippians) is, however, but a general statement, the substance of which is Christ our strength—yes, as truly 'Christ our strength,' as 'Christ our righteousness.' Here is the true theory of creature power; here are the dynamics of a religious life and Christian work.

But the second passage enters more fully into the exposition of the 'theory' of a believing man's strength. It gives the detailed experience of the greatest of the apostles. It shows us how he lived, how he wrought how he suffered, how he triumphed—all through means of another; how Christ was made unto him not only wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, but also strength. Here Paul speaks freely of his infirmities, his helplessness; he tells us how he dealt with these infirmities; he gives us also his reason for his peculiar way of dealing with them.

I. Paul's infirmities.—He is not so much referring to sins, as to weaknesses—weaknesses of various kinds; to his bodily circumstances; his poverty; for 'his bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible.' Yet there is a sense in which he may be referring to his sins as well; for in dealing with them, as well as with his infirmities, he was drawn into direct connection with his Lord. We are, like Paul, compassed about with 'infirmities;' we are men of like passions with him; iniquities prevail against us; innumerable evils compass us about. Every step we take betrays an infirmity; every hour gives scope to an infirmity; every word is an infirmity; every thought is an infirmity; every prayer is an infirmity. We are made up of infirmities; filled up with infirmities; body, soul, and spirit, we are subject to infirmities. 'Oh wretched men that we are!'

II. His way of dealing with them.—'Glorying in them.' He did not so deal with them at first. He wanted to flee from them; to get rid of them all without delay. He went to Christ, asking that they might be taken from him. At first he dealt with them in a way which showed he did not understand God's reason for sending them. He could see no way of dealing with them, but getting quit of them. He was impatient under them. They were perhaps drags, impediments, burdens. They tried his faith, his patience, his strength, and, it may be, his temper. He was restive under them.

He wanted to shake them off. He went to his Lord to get Him to take them away. He wanted to dictate to Christ as to the way of dealing with them. But he found that his Lord and he were at variance about them. He said, 'Take them away.' His Lord said, 'Let them remain, and use my strength instead of your own. Give me the opportunity of helping you; of working for you, and in you; and so my strength shall find full scope, and out of weakness you shall become strong.' Here is the controversy between the saint and the Lord; and here is,—

(1.) The great love of Christ.—It is love that we find in all this singular dealing. It does not look like love, and yet it is so. It is pure and perfect love. 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.'

(2.) The great wisdom of Christ.—It is wise love. There is no folly here; nor weakness. He loves both wisely and well. Infinite wisdom is in this treatment of His suffering and impatient servant.

(3.) The great power of Christ.—He speaks as one possessed of all power; as one to whom it was no matter how many or how great these infirmities were. He was conscious of power to deal with them all. What are the infirmities of one soul, however many they may be, to Him in whom all fullness dwells?

(4.) The great patience of Christ.—He has no pleasure in His servants' infirmities; but He has long patience. The Master's patience; and the servant's impatience: these meet, and produce the most blessed results.

It was, then, the Master that taught the servant how to deal with infirmities. He first bore with them Himself and then He bids the servant bear with them; offering strength in time of need. The way or ways in which Paul learnt to deal with his infirmities may be stated as follows:—

1. To glory in them.—Not to be ashamed of them. Every man has infirmities, weaknesses, peculiarities, which often trouble him, fret him, annoy him. He is ashamed of them. He looks on them as pure hindrances, stumbling blocks, drags; and he cannot reconcile their continuance with the right doing of his work. Such is not the way to deal with them. He must learn to glory in them.

2. To take them to Christ.—Our sins, our burdens, our sorrows, and our infirmities, we must take to Him. We must deal with Him personally, face to face; we must allow Him to undertake for us in these things, and not to attempt the removal or regulation of them ourselves. 'Bring them all to me,' He says; 'and don't prescribe to me the proper way of dealing with them. Let me deal with them as seems best.' He is as willing to undertake dealing with our infirmities as with our sins.

3. Make them do their own special work.—They have a work to do in their own way, a way which seems to us very poor and broken; but still they have a work to do, and we must let them do it. We must not take it out of their hands. They are earthen vessels, and we must not wait for their becoming golden urns before putting the treasure into them. It is as earthen vessels, and just as such, that they are to do their proper work. They are like bruised reeds; and we are not to make them strong and vigorous staves or swords before using them. We must use them as they are. The earthen vessel, as such, and the bruised reed, as such, have their proper work to do. It is the stammering tongue that speaks best for

God; for by such it is that God speaks. It is the feeble arm that best wields the sword, or the spear, or the buckler; because it is in and by such that God works.

III. His reason for so dealing with them.—That the power of Christ might rest upon him,—literally, might 'pitch its tent upon him.' That power could only dwell with weakness. It is to weakness that it comes, not to strength. The more of personal infirmity, the more of Christ's power. Infirmity was in itself an annoyance to Paul; but as a bond between him and Christ it was blessed, nay, it was a thing to be gloried in; a thing which he rejoiced to glory in; which he did not glory in reluctantly, but with his whole heart; a thing which he would not part with here on any account. Thus his infirmity—

(1.) Emptied him of self and self-glory.—He had nothing of his own to look to, or to boast of. His infirmities made him ashamed of himself. Who am I, that I should be saved, or that I should be used by God?

(2.) Brought him nearer his Lord.—As the child's weakness brings it nearer the parent, so did Paul's. He could not live apart from Christ. His weakness made nearness to Him a necessity.

(3.) Taught him more of Him than he could have learned otherwise.— It taught him more of Christ's love, and power, and grace, and fullness than he could otherwise have known. It gave opportunities for the divine fullness to empty itself into him. Had it not been for these weaknesses, he could have known but little of his Lord. Blessed infirmities, that teach us Jesus, draw us to Him, fill us with His love, and make His sufficiency as suitable as it is indispensable.

XXII.

The Fountain Filled And Overflowing

"But my God shall surely all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."—

Philippians 4:19.

"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." —

2 Corinthians 9:8.

The apostle in both these passages is writing concerning temporal gifts,—liberality to the poor saints and to himself; but his words have a largeness about them which carries them far beyond this,— both into the region of divine liberality, and of human large heartedness in all things.

These passages here remind us of some others, of like tone: 'Unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think' (Ephesians 3:20); 'How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' (Romans 8:32.) It is of the boundless generosity of God that Paul speaks so often.

I. The fountain filled.—'God is able to make all grace abound toward you,'—that is, He is able to make you overflow with His fullness; able to pour into you in abundant measure the full river of His free gifts, temporal and spiritual, His own free love being the fountainhead of all. That which He gives is 'grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.'

(1.) The original fountain is God Himself.—He is the great original well-head of blessing. All other sources are subordinate,—mere reservoirs, or ponds, or cisterns. Everything in us, in the Church, in the saint, is to be traced directly to Him. 'Of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things.' We cannot too greatly magnify the fullness of this infinite Source,—Jehovah, God, the living God; the all in all.

(2.) There is enough in Him for us.—Very fully and expressively does the apostle bring out this, as if to obviate every possible objection, or fear, or

shadow of unbelief. 'He is able to make' all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things.' The ability or power here spoken of does not simply refer to His omnipotence. It goes beyond that. He has in Himself such a sufficiency or fullness of grace and blessing, that there is no amount of want in you which He cannot supply. It is sufficiency more than power (though it is power also) that is implied here. That which, in all its fullness, God makes so specially to overflow and abound towards us is grace,—'all grace.' The whole fullness of God's free love, with all the gifts which that free love contains, is poured into us, so that we can lack nothing. Not one good thing of any kind whatever, for soul or for body, can be found wanting. We have all sufficiency in all things. It would seem as if the apostle could not find words sufficiently to express this fullness of blessing, either as it is contained in God, or as it flows out of Him into us. God is light; all the divine fullness of light flows into us. God is love; all the divine fullness of love flows into us. Infinite power, wisdom, righteousness, are all pouring out their inexhaustible stores into us—into every crevice of life, every corner of being,—like an overflowing sea. He is full, we are empty; or rather, He is fullness, we are emptiness, and all His divine fullness is ready at hand for us. He is the bright sun, we are the dark earth; and His brightness is more than enough to dispel all earth's darkness, and fill every region of it with glorious radiance. He is the true Joseph, the Lord of an infinite storehouse, out of which the worst famine of earth, the sorest hunger of a human spirit, can be abundantly supplied. He is the great merchant, in whose ample warehouse are all the goods we need; who knows the extent of our want ('thou art miserable, and wretched, and poor, and blind, and naked'), yet, in the consciousness of one with whom is all fullness, says to us, 'I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich.' For, 'grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ' is the extent of the fullness and sufficiency which we have in Him. 'According to His riches in glory,' He supplies our need.

II. The fountain overflowing.—'May abound to every good work,' or may pour yourselves out abundantly to every good work. As soon as we are filled ourselves we overflow; as soon as we are replenished with light we shine.

(1.) We must be filled ourselves.—We cannot work till we have this sufficiency; or, at least, it will be poor, heartless work, without power, or liberty, or success. God waits to fill us.

(2.) We must work.—We are redeemed and called that we may work. We are not only sons, but servants. 'Son, go labour in my vineyard,' He says to us. It may not be to any great work that we are called; but a multitude of little ones,—daily pieces of filial service in word and deed.

(3.) We must work abundantly.—Not slothful in the business of the Lord. No; but doing good 'with both hands earnestly;' as men in earnest, who have been bought with a price, whom the love of Christ constraineth, who wish to redeem the time, to fill up their hours and days with something that will last, something useful, something which the Son of man will acknowledge when He comes to sit upon the throne of His glory.

(4.) We must work as men whose sufficiency is of God.—Our motto is, 'We can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us.' We are not stronger than others, nay, we have no strength; but we remember, 'not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.' Our sufficiency is (1) infinite; (2) divine; (3) ever open; (4) ever free; the sufficiency of love and strength and wisdom, all in one.

Abound in every good work. This is the apostolic message. Let us go about it in faith,—with all confidence and boldness. We do not go to war on our own charges. Our weapons and armor and strength are all supplied from above, and our whole expenses paid out of the exchequer of heaven.

There are some Christians to whom religion is a very easy thing. There is no cross in it; no self-denial; no bitterness; no toil; no conflict. And when we say to them, Why is it thus? why do you sit at ease? they answer, Are we not saved by grace? Are not all these struggles or trials, of which you speak, proofs of a legal spirit? So they take their ease, and enjoy the good things of this world. They are naturally, it may be, of an easy temperament. God has, perhaps, given them much of this world's prosperity. They have not had, or at least have not felt, the sharp strokes which some have done. They know the gospel. They like 'religion.' They take pleasure in the Bible, in pious conversation, in the soothing or solemn songs of Zion. Their life is one of spiritual ease—religious luxury.

Where is the Master's cup of vinegar? Where is the wounding cross? Where are

the scars of battle? Where is the breathless earnestness of eager toil for Christ? Where is the hourly self-denial, the self-sacrificing generosity for others, the girding one's self for labour, the enduring of hardness, the courage in facing danger, and laying aside every weight?

Is the Christianity of our day of the lofty kind of which apostolic men have left us so bright an example? Is it not feeble, indolent, self-indulgent, second-rate? Is there in it anything of the presentation of 'living sacrifices' to God, which is our acceptable and reasonable service? Are we not seeking our own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's? Are we not feasting when the world is starving? Are we not at ease in Zion? Are we not sitting still and in luxurious comfort, when many noble and self-sacrificing ones amongst us are rushing into the toil or the war, and, for want of being supported by their fellow Christians, are sinking under the burden and heat of the day?

O easy, luxurious, comfortable Christian! While you are lolling on your couch the sinner is going down to woe! While you are soothing your conscience with the opiates of religious routine; or pampering the flesh; or killing time in mirth and music, at the concert, or oratorio, or social party; or idling days in sport; or talking politics; or drinking in the applause of public opinion; or sunning yourself in the blaze of the ballroom; or absorbed in the last novel; or engrossed with the unmeaningness of the card table;—men are dying, the present scene is passing, the eternal world is hastening on, and the Judge is at the door!

Rouse thyself from thy indulgence, and work! Do it with thy might. Spend and be spent. Give thy money to the Master; give thy strength and thy life to Him. For He is at hand. He may be nearer than thou thinkest. And how shouldst thou like to be caught by Him lounging on thy soft couch, or feasting at thy well-spread table, when thou shouldst have been working for Him, or fighting His battles,—visiting His brethren, soothing His sorrowing children, ministering to His poor disciples, grudging no weariness or hardship for a Master like Him?

XXIII.

Higher And Higher

"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will, in all wisdom and, spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all, patience and long-suffering with joyfulness." —

Colossians 1:9-11

Look back on the previous verses. Hear first the apostolic benediction, 'Grace and peace.' Hear the thanksgiving of the manifested faith and love of the Colossian Church. Hear the exultation in the hope laid up for us in heaven. Hear the continued intercession in behalf of the saints (verse 9). It is to this intercession that we shall attend.

I. The filling (verse 9).—The gospel comes to us as 'empty.' It brings the good news of that which will fill us. Often does Paul use this word: 'Him that filleth all in all' (Ephesians 1:23); 'Filled with all the fullness of God' (Ephesians 3:19); 'That He might fill all things' (Ephesians 4:10); 'Be filled with the Spirit' (Ephesians 5:18); 'My God shall supply (fill) all your need' (Philippians 4:19). The 'filling' in the passage before us is with 'the knowledge of His will;'—that is, of what He wishes us to be and do. The knowledge of God, and of Christ; this is what is elsewhere said to fill us. Here it is of the will of God. Yes, the knowledge of God's will is replenishing and gladdening and sanctifying; His will in loving, choosing, calling, pardoning, blessing us, making us sons, heirs of His kingdom, partakers of His holiness and glory. This knowledge is further defined by the expression, 'All wisdom and spiritual understanding.' Wisdom is not only the contrast of the false thing which went by that name among the Greeks, but it specially denotes largeness and fullness of comprehension; understanding refers more to common sense, or the aptness for using our faculties aright. The Colossians were to be wise men, men filled with true wisdom, and men skilful in using that which they possessed; and this not naturally, but spiritually. What we need so much is 'spiritual understanding;' an

intellect prepared and disciplined by the Holy Ghost.

II. The walking.—'Walking' takes in every part of our daily life. We are not to be slothful or sedentary, but to walk—as Enoch and Noah, 'to walk with God,'—as Abraham, 'before God.' Our walking is to be of no common kind, regulated by no common standard; it is to be 'worthy of the Lord;' worthy of the Master whom we serve, of Him whose name we bear. Further, our walking is to be 'unto all pleasing.' As Enoch 'pleased God,' so are we. As 'Christ pleased not Himself,' so are we not to please ourselves, but God,—'I do always the things that please Him;' for Christ was the true God-pleaser, Enoch but the shadow. Let our aim be not simply to 'obey,' but to 'please' God; to please Him always and in all things; for 'allpleasing' is a wide word.

III. The fruit-bearing.—This is the law of being; the seed the beginning, the fruit the end (Genesis 1:12); not by constraint, but by the law of the new nature, according to the incorruptible seed. A Christian life is to be fruitful from beginning to end. There are different fruits at different times,—fruits of childhood, youth, manhood, old age. 'Twelve manner of fruits,' or more, like the tree of life. In connection with this subject we notice the following things in Scripture:—(1) No fruit; (2) unripe fruit; (3) withered fruit; (4) scanty fruit; (5) ripe and plentiful. Here it is 'fruitful in every good work.' The way to be fruitful, and to ripen, is to increase in the knowledge of God. This is the wisdom of wisdoms, in comparison with which all earthly science and philosophy are as vanity. The knowledge of God! What an ocean! Infinite, eternal, inexhaustible! Life eternal is in it (John 17:3); joy and peace are in it; health and holiness are in it. This is the knowledge that fills and gladdens and purifies the human heart.

IV. The strengthening.—Weakness, as well as emptiness, is our natural estate. We need power, superhuman power, divine power. This is given to us, and we are to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might; so that out of weakness we become strong, through Christ that strengtheneth us. God Himself is our strength and our strengthener. He strengthens us 'with might,' nay, 'with all might;' so that no power may be lacking; the kind of power and the amount of power being communicated or poured into us out of the heavenly fullness, the fullness of Him to whom all power is given in heaven and in earth. We have fullness of power in Him; in Him who has the fullness of the Spirit. This, too, is 'according to His glorious power,' or 'the power of His glory;' the power of

which His glory is the exhibition and the measure; the power coming forth from that glory which rested over Israel, and did such wonders for them. This divine strength works to the production of 'all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;' for without it we should grow impatient, and fret, and sink into gloom. The strength works patience and gentleness and gladness. Let us allow God to fill us with this power. He is willing to do so to the uttermost.

V. The thanksgiving.—Our hearts are to be filled with thankfulness, and our lips with praise. Our attitude here is to be that of praising men. 'In everything give thanks;' thanks unto the Father; to Him who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. How much have we to praise Him for! Did we but rightly understand and interpret the events of life, even the darkest and the meanest, we should be continually singing a new song; finding, each hour, new materials for it. Let us live lives of praise. Let us do justice to the love and faithfulness and wisdom of our God. Let us not suppose it possible that He can wrong us, or be unkind, or even ungentle. Let us put away bad thoughts, and thrust out all suspicion. Let us learn His love in all its constancy, as well as in all its depths and heights.

XXIV.

A Christian Life

"That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." —

Colossians 1:10.

Such is the outline of a Christian life! It is like Enoch's, a 'walk;' not a motionless resting and retirement from our fellows, but a moving about in the midst of them; a coming into contact with our neighbors; a going to and fro upon the highways of earth. 'Walk,' says the apostle; not 'live' merely, but 'walk.' And this walk is not merely for your own benefit, but theirs. You will be seen on all sides, before and behind,—at all times; keep this in mind. There are many eyes to look on you,—many ears to hear you,—men and angels, the world and the Church. Walk well, walk wisely, truly, uprightly. But let us mark the kind of walk.

I. Worthy of the Lord.—Let the servant be worthy of his Master, and the disciple of his Lord. (1.) Live as the Lord Jesus would have you live. (2.) Live as He lived. (3.) Live so as not to dishonour Him. (4.) Live so as to glorify Him. (5.) Live so as to reflect Him to others. We often hear it said, Don't bring discredit on your family and country; or, Be a credit and an honour to your family and country. How much more forcibly may this be said to the Christian, Don't dishonour Christ; nay, do everything to honour Him, and to lead others to honour Him,—especially in a world like ours, where He is everywhere either unnoticed or reproached. Be followers of the Lord; let men see whose you are; let no man mistake you!

II. Unto all pleasing.—We are so to walk as to please God,—thoroughly and well. In order to this, our walk must be—(1.) A believing walk; for without faith it is impossible to please God. (2.) A decided walk. No compromise nor half heartedness; we must be Christians out and out; no divided heart, nor service of two masters. (3.) A consistent walk. Not in word or profession, but in deed; not one part of our life contradicting the other, but all in harmony; each

contributing its separate testimony. (4.) A persevering walk. Not a running well at times, and then a halting or fainting; but a constant pressing forward. Only in these ways shall our walk be 'unto all pleasing.' Do you seek to please Him? Not merely to avoid displeasing; but is it your aim in all things to please God, and in pleasing Him, to cast a pleasant light upon all around? Please God!

III. Fruitful.—Not a barren walk, a useless life, filled up with idle words and deeds; but a fruitful life. Universal fruitfulness is to be its characteristic. A barren walk is—(1.) A very inconsistent one; for we are expected to work for God. (2.) A very unhappy one; for conscience will always be pricking us, reminding us of our idleness. (3.) A very unprofitable one to ourselves. It is not merely that we are useless, doing no work for God or for the Church; but we get no reward: at the most we are saved, barely saved; but we win no crown. Our whole life turns to nothing, ends in a blank. It is wasted in all respects. Let us be fruitful— very fruitful; every branch, every twig on our tree laden with fruit; bringing forth our fruit every month,—nay, every day. Live a fruitful life. Be not useless disciples. Do not throw away time and thought and life. Use your being well. Live to some purpose. Do your work bravely and fully. Be not fearful or slothful. Ye are not your own; live like redeemed men; men with the blood upon them, and the Holy Spirit in them, and the crown before their eyes. Cultivate life; till your fields; water them every moment; aim at an abundant harvest.

IV. In our walk we are to increase in the knowledge of God.—We know Him so little; and there is so much to be known. We begin with knowing Him—'acquaint thyself with God;' we go on to know Him—each day is to add to our stores. An increase of knowledge will help our walk; and our walk will help our knowledge. To this end we must study the word more; for how small a portion of it do we know! We have never gone beneath the surface, nor surveyed even the tenth part of that surface. We study other books much; this very little. We increase in the knowledge of other things, little in this. The proper study of mankind is not man, but God. 'This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.' Learn the heavenly lessons daily. Make fresh discoveries everywhere. Sink new shafts in this mine of heavenly gold. Bring up new pearls from the depth of this vast ocean. Grow rich in the knowledge of God!

XXV.

The Reconciliation

"Having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."—

Colossians 1:20.

The glory of Christ's person is the special subject of the verses preceding this; His glory as the Son, the image of the invisible God, the First-born, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Head of the body, the possessor of all fullness. Everything that is glorious and lovable, in the divine or the human, the uncreated or the created, the heavenly or the earthly, is to be found in Him. Perfection, not only without flaw, but without limit; perfection embracing the excellencies of the universe, visible or invisible; perfection as to nature, person, office, position, authority, unchangeableness; perfection, in God's meaning of the word, is ascribed to Him; and in such a way and degree as to make it absolutely unapproachable by any other being. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

There is one glory of heaven, and another glory of earth; there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; there is one glory of man, and another glory of angels; there is one glory of the Creator, and another glory of the creature; but this glory of Christ comprehends them all. There is nothing of excellence, above or beneath, that is left out of it.

But our text carries us beyond the person and its constitution. It is its relation to us, its bearing upon the universe, that is here announced. This Christ has been made the center of all being, the foundation of an infinite structure; the stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; the root out of the dry ground has become the plant of renown; the woman's seed has not merely bruised the serpent's head and slain every enemy of God and man, but has been invested with the sovereignty of all things, having already received the

crown of heaven, and destined ere long to obtain the crown of earth, as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Our text points out two things specially in connection with the person of this God-man: (1.) The peace making. (2.) The reconciliation.

I. The peace making.—His work begins here. It may seem a great work for a small end—the incarnation and propitiation of the Son of God for a sinner, the inhabitant of a small planet like ours. But the spiritual resembles the natural. It takes a sun, a whole sun, a sun immeasurably larger than our earth to light us; nothing more than such a sun is needed, yet nothing less will do. For the making of one sinner's peace, the Eternal Word must take the flesh and die the death of man.

(1.) Peace was needed.—Man had broken off from God. There was variance between heaven and earth. The link had snapped. Friendship was at an end. Sin had parted the Creator and the creature. Law had said, The soul that sinneth it shall die. God and man must be brought together; the broken peace must be restored; and the basis of this peace must be pardon—righteous pardon,—pardon coming from God; sanctioned by the law, and pronounced by the Lawgiver.

(2.) Peace has been made.—The announcement of the gospel is not that peace is a possible or a likely thing, or that peace may be made by the sinner's efforts, or tears, or prayers; but that peace has been made,—legally and righteously made. This infinitely glorious One, the Christ of God, the Head, the First-begotten, the Creator, the possessor of the universal fullness, has made the peace. He dug the gold and coined the money for the payment of our debt eighteen hundred years ago.

(3.) It has been made by blood.—The cause of the dispeace, the quarrel between us and God, was sin, and that must be put away. The mountain wall of our guilt must be thrown down; and this can only be effected by blood. The moment the blood touched the barrier, it dissolved and disappeared. For guilt cannot be ignored or overlooked, it must be dealt with,—judged, expiated. This dealing, this expiation, can only be by blood; the giving of one life for another, a higher life for a lower, a divine life for a human.

(4.) This blood is the blood of the cross.—Not any kind of blood, but that of the Son of God; not blood anyhow shed, but shed upon the cross, the appointed place of propitiation. Only blood shed there could meet the divine requirements; suit all circumstances; answer all legal questions and claims. The expiatory blood shedding must be the blood shedding of the accursed tree. Thus it is that the question of guilt brings us to that of peace; and the question of peace to the blood; and that of the blood to the cross. All these are inseparably linked; and he that rejects one must reject all. He that will not have the cross and the blood, must be without the peace. He that undervalues the peace, will undervalue the cross; and he that depreciates the cross, can neither understand nor prize the peace.

II. The reconciliation.—The blood shedding and peacemaking of Calvary have prepared the way for the actual reconciliation of all things and beings whom it is the purpose of God to reconcile or unite to Himself, either on earth or in heaven. The meaning of the word 'reconciliation' in reference to man is easily understood, and signifies just what we usually ascribe to it, the actual making up of the variance between two parties. The two parties here are the sinner and God; the reconciliation is the actual forgiveness of the sinner, and the restoration of the divine friendship; the basis of the reconciliation is the blood shedding of the cross. But as to the 'things in heaven' said to be reconciled, there is a difference. We cannot say of the nature of angels that it needed actual reconciliation, such as ours needs; for only part of angelhood had fallen, and that fall did not involve the whole nature or race, but simply the individuals who 'left their first estate.' But still the angelic family, and those members of it who kept their first estate, need something to cement and confirm their union; something to assure them that there shall be no second fall among them, no possibility of a breach between them and God, in all the eternal future. It is to this closer and firmer union that the apostle here refers it is the readjustment of the things in heaven; the restoration of their disturbed equilibrium; gathering them round a new and more glorious center; fixing them on a far surer basis; cementing together all their various parts and relationships indissolubly and everlastingly; drawing them more closely to God, to one another, and to the various regions and individuals of unfallen creature hood; opening up to them a far more intimate fellowship with Godhead than they ever had or could have had; and all this through the incarnation and blood shedding of the eternal Son. It is this that the apostle speaks of as 'reconciliation,' the reconciliation of 'the

things in heaven.' Not pardon, nor cleansing, nor renewal; of these the hosts of God above need nothing; but a closer union, surer bonds, more intimate communion, nearer access, an increase of bliss and holiness, with the superadded assurance of eternal security.

Though Christ 'took not hold of angels,' yet is He their Head; appointed such by God, and constituted such in virtue of His Person and work; for, not as God is He the Head of angels, but as Godman—the crucified and risen God-man. His possession of the human nature is that which links Him to creature hood. Of universal creation, as represented in and by humanity, He has become the Lord and Head. His connection with angels comes to Him through His connection with us. Linked to one portion or fragment of creature-hood, He has become linked to all; for, as the uncreated is one, and he who touches it at one point touches it all, so the created is one, and he who takes hold of one section takes hold of all. Christ then has become the Head of angels, because He is the woman's seed, the Head of the Church. To this He Himself refers, when, as the risen Christ, He says, 'All power is given to me in heaven and in earth.'

What a view does this give us of the value, the potency, the glory of His finished work, as bearing not only on men but angels, not only on earth but heaven! What a circle does it embrace! Into what regions of being does its efficacy, its virtue, not enter! What might it not accomplish, if so the Father willed it, in heaven and earth and hell! Its innate potency is absolutely infinite; and the only limit that can be set to it is the will of Jehovah, the only thing that can circumscribe its irrepressible tendencies of blessing is the Father's purpose.

What a view does this give us also of the security of angels, and of all holy creature-hood forever! The work of Christ is their assurance against any future fall. They shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of His hand. They are not indeed members of His body, but they are integral, necessary parts of that creature hood of which He is the glorious Head. This readjustment of the universe is its eternal security. Formerly it had no proper, no visible, no all-attractive center; now it has one which is both visible and invisible, human and divine, resistless in the force of a mysterious gravitation which does not diminish with distance, and which no intervening body, great or small, has power to disturb or alienate.

We too often think of connection with Christ as exclusively the privilege of the redeemed. And no doubt this is the case with that special union of which the New Testament speaks. In this, angels have no share; for it belongs to those whose flesh He took, and whose death He died. But, beyond this, there are outer circles of connection; less intimate, but not less efficacious bonds of union; and these are for the 'things in heaven;' these are they that give even the angels an interest in Jesus and His cross; for from that cross there go forth, even to the highest heaven, invisible influences of the most blessed and potent kind; and it is because He stooped so low in shame that God has exalted Him so high; not only giving Him a name that is above every name, but making Him 'head of principalities and powers.'

Such is the foundation on which 'the things in heaven' rest. Such is the security of angels. We think, perhaps, that there is no need for any security save that furnished by their own holy natures, tested by the standing of so many thousands of years. But herein we greatly err. No creature in itself has any security, or any reason to suppose that it may not, next moment, fall. And if no additional barrier has been thrown up to protect the holy angels, since the fall of their fellows, their personal standing during so many ages is inexplicable. But God's purpose concerning Christ, and then the fulfillment of that purpose in His incarnation and death, threw up the barrier, and secured them against the possibility of fall. Before this was known among the angels, one might suppose them at times wondering how it was that they stood while others fell, and asking, with fear and trembling, as they came and went on their errands over a fallen earth, or passed by the gate of hell's eternal prison-house, May we not also sin and be condemned to chains? But now they know that they shall never fall; for God incarnate has become their Head, and connection with Him secures their stability forever. Thus they, as well as we (though not in the same way), have an interest in the manger and the cross; the birth, the life, the death, the resurrection of the Christ, contain good news for them as well as for us. They are not mere spectators of these, but sharers in the benefits that are flowing from them, and shall flow from them throughout eternity.

It is to the Father that this reconciliation is made; but then it is through the Son, the inner and ultimate center being the Father, but the outer and visible center being the Son. Thus all the universe is gathered round the Son; and yet God is all in all. The Christ, the crucified Godman, is the Head of creation, the Head of

the Church, the Head of the universe, and yet it will even then be said, 'My Father is greater than I.'

The reconciling blood has not yet done all its work. That work is going on, and will, ere long, be in larger measure exhibited, in the day of the kingdom, the times of the restitution of all things. Meanwhile, 'individual reconciliations are going on upon earth, preparatory to the coming consummation. Each reconciled sinner is part of this. And hence, with that day in view, we give out our message of reconciliation, as ambassadors for Christ, beseeching men to be reconciled to God.

XXVI.

A Christian As He Was, Is, And Shall Be

"And you, that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and unblameable, and unproveable in His might."—

Colossians 1:21, 22.

What is a Christian? He is one to whom the gospel has come (verse 6); who has been delivered from the power of darkness (verse 13); translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (verse 13); who has found redemption and forgiveness (verse 14); who has known the grace of God in truth (verse 6).

These are the things that a Christian is and has. Nor are they doubtful to him; he knows what he is, and what he has. It is poor Christianity that brings with it no certainty; that can only say to him that receives it, Perhaps you are a Christian; perhaps you are forgiven; perhaps you are a child of God.

Let us look at these two verses, and learn from them—(1.) What a Christian was. (2.) What he is. (3.) What he shall be.

I. What he was.—Not one of the better class of sinners, or those who 'have some chance' of making themselves better; but one of 'the world,' one of 'the dead,' like every one else. The seeds are alike bad; the roots are all evil; and the difference between a believer and an unbeliever must be traced not to man's will, but God's.

(1.) An alien.—One like what the Philistines or Moabites were to Israel; a man who had turned his back on God and heaven; selfbanished, expatriated, homeless, like the prodigal.

(2.) An enemy.—Inwardly and outwardly hostile to God. 'The carnal mind is enmity;' man is a hater of God; in heart as well as life opposed to Him; a rebel as well as a stranger.

(3.) An evil-worker.—His alienation and enmity develop themselves in works of wickedness. 'He doeth evil with both hands earnestly.' Evildoer was his name in God's register, whatever it might have been in man's.

II. What he is.—He is 'reconciled.' God and he have met together; the Father and the prodigal have embraced each other. Alienation and enmity are gone. Redemption has come; and, with redemption, forgiveness; and, with forgiveness, friendship and love. The banished one has returned from his exile; Absalom has found his way back to Jerusalem. Distance and suspicion and hatred have all been removed; the far off one has been made nigh! No longer a stranger and foreigner, but a fellow-citizen with the saints and of the household of God. Yes; he has been reconciled, and he knows it. Absalom knew when he had returned; the prodigal knew it; so does he. It is no uncertainty, nor expectation, nor hope; but a thing done. He has found mercy; he has been brought nigh; he has been reconciled. Be reconciled, was the message that came to him when an enemy; he received it and was reconciled: God and he are now at one; they are agreed, and walk together as such. Oh, what is the gospel, Christianity, religion, without this reconciliation, sure and conscious! Are they not sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal? How many come short here! Anxiety or earnestness is not religion. The love of the beautiful is not religion.

III. What he shall be.—Perfect, absolutely perfect; holy, unblameable, unproveable; without spot or wrinkle or any such thing; altogether glorious, in soul and in body; every sin, blemish, weakness, infirmity, passed away. His inheritance is glorious; so shall he be. His city is glorious, nothing that defileth entering in; so shall he be. His kingdom and crown are glorious; so shall he be. For this end was he redeemed and reconciled. He is to be presented holy and spotless, in the sight of the holy God. This is what the Christian is to be. This is our hope,— perfection, glory, incorruption, immortality. 'It doth not indeed appear what we shall be, but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him.' What manner of persons should we be now!

And all this reconciliation, this blessed change, is through the cross of Christ, 'in the body of His flesh, through death.' It is death that has done it all,—the death of the Substitute—the blood of the Everlasting Covenant! 'He hath made peace by the blood of His cross;' 'without shedding of blood is no remission.' And this is the good news which we preach; and in believing which, men are saved;

saved at once; saved, and made to know that they are saved; 'saved with an everlasting salvation.'

Our knowledge of this death may at first be very imperfect; but it is the perfectness of that death, and not the perfectness of our knowledge, that saves. Our faith in the blood may be poor and feeble; but the preciousness of the blood prevents that poverty and feebleness from depriving us of the benefit of its sin-atonement virtue. The value of the blood is one thing, and our sense of the value of that blood is another. To deny its value, or to disbelieve God's testimony to that value, would certainly exclude us from its benefits; but our acceptance of the divine testimony to that value, though with a very feeble sense, a very defective feeling of its worth, saves. It is our simple belief of what God has written for us respecting the Sin-bearer and His work, that delivers us from condemnation. If we had to wait till we properly felt what we believe, we should have to wait forever. Our interest in, or connection with, the work of the Sin-bearer, comes not from what we feel, but from what we believe; not from the adequacy of our appreciation of the work, but from our reception of God's declaration as to His appreciation of it. He fully appreciates it, whatever we may do; and it is the knowledge of His appreciation that brings peace and liberty to the soul. A Christian is one who has accepted God's valuation or estimate of the cross of Christ, and in so doing has entered into reconciliation and favor. A believer is not one who believes in his own faith, or his own feelings; but one who believes in Jesus. The divine record concerning the Son of God is that on which he stands, even in the absence of feeling, and in the consciousness of evil and darkness, and a stony, insensible heart.

The first cries of the sinner may be very weak; but the blood covers their weakness, and the incense which accompanies the blood sends them up as 'strong crying and tears,' divested of all imperfection, 'an odor of a sweet smell, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.' Thus their very feebleness is made to cry and plead; their very defects are the occasion of bringing honour to the great sacrificial work on the cross. It is the blood that pleads and prevails. Were the success of our application to the heavenly throne to depend on the internal goodness of that application, or the absence of flaws in it, and in him who applies, there would be no hope of prevailing, for any man on earth, sinner or saint. But the blood comes in and pleads for all who will but consent to be indebted to its pleading; the blood comes in, and with its entrance all

deficiencies in us and in our prayers disappear. We prevail not; our cry prevails not; but the blood prevails, both for us and for our cry. The weight of the sin laid upon the altar, honours while it tests that altar's strength. And such is the strength of this altar of ours, that no amount of sin, of whatever kind, can prove too great for it to bear, and to bear away.

XXVII.

The Shadow And The Substance

"The body is of Christ."—

Colossians 2:17.

Jewish feasts and feast-days had all a meaning; a divine meaning; a meaning in connection with the sin of man and the grace of God. It was God who set them up; and as their peculiar construction indicates divine skill, so do their contents, or substance, reveal special divine truth— truth not contained in what are called the common symbols of nature.

They all speak one language and point in one direction. As, before dawn, the clouds and hilltops, touched with radiance, tell of the one sun about to rise; so did these rites of Israel speak of the glory of the truer and brighter dayspring. They are all illustrations of the old promise respecting the seed of the woman, the Son of Abraham, the Son of David, the Messiah of the prophets.

They have been broken in pieces and have passed away; and the poor remains that we have of them among the scattered Jews are like the last rags of the beggar's garment. But each of them, though dead, yet speaketh; nor shall their voice ever cease. They will speak forever; they will continue to be heard throughout the ages, both in earth and heaven. They speak in two ways. (1)

They have furnished the alphabet of the language in which the prophets spoke and the apostles wrote. Just as common language is constructed originally out of natural signs or forms—the tree, the mountain, the river, and the like—so the language of Scripture is all built up out of these Mosaic symbols, so that almost every word has some reference to them, and can only be fully understood by understanding them. (2) They have been concentrated in Christ Jesus; and speak now to us in Him, as of old they did of Him. They may be said to have been buried in His grave; but they were buried there only that they might rise again. They have risen with Him, and speak to us with a risen voice concerning our risen Substitute and King. When the traveler wanders over Moriah, or climbs

Zion, or passes up the vale of the Kedron, or admires the majestic stones of the old temple wall, he is but seeing the empty tomb, the place where this symbol language lay; but he is reminded 'by the desolations around that it is not now here: it is risen, and is to be found, not in Jerusalem or Palestine, but in every nation under heaven to which the glad tidings of the dead and risen Saviour have come.

Though full of meaning, yet these feasts and rites were nothing in themselves; nothing apart from something beyond them, to which they pointed. They were pictures, statues, shadows,—no more. They were not the substance; they were not the body or person; they were, like John the Baptist, a voice crying in the wilderness; they were friends of the Bridegroom, but not the Bridegroom Himself; they said, Look not at me, but at Him to whom we are looking; admire not us, but Him who is our Alpha and Omega, our beginning and our end.

Christ was the body, the substance, the person of whom they spoke. They were the shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ,—that is, belongs to Christ; the living substance, of which these dead shadows spoke, was Christ Himself. Of the passover, the feast of tabernacles, the feast of trumpets, and the like, we say, they were all shadows, but 'the body is of Christ.' Apart from Him they were nothing; in Him they terminated, and in Him they had their fullness and their life. Apart from Him they were dumb; in Him they are not only vocal, but eloquent. Of them we may say,
'Christ is all and in all.'

Look at the tabernacle, with its courts, and furniture, and priesthood. There Christ is all. The fabric itself declares His Person;—partly human, and partly divine: in what is visible, earthly; in what is invisible, heavenly. It announces Him as Immanuel, the God-man, God with us; and it says, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and .He will dwell' with them; and God Himself shall be with them, their God.'

Look at the entrance, which was so free to all worshippers. It is but a shadow; the body is He who says, 'I am the door.' Look at the altar, with the sacrifice consuming there. It is but a shadow; the substance is He who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree. Look at the laver, filled with pure water from the smitten rock. It is but a shadow; the reality is He who cleanses us from

all unrighteousness, who washes us from our sins in His own blood. Go in to the second court: look at the golden altar, with its everfragrant, ever-ascending incense. It is but a shadow; the body is He who loved us, and gave Himself for us as a sweet-smelling savor; whose name is as ointment poured forth, and whose excellencies are like the ascending incense before the throne of God. Look at the table of shew bread. It is but a shadow; the substance is He who is the Bread of God which came down from heaven. Look at the golden candlestick. It is but a shadow; the reality is He who is the Light of the world. Look at that beautifully woven veil, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen. It is but a shadow; the truth is He whose flesh was rent for us, whose body was broken on the cross. Pass through the veil: look at that mercy seat. It is but a shadow; the reality is He who is seated on the throne of grace, and ever liveth to intercede for us. Look, at that glory resting on the outstretched wings of these golden cherubim. It is but a shadow; the body is He who is the brightness of Jehovah's glory, and the express image of His Person. Look at that whole tabernacle, within and without, in all its parts, and services, and priesthood. It is but a shadow; the body is of Christ Himself; He is the sum and substance of it all. Not a vessel yonder, but is full of Jesus. Not a sacrifice yonder, but speaks of Jesus. Not a robe or ephod yonder, but reveals Jesus. Not a fragment of gold or precious gem yonder, but shines with Jesus. Not a priest or Levite yonder, but proclaims Jesus. Not a drop of blood yonder, but speaks of Jesus. Not a blaze of fire or wreath of smoke yonder, but speaks of Jesus. Ah! it is truly the figure of heavenly things; it is God's own picture or representation of Immanuel and His finished work.

The things that strike the eye in all this are such as these: The blood; the water; the fire; the smoke; the incense; the light; the bread; the gold; the glory. All these connect themselves with the Saviour and His work; the Son of God and His varied fullness; the heavenly High Priest and His transactions with God in behalf of sinners. For it is in reference to sinners that all this goes on. No part of it has any meaning, if this be lost sight of. He is exhibited to us as the Son of Man, who came to be the servant of sinners and the Saviour of the lost;—who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many. It is for sinners that He lives and serves and dies. In Him we see the just acting for the unjust; the Holy for the unholy; the Well beloved for the children of wrath. He is seeking for employment from us. He wants us to make use of Him in our transactions with God. He offers us the use of His name, the service

of His priesthood, the benefit of His sacrifice, the treasures of His fullness, the consolations of His love. Oh! let us do justice to His riches; let us make use of Him as Prophet, Priest, and King.

In all the details of tabernacle-service we see one thing specially, everywhere meeting our eye; it is death. Every hour of the day almost, some lamb, or bullock, or goat dies, and is laid on yon altar. You have scarcely crossed the threshold when you tread on blood. As you go inwards, you see blood everywhere. When you reach the holiest of all, the very presence of God, you find blood there; blood on the floor, blood on the walls, blood on the mercy seat. From one extremity to the other you are met with this strange spectacle—blood;—blood which speaks of death. Death seems here to reign.

Is this a slaughter-house or a charnel-house? Is this the dwelling of death and of the prince of death? It looks as if it were so. Can it be so? No. This is the abode of life, not of death. Here truly we find the living among the dead. The God of life is here. The Prince of life is here. How, then, is the awful symbol of death shaken before our eyes everywhere around, in all these courts?

It is just because death is here that life exists. No blood, no cleansing. No death, no life for the sinner. Life is taken, that life may be given; taken from one, that it might be given to another; taken from One who could spare it, because an infinite life was His, that it might be given to those whose doom was everlasting death. This death, that seems to reign in the sanctuary, is God's assurance to us that life also reigns;—reigns through death. These manifold symbols of death are, in reality, symbols of life. The inscriptions which we read all round are not, like those of the graveyard, the memorials of death, but the proclamations of life. The blood which we tread on calls up no images of horror; it is the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel.

The key to the sanctuary service is death; and the key to the meaning of this death is the great Bible truth of life through death; deliverance from condemnation through the condemnation of another. Let men, who never felt the burden of their own guilt, speak of all this as crude Judaism or coarse Paganism; we will own it as the very truth of God. Let men call this the religion of the shambles; we will recognize in it the religion of the one living and true God, the merciful yet just Jehovah, who, while He pardoneth iniquity, will by no means

clear the guilty.

O fruitful and wisdom fraught ceremonies of the earthly sanctuary! Let us learn from you God's way of dealing with sin and with the sinner;—with the former, that it may be condemned; with the latter, that he may be forgiven and blest. O marvelous symbols! Yourselves steeped in death and wrath, yet exhaling only life and grace to all who acknowledge you! O eloquent blood, and fire, and smoke, and death! Yourselves speaking of condemnation and woe and terror from Him who is a consuming fire, yet announcing to the chief of sinners pardon, and love, and joy, and favor, and revealing to the unworthiest the exceeding riches of the grace of God!

If the shadows, are so eloquent, what must the substance be! If the symbols so explicitly announce to us life through death, remission through the blood, the forgiveness of the sinner through the condemnation of the Substitute, how much more clearly may we read, how much more vividly may we perceive, these glorious truths in Him who presents Himself to us as the reality of all these emblems! In Him who knew no sin we see what sin is; we see God's way of dealing both with sin and with the sinner. In Him we read forgiveness, and acceptance, and righteousness; as well as God's way of dealing with the forgiven, the accepted, and the justified. In Him we see the provision for our continual cleansing; our spiritual food, our light, our fellowship with Jehovah in His holy dwelling. In Him, too, we see the glory to be revealed; for, as His righteousness has become ours, so is His glory yet to be ours, in the day when He comes to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.

Forgiveness and life to every son of man that will receive God's testimony to this great sacrifice;—this is the great Bible message, the gospel of the grace of God. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself; condemning the sin, yet acquitting the sinner; magnifying the law, yet pardoning the law-breaker; putting down rebellion, yet receiving the rebel back to His embrace,—this is our world-wide proclamation to the sons of men. Condemnation and death and woe to every sinner that rejects this testimony, and refuses to recognize this Sacrifice! This is our warning, from the lips of God. 'Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish!'

XXVIII.

Prayer, Watchfulness, And Thanksgiving

"Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; withal praying also for us, that Cod would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds; that may make it manifest, as I ought to speak."—

Colossians 4:2,3,4.

This is the summing up of the epistle, and should begin a new chapter. It is an exhortation addressed not to masters only (as our division indicates), but to the whole Church. It is to prayer that the apostle calls the whole body of saints; in every epistle concluding with an earnest summons to prayer—'pray without ceasing.' How loudly should this summons sound in our ears! Is prayer less needful now? Is the kingdom won with less conflict? Are divine blessings more easily obtained? Do we not require now to open our mouths so wide as the saints of other days? Nay, ought not the cry to be louder? Ought not the pleading to be more earnest? Ought not the warfare to be more strenuous and unslackening?

The description of the prayer to which he here urges us is as follows:—(1.) Persevering. (2.) Watchful. (3.) Thankful. (4.) Unselfish.

I. Persevering.—Prayer is not for propitiating God; yet none the less on that account is it to be earnest, continual, persevering. It is not to make God willing, yet it is to be importunate. 'Continue in prayer;' literally, 'persevere vigorously in prayer.' It is not to be cold. It is not to be unbelieving. It is not to be occasional; by fits and starts; when we are in the mood. It is to be continuous, unwearied, unflagging. We are not to despair or get disheartened, but to hold on.

II. Watchful.—No part of a saint's life is to be sleepy; least of all his prayers and praises. Our eyes are to be wide open that we may always see—(1) that heaven to which we are sending up our prayers; (2) ourselves, that we may fully know our wants, and pray accordingly; (3) the world around, with its innumerable objects for prayer; (4) the Church of God, near and far off, for

which we ought to be continually interceding. Let us pray and watch; let us watch and pray; let us be vigilant, sober, self-denied; eyes and ears ever open, hearts ever awake and enlarged; like pilots on a stormy sea, where it would be destruction to slumber for an hour. Routine prayers are not watchful prayers. Random prayers are not watchful prayers. Half hearted prayers are not watchful prayers. The end of all things is at hand, let us therefore be sober and watch unto prayer. Watch! for we know not when the Master cometh.

III. Thankful.—With every petition let us mingle thankfulness. In everything give thanks. Our causes for this are innumerable. We are to be thankful—(1) that we have a prayer-hearing God to go to; (2) that we have wide and free access to His throne; (3) that we are upon praying ground, not in the regions of despair; (4) that we have got so many answers to prayer; (5) that we have obtained so many blessings unasked;

(6) that everything we need we may ask for. What thankfulness should fill us! Should we not be continually praising and thanking? Yes, truly, we should be thankful men! Men of praise; men of song; of thankful lips; thankful hands and feet; thankful deeds; thankful lives. As men of prayer we should be thankful. Not to intermingle thankfulness with prayer is sad ingratitude. Thankless prayers! How mean, how base, how ungenerous! Can we expect answers to such greedy cries; cries of mere selfishness, like those of the beasts of the field? Oh, brethren, beware of thankless prayers! Nothing so likely to shut heaven, and check the liberality of God.

IV. Unselfish.—It was not for themselves, but for him and for the success of his work, that Paul would have them pray. He prayed for them, and he would have them pray for him; so that, by this mutual intercession, this interchange of supplication, blessing might be obtained for all. Direct prayer for one's self is not always the best way to obtain blessing. It is in helping others that we are helped; in watering we are watered; in blessing we are blessed. Our prayers should be wide, generous, all-embracing; beyond self, beyond our family, our Church, our town, our land. Let us beware of narrow-minded, narrow-hearted, selfish prayers, revolving round one point, and that, self. Let us mark the apostle's exhortation here, and pray—

(1.) For ministers.—He puts himself first here, not because he would confine

them to that order, but because he would thus draw them away from self, to Him who was the channel of blessing to them. The order is of no consequence, only let us get away from self. Open the lips of ministers! Open doors and hearts!

(2.) For the gospel.—Let this gospel go forth in power. Let us impel it by our prayers. God has so ordered it that our prayers are needed for this end. The 'mystery of Christ' ('secrets of Christ,' now made manifest) is a glorious mystery; but God has made its success in a measure dependent on our prayers. Let us plead for its forth going in power.

(3.) For the Church.—It was for this that Christ so specially pleaded; let us enter into His mind respecting it. Let us plead—(1) for its unity (2) for its holiness; (3) for its peace; (4) for its enlargement; (5) for its discharge of its duties and functions; (6) for its being filled with the Spirit, and so made to tell upon the world in the ingathering of thousands. Let the Church's light shine, and it will attract; let it not be dim, but bright.

Let us plead for the Church Universal. In so doing, not only is the bond of love maintained, but reciprocal blessing comes. We get the benefit of their prayers, and they of ours. We help to fill the great cistern; and the waters of that cistern, in overflowing, find their way to us. In praying we are prayed for; in watering we are watered; in blessing we are blest.

XXIX.

The Turning To God And The Waiting For Christ

"For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." —

1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10.

Paul's gospel (verse 5) had found its way into Thessalonica. He was himself the preacher. It had come 'in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance;' and from Thessalonica had sounded out the word of the Lord, not only through Greece, but over the world. The spiritual work was a very decided one. There was no semiChristianity; no half-and-half discipleship; no languid and lifeless and second-rate religion. The results of the gospel were beyond all mistake; and the Christian life was bold and without compromise. In this Church we have a bright specimen of primitive Christianity and discipleship. The line between the believer and the unbeliever was drawn deep and sharp. These Christians were out and out what they professed to be. The world might hate and malign them, but it could not misunderstand them. They were, beyond all doubt, followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are here two main features given us of these Thessalonian conversions,—the turning and the waiting.

I. The turning.—Conversion is here exhibited in its fullest and largest aspect; for, in the case of these Gentiles, everything had to become new,—creed, conduct, worship, religion; not a particle of their former selves remained. Old things passed away; all things became new.

I. 'They turned.'—Yes, they turned; and no one could mistake their turning. To themselves, as well as to all others, it was equally plain. 'They turned,' and yet it was God who turned them; they turned, and yet there was an invisible and supernatural power at work within them, working in them both to will and to do.

God's entreaty to them, as to all, was, 'Turn ye, turn ye.'

1. They turned from idols.—Idolatry was their chief characteristic. They had 'gods many,'—idols without number. These they cast aside. They forsook Jupiter and his altars; flung down their Lares and Penates; turned their back on idolatrous temples, as temples not only of idols, but of devils (demons, 1 Corinthians 10:20). For what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? And what concord is there between Christ and

2. Belial? What sympathy between the theatre and the sanctuary, between the Lord's table and the ballroom?

3. They turned to serve the living and true God.—(1.) They 'turned to God,' setting their faces God-ward. (2.) They 'turned to serve God,' quitting all idolatrous service, and dedicating themselves to the service of God—of Him who alone is entitled to that name; the living God, in opposition to the dead and dumb idols; the true God, in opposition to their false and fabulous divinities. How total the change of service! What an elevation, what an expansion, what an ennobling! Their old religion, how vile and material and earthly; their new religion, how lofty, how spiritual, how heavenly!

This is the true revolution, whether in a nation or a man; the reversal of our whole life, the transformation of our whole being, the renovation of heart, creed, principles, character, and aims. This divine revolution or reformation is the only one that can avail;—the new creation; the new being; the new soul and life.

II. The waiting.—It is not mere turning from our former selves; for it not only alters our feelings as to the past, but as to the future also. A new future is given, as well as a new present. To these Thessalonian idolaters the future was all a blank, or filled up with gloom. Now, after their turning, it is filled with glory. The special object of that future is the Son of God Himself. Many things cluster round Him; but He is Himself its special brightness. He has gone into heaven; and there He now is, at the right hand of God. But He is not always to remain there. He is to come again; and it is this advent that fills up the future of the believing man. There are several expressions used in reference to it.

1. Loving it (2 Timothy 4:8).—In turning to the living and true God, we

love the appearing of His Son. It appears to us so desirable, and the meeting between Him and us, when we shall see His face, so blessed. Loving Him and knowing His love to us, we love His appearing.

2. Waiting for it.—The word (ἀναεμεν) refers to passive expectation; sitting still, and abiding till the expected one arrives, as the disciples tarried at Jerusalem till Pentecost; patient waiting or endurance. Not indifference, but still simple waiting, the happy, tranquil expectation of a believing, loving heart.

3. Looking for it.—We are not, however, to be content with this passive expectation. We are not to sit quietly in the house till the knock comes to the door; we are to be looking out at the windows and along the road, to see if the beloved one be not coming.

4. Watching for it.—This rises above all the rest. It is more than loving or waiting or looking; it is that feeling (we call it nervous and eager) which arises from the uncertainty of the time. When we greatly love a person and long for a visit, but are quite uncertain as to when he may come, we watch. This was the special word of our Lord Himself. He has commanded us to watch.

Of Him for who we are to wait, the apostle proclaims three things. (1.) He is the Son of God. (2.) He was raised from the dead. (3.) He is the deliverer from the wrath to come. These are three special things on which our faith rests, and in believing which we are saved; and these are three special things on which our hope rests, on which it builds itself in anticipating the glory to be revealed. He who is coming, and for whom we look, is the Son of God, the risen Christ, the deliverer from the wrath to come.

XXX.

Mr. Feeblemind Comforted

"Comfort the feeble-minded."—

1 Thessalonians 5:14.

The word 'feeble-minded' is taken, like many other of Paul's peculiar expressions, from the Old Testament, in which it has several shades of meaning, all of them more or less bearing on weakness, fearfulness, depression, and trouble of spirit. Let me note a few of these:—"The soul of the people was muck discouraged because of the way,' Numbers 21:4; 'Faint, yet pursuing,' Judges 8:4; 'His soul was grieved for the miseries of Israel,' Judges 10:16 (strange that this word should be applied to God; but see Genesis 6:6); 'His soul was vexed unto death,' Judges 16:16; 'My spirit was overwhelmed,' Psalm 77:3; 'Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Fear not,' Isaiah 35:4; 'The Lord hath called thee as a woman grieved in spirit,' Isaiah 54:6; 'To revive the spirit of the humble,' Isaiah 57:15; 'He fainted, and wished in himself to die,' Jonah 4:8; 'The people shall weary themselves for very vanity,' Habakkuk 2:13.

Thus the word expresses everything that can come under the word, feeble-minded, from whatever cause arising; fear unbelief, doubt, sorrow, vexation, opposition from without. So that it is not possible for any one to say, Mine is a peculiar feeble-mindedness; mine is a sinful feeble-mindedness; mine is a deep-seated feeble-mindedness, I dare not hope to be comforted under it, or to be delivered from it. The Holy Spirit says, 'Comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak.' The apostle, in choosing a word connected with so many various scenes and characters in Old Testament history, evidently meant to comprehend them all; and wishes us to understand that every state of mind which that word can be supposed to describe, is included in the exhortation, 'Comfort the feeble-minded.' What weak and fearful heart is there which that word excludes? Who amongst us is weak and fearful? Here is a message to him from the Divine Comforter. Do not puzzle yourselves by the inquiry as to whether your feeble-mindedness is of the right kind, and springs from a right source. Take the word as you find it. Are you feeble-minded? To you is the word of this strength and comfort sent.

This is only one out of many passages intended for the same class, and containing words of cheer and sympathy, words which express God's tender pity and gracious condescension to the feeblest and sinfullest. Let us note a few of these:—'Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not:' Isaiah 35:3,4. 'Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.' Hebrew 12:12. 'A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench:' Isaiah 42:3. 'He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength:' Isaiah 40:29. 'When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them:' Isaiah 41:27. 'He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted:' Luke 4:18. '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:' Ezekiel 34:16. 'He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom:' Isaiah 40:2.

The feeble-minded form a very large class; and hence so much is spoken to them by way of cheer. They are to be found everywhere. They are the fearers and doubters, the dark and troubled ones, they in whom perplexity and uncertainty prevail, who are all their lifetime subject to bondage. Among them are many single-minded. Christians, whose faces are Zion ward, but whose steps are feeble, and whose eyes are dim; who are in sore bondage and uncertainty; in whom unbelief prevails sadly over faith, and keeps them bowed down and weary.

There are some who would treat these feeble-minded ones as unbelievers, and speak to them the words of harsh rebuke. Not so the Lord. His hardest words are, 'O ye of little faith, wherefore did ye doubt?' He is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. He is touched with the feeling of their infirmities. He yearns over them; has long patience with them; bearing all things, and never failing in His loving-kindness. He has not a harsh word for them, not an unkind look, though He seems long in hearing their cries. He deals with them more gently than the gentlest of earthly friends. For wise ends He does not all at once bring them into light; He lets them know, also, that their unrest is the fruit of their sin and unbelief. But still He watches over them, and cares for them, and leads them by a way that they knew not.

Bunyan seems to have sympathized deeply with these sorrowful ones, and to have entered into the mind of the Master regarding them. They form, comparatively, the most numerous characters in the Pilgrim's Progress. There is Mr. Little-Faith, Mr. Feeble-mind, Mr. Fearing, Mr. Ready-to-Halt, Mr. Despondency, and his daughter Much-afraid. There is surely no one of the class we are speaking of that is not met by one of these characters. These are mirrors, in which many amongst our selves may see their own faces. The words of comfort which Bunyan writes down for these are very precious; but it is the deep and tender interest which he seems to have taken in them that touches the heart and ministers consolation. He shows the spirit of his Master, the affection of the good Shepherd, the love of a father to a sick and weakly child. Bunyan seems never to have forgotten the gracious and sympathizing words, 'Comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.'

(1.) God's care for the feeble-minded.—He is the Almighty, the Lord God Omnipotent; yet He despises not the weak; He overlooks not the weakest; but His tender mercies are over them, and He heareth the cry of the destitute. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. Specially is all this true of Jesus, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; who knows what a bruised reed is, and what the smoking flax; who can have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way. No man, no minister, no friend, no parent is half so tender and pitiful as He. His very strength but makes Him more pitiful to the weak. How gently does He deal with the feeble-minded!

(2.) The Church's care for the feeble-minded.—It is to the Church at large that the apostle speaks, 'Comfort the feeble-minded.' He expects his saints to be sons of consolation, true children of Barnabas. When one member suffers, let all suffer; when one is weak, let all be weak. Care for the troubled and the tempted, the weary and dark and faint. God careth for them. 'They that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.'

(3.) The use of the feeble-minded.—What purpose do they serve? Many purposes. To show that the righteous are scarcely saved (saved 'with difficulty'); that the spiritual state even of true saints is sometimes very low; that our help is not in ourselves. Man's helplessness, and God's almightiness, are thus made manifest. In these feeble ones God gets an opportunity of displaying His resources.

(4.) The consolation for them.—Words of grace and cheer innumerable has God spoken to them. While He says to us, 'Comfort the feeble-minded,' He comforts them Himself. He does so by His gospel; by His providences; by His Spirit, the Comforter. He sustains and strengthens them. He tells them of His love; of the grace of Christ; of the propitiation on the cross; of the fullness of the Mediator; of the peace through the blood; of the living water; of the freeness of all blessing; of the simple way of obtaining it, by the acceptance of His testimony regarding Jesus Christ His Son.

XXXI.

The Coming Kingdom

"That ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God." —

2 Thessalonians 1:5.

"The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."—

Romans 14:17.

We are 'kings and priests unto God' (Revelations 1:6). The exercise of this royalty and priesthood is not yet. It will come in due time. 'If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him;' and the song which the redeemed sing above is, 'We shall reign on the earth.'

It is an 'everlasting kingdom' (2 Peter 1:11). It is a 'heavenly kingdom' (2 Timothy 4:18). It is a 'kingdom which cannot be moved' (Hebrew 12:28). It is called the 'kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 8:28); the 'kingdom of Christ' (Ephesians 5:5); the 'kingdom of God' (1 Corinthians 15:50). This last name is the most frequent.

There is a kingdom for us. Not for angels, but for the sons of men. It is truly what its name implies—a region ruled over by a king, and filled with subjects, happy, holy subjects; governed by laws, good and blessed laws. It is here called the kingdom of God,—God's kingdom,—because originated by Him, set up and ruled over by Him. Elsewhere it is called the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of Christ.

It is a kingdom to which we are invited,—invited by Him who is its King and Lawgiver, God Himself. He has revealed to us its nature, and proclaimed the law of entrance and exclusion. For no man may make what he please of this kingdom; no man may enter it in his own way, or take possession of it at his own pleasure. The law of entrance is very explicit: 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see it.'

It is of less moment that we should know the locality, than that we should know

its nature and entrance-gate. A right knowledge of these lies at the root of all true religion; and mistakes on these points are fatal. It is a perilous thing not to know the King, or the kingdom, or the way of entrance—the warrant for taking possession of it as our own.

Let us gather from the second of our texts, first, What this kingdom is not; and, secondly, What it is. And let this solemn warning sound in the ears of all who name Christ's name: 'The kingdom is not meat and drink;' or put it in this way, 'Heaven is not meat and drink;' or put it in this way, 'Religion is not meat and drink.' Take it in any or in all of these forms or senses, it enunciates the same searching truth, and touchingly rebukes the materialistic religions of our day.

I. What it is not.—Of course one might enumerate a hundred things which it is not. But let us take those directly suggested by our text.

(1.) It is not forms.—There must be forms in this kingdom; but the forms do not constitute the kingdom. Under Judaism there were many rites, sacrifices,—there was the passover; but these did not make the kingdom. 'He is not a Jew that is one outwardly.' 'The kingdom is not meat and drink.' So with us there are sacraments, prayers, worship, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the weekly Sabbath and gathering; but these are not the kingdom. All these may exist, and yet men may be far from it.

(2.) It is not moralities.—There must be these, and yet these are not the kingdom. Without them the kingdom cannot be won; yet they are not the entrance. A man may have the gate shut against him, though presenting himself clothed with all the moralities that ever distinguished humanity. So was it with him who came to the Lord saying, 'All these things have I kept from my youth up.' He went away sorrowful. It was not the kingdom for him.

(3.) It is not carnalities.—The theory of a large school in our day is, that we are to enjoy the world and its pleasures as much as may be, and that this is real religion,—that thus we honour God by enjoying His world. But this is worldliness, not religion; it is not the kingdom, nor does it resemble it or fit us for it. No doubt, 'whether we eat or drink,' we are to do all to His glory; but the mere physical or carnal enjoyments of the world have nothing to do with that glory. Self-denial, not self-indulgence; flesh-crucifying, not flesh-enjoying, is the

law of that kingdom now.

Yes, nothing outward, nothing in the flesh, nothing of external display, nothing that feeds self—none of these is the kingdom, or can give us a title to it, or prepare us for it. The body can never be the soul, nor the dress the man, nor the word the deed. Externalism is not the kingdom.

II. What it is.—God's kingdom has to do with the inner, not the outer man; with the soul, not the body. Everything connected with the kingdom and the King is spiritual, and real, and true, and holy. The words do not imply that the kingdom is not a real kingdom, and that its dwellers are not real men; but that its laws, its service, its employments, its enjoyments, are spiritual and divine. It is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

(1) It is a righteous kingdom.—Its King is the Righteous One. Its laws are righteous; its employments are righteous. The entrance into it is by the righteousness of the Righteous One. All in it and about it is righteousness. Only the righteous enter and dwell there; nothing that defileth.

(2.) It is a peaceful kingdom.—There peace dwells. Dispeace has been banished from every heart. It is the kingdom of the reconciled; of men who have found Him who is 'our peace.' No variance, no estrangement, no wrath, no trouble yonder!

(3) It is a joyful kingdom.—Everything about it is joy; not gloom, nor sorrow, nor darkness. We belong to it, 'if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope;' if we have joy in God, and are partakers of what Christ calls 'my joy.' There are songs of joy; every being in it is full of joy; its King is anointed with the oil of gladness.

All this is in and through the Holy Ghost. He makes the kingdom what it is; and its dwellers what they are,—righteous, peaceful, joyful. It is He who imparts reality, spirituality, truth, holiness, to that kingdom. No Spirit, no kingdom. Ye speak of being heirs of the kingdom. Have ye received the Holy Ghost?

Of this kingdom we are to 'walk worthy,' and to be 'counted worthy,'— that is, 'meet for,' as it is said, 'Meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.'

Worthy of the kingdom of God! What an expression! Yes, worthy of God and of His kingdom. Such are we to be even here. Such is to be our life on earth. A life of holiness, and self-denial, and devotedness to that God in whose kingdom we are kings; a life of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Yet though our life here is to be a life worthy of or corresponding to, the holy nature of that kingdom, still our right of entrance and possession does not depend on any such worthiness. That right comes from and through another. Another's grace and another's worthiness give us the introduction into that kingdom. It is absolutely and entirely on the ground of what Christ is, not of what we are, that we enter in. His excellency comes in the place of our unfitness, so soon as we accept the Father's testimony to that excellency, and consent to be treated on the ground of it alone. A growing fitness for that glory, and a growing likeness to its inheritors, is unspeakably blessed and desirable. Nay, to this we are called. Yet that fitness has nothing to do with our right. The fitness is one thing, the right is another. Live enter the kingdom as does a little child who has had no time nor opportunity to acquire fitness, but gets in on the ground of another's doings. We enter the kingdom as did the thief upon the cross, who all his life long had done nothing but evil, and seemed wholly unfit to possess a kingdom into which nothing that defileth shall enter.

O blessed freeness! Freeness absolute and unconditional; freeness which makes no exceptions, but receives all who come; freeness which does not suspend itself upon one good thought, or feeling, or wish on our part, of any kind whatsoever, but throws wide open the everlasting gate, that the chief of sinners may enter in freer than the air which we inhale; freer than the sunlight; freer than the rain of heaven, is this access into the kingdom of God.

The Father beseeches; the Saviour invites; the Spirit calls; good angels beckon; Christ's ministers entreat; and the one dear sound which they make to echo through earth, and to pierce the wanderer's ears, is, enter in. All is free; all is ready; all is for you.

XXXII.

The Believed Lie, And The Hidden Gospel

"For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie."—

2 Thessalonians 2:2.

"If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost."—

2 Corinthians 4:3.

The warnings to the Thessalonians concerning the perils of the last days in this second chapter are very awful. These are appalling words,— 'the mystery of iniquity,' 'the working of Satan,' 'lying wonders,' 'deceivableness of unrighteousness,' 'strong delusion,'^[5] 'believing a lie,' 'all damned who believed not the truth.' They are written specially for our days; and we see, or rather feel, these terrible delusions gathering round us more and more subtly every day, deceiving, if it were possible, the very elect.

Every lie is evil; but the lie of the last days is the most evil of all. All unbelief is more or less the belief of a lie, but the unbelief of the last days will be the belief of Satan's darkest and subtlest lie—the lie of Antichrist. It is against this that the apostle warns the Thessalonians.

But apart from the believed lie, there is a hidden gospel; and it is of this that the apostle speaks so solemnly to the Corinthians in connection with his own ministry. A hidden gospel; lost souls; the god of this world; the blinded eyes,—all these are unspeakably terrible.

There is such a thing as a hidden gospel, and a lost soul.

A hidden gospel. What does that mean? Not an imperfect gospel; not an obscure or mystified gospel; not a false gospel; not 'another gospel,' as he speaks elsewhere. No, but 'our' gospel—'my gospel' and Timothy's— the gospel of all my fellow-workers. It is Paul's gospel, Christ's gospel. The true gospel is said to be hidden. There is something fearful in these simple words—a hidden gospel! An eclipsed sun, a dried up well,—these are but poor emblems of a hidden

gospel. For if it be hidden, then (1) the way to heaven is lost; (2) peace is gone; (3) life is gone; (4) hope is gone;

(5) the anchor of the soul is destroyed. Take away or hide the gospel, and what is there for a man to take refuge in? Hide the gospel, and you shut the gates of heaven; you fill earth with gloom; you make life not worth the having, death terrible, and eternity a region of unmitigated despair. Hide the gospel, and you may close the Bible, shut your churches, and say, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'

But who hides the gospel? (1.) Not God. He has sent it, exhibited it, lighted it up. He does not hide the sun from earth. (2.) Not Christ. He has come a light into the world; and His object is to show Himself not to hide Himself. (3.) Not the Holy Spirit. His office is to glorify Christ, and to unfold the gospel. He certainly draws no veil over the face of Christ, but unveils Him, reveals Him. (4.) Not the good angels. They desire to look into these things themselves, and to see others also searching them. They would not, even if they could, hide the gospel of Christ. (5.) Not ministers. They are set for the preaching, not the hiding of it. They do, indeed, at times obscure it, teach it imperfectly; but it is not of this that the apostle is speaking, but of the hiding of the pure gospel from the eye, so that, though preached, it produces no effect.

Who, then, hide it? (1.) The sinner himself He shuts his eye; he closes his lattice against the light; he sets the world between him and the gospel. He refuses to receive it; he buries it out of sight; he treats it as the Jews treated Christ. He hates it; turns away from it; prefers other light, and another gospel. (2.) The god of this world. Satan is the great obscurer of the gospel; he tries to keep the Sun of Righteousness in perpetual eclipse, by keeping his world between Him and the sinner. He blinds the minds of them that believe not; he keeps out the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Thus, then, the sinner and Satan combine to hide the gospel; not the sinner without Satan, nor Satan without the sinner, but both co-operating, and both because they hate the gospel and its light, and Him especially who is its Sun.

This kind of hiding can only occur when the pure gospel is preached. There are other kinds of hiding, with false or defective gospels. But the special awfulness of the present case is, that it occurs in connection with Paul's gospel. It is this

that is hidden; and the hiding of it is eternal darkness and ruin. How perilous the position of the hearers of a pure gospel! Sometimes these congratulate themselves on their privileges, and seem to think themselves all right, because their minister preaches a pure gospel! Ah, that may perhaps be their ruin! It is in such a congregation that Satan works so terribly and so peculiarly, entering into confederacy with the sinner to shut out the light! So he did in the days of the prophets, so that they said, 'Who hath believed our report?' He did so in the days of Christ Himself, so that He said, 'Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight, Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent.' When the light is at its brightest, the deepest darkness is found. Oh sorrowful issue of a preached Christ!

Deeper darkness, stronger delusion, more obdurate blindness, more resolute unbelief, and a more woeful eternity!

Slight not the good news, O man. They may seem to you just now to be nothing; they will soon be all. Take the divine testimony to the great propitiation on the cross. There is salvation in the simple reception of that testimony. Don't get into metaphysical labyrinths or theological puzzles about the nature of faith. The thing to be believed is that with which the sinner has to do. Is it true, or is it not? Your reception of it as a true thing, as the very truth of God, is what God demands of you. Could He ask less? Do you need more? That true thing which he bids you believe contains eternal life.

XXXIII.

The Indwelling Spirit

"Stablish you in every good word and work."—

2 Thessalonians 2:17.

"Ye have an unction from the Holy One."—

1 John 2:20.

"Sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise."—

Ephesians 1:13.

"He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit." —

1 Corinthians 1:21, 22.

The last of these passages brings all the previous three before us; each of them containing a mine of truth; each suggesting something new concerning our own progress and blessedness; and each of them connected with God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us take the fourth of the above passages as our guide, linking it on to the others, and bringing out the reference to God Himself. As in His discourses Jesus brought forward the Father and the Father's name in conjunction with Himself and His own name, and as corroborative of what He was saying; so here the apostle brings God before us as the ultimatum, the highest court of appeal, the fountainhead of all doing, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This appeal to God is for the corroboration of all that he has been saying. He brings his hearers to this ultimate point,—God himself, the doer, mover, beginner, ender of the whole, God all in all. Thus the apostle brings everything connected with the Church, and with individual saints, at once into direct

communication with God, the infinite Jehovah. 'Of Him, and to Him, and through Him, are all things.' Here God is referred to in the following ways:—(1) Stablishing; (2) Anointing; (3) Sealing; (4) Giving the Holy Spirit.

I. Stablishing.—It was of Christ and our connection with Him that the apostle had been speaking. Christ is all, and in all,—the All of the promises, the Amen of each word and oath of God. Everything depends on our relation to Him being 'stablished;' the holds between Him and us drawn closer and closer. He who chose us in Christ, redeemed us in Christ, called us in Christ, knows the necessity for this; that without Him there is no life, no peace, no health; and that it is in proportion to the closeness of our connection that these increase. He stablishes or confirms us in Him; knitting us more strongly; rooting us more deeply; fastening the stone more firmly to the foundation, that nothing may separate us. Thus He carries on in us a daily process of adhesion, fixture, vital communication. He who does all this is God; not man, nor self, but God. He has made Christ the foundation stone of the universe.

Out of Him there is no stability; and the fixedness of any creature, any part of creation, depends on their closeness of connection with Him. The Christ of God is the one center round which all holy being revolves. The Christ of God is the one root of life, the one rock on which alone we can build. The Christ of God is the one link between the divine and the human, the earthly and the heavenly; that by which the mortal becomes immortal, by which the weak becomes the strong, by which the earthly becomes the heavenly. And the statement of our text does not refer so much to our being strengthened by means of Christ, as to our being fixed more firmly, closely, immoveably upon Him. It is not so much Christ the vessel of fullness, as Christ the rock, Christ the foundation, Christ the anchorage.

II. Anointing.—The word 'anointing' connects itself with Christ, which means anointed. God anoints; He makes us like Him,— partakers of His anointing,—His threefold unction as prophet, priest, and king. We have an unction from the Holy One; this is the true anointing with the oil of holiness, the oil of healing, the oil of gladness, the oil of light,— prophetic, priestly, kingly anointing. It is God who thus anoints us; so that as Jesus said, so may we, 'The Lord anointed me.' Every believer is an 'anointed man;' and as such he lives, walks, speaks, and acts. This is the anointing with the true oil, which, coming

first on the head of our Aaron, flows down to the skirts of His garments. It is this anointing that the Church so much needs, that each of us so much needs; and He who has it has it for us,—longs to shed it fully down.

II. Sealing.—Sealing here (as generally in the East) is not so much for security as for identification of property. It is like our signature or subscription to a letter. So the sealing of our text is the divine stamp put upon us, authenticating us as genuine,—as His property. It is the heavenly signature, the divine initials; the outline of His own image drawn upon us, by which we may be recognized. Circumcision was God's seal in the flesh to Abraham, by which he was recognized as belonging to God; 'a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had.' So the putting off the old man,—conformity to God's likeness, is His seal upon us. It may be faint, a mere outline, only the initials; but if it be genuine, it authenticates us as the true property of God. Thus He says, Thou art mine; and thus we respond, I am Thine.

IV. Giving us the Spirit.—This refers not merely to that Spirit through means of which we believe, but to the fullness of the Spirit which we receive upon believing: 'After that ye believed ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance' (Ephesians 1:13). The sealing is connected with this gift of the Spirit; yet the apostle carefully brings out the personality of the Spirit, apart from all His operations. It is not certain impressions or results that are the earnest, but the Spirit Himself. He is the earnest, the pledge of all that is to come. He seals us as God's property; and He is the earnest of our inheritance. He is the promise of the Father, and as such He comes to us; the gift of the Father,—the gift also of Christ,—as such He dwells in us. The fullness of this indwelling Spirit is the Church's birthright.

Be filled with the Spirit! Only thus can we work the works of God; endure trials in our way; do battle for God and Christ against the evil one, against his temptations, against the errors of the day, for truth, against the intense worldliness and laxity and false 'enlightenment of the times. Science, wisdom, philosophy will avail nothing. It is only by the Spirit of the living God that we can do our work here, fight our battle, and win our crown.

XXXIV.

Patient Work For The Master

"But ye, brethren, be not weary in well-doing."—2 Thessalonians 3:13.
"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."—

1 Corinthians 15:58.

In the first of these passages there is a calm earnestness of exhortation, which ought to pervade us with its zealous spirit, and quicken us to work and well doing. Whatever others may do or be, be you in earnest;—'but ye, brethren, be not weary in well-doing.' It is to 'welldoing' that we are called; and though our well-doing cannot come into the room of Christ's well-doings as procurer of pardon, not the less are we, as men who stand upon the footing of Christ's well-doings, to abound in well doings of our own.

There is a quiet sadness, or perhaps rather a chastened joy, in the words of the second passage, which adds greatly to their power. There is no excitement, no bluster, no violence, no unnatural vehemence. They are the words of one who knows that he has a work, and who is calmly but resolutely bent on getting that work fully done, whatever be the hardships or perils. They are the words of a man compassed about with infirmities, who feels how easily he might be led aside, or made to slacken his efforts, or damped in his zeal, or made to grow weary. They are the words of a man who has a hope,—a good and glorious hope, and who feels in that hope a sustaining and quickening power. They are the words of a man who is leading on a host,—who is at the head of a great multitude, all in like circumstances, and needing encouragement like himself.

They are the words of a man full of love to those with whom he is surrounded, and who speaks to them as 'beloved brethren.' Thus he cries aloud to his fainting fellow saints, 'Brethren, be not weary in well-doing.' They are some of the many fervent exhortations with which he winds up some profound or lofty doctrinal exposition; and the second of the above passages comes in at the close of one of the most solemn chapters to be found in his epistles,—concerning the resurrection of the saints. What he wrote for the Corinthians he writes for us. He

speaks with authority, yet he speaks in love, as if pleading with us to make the right and true use of our resurrection hope. Let us note—(1) The exhortation; (2) The motive or reason enforcing it.

I. The exhortation.—Putting the two passages together, this is threefold; each of its three parts bearing directly upon Christian light and character and work, yet also connected with the doctrine of the whole chapter. There is much for each one of us in this threefold exhortation. The last days need words like that quite as much as the first.

(1.) Be steadfast.—The steadfastness here refers to the foundation on which they were to be grounded and settled. Be like a temple with a deep and firm foundation; be like a house founded on a rock, which the winds cannot shake, and the floods cannot overflow or beat down. Look well to your foundations; and having got them, cleave fast to them. Be not changeable, either in doctrine or practice. Be not unstable, fickle, capricious. Or, taking another figure of the apostle, be well rooted in the fruitful soil which God has provided for the growth of His trees; 'be rooted and grounded in love;' 'rooted and built up in Him;' be not 'carried about with every wind of doctrine.' The special reference here is to the resurrection, which some were denying, and which the apostle had been proving. Be steadfast in this. Be not like Hymenaeus and Philetus who deny it, or say that it is past already, thus overthrowing their own faith and that of others. 'Be steadfast,'— 'steadfast in the faith.'

(2.) Be immovable.—This word may be illustrated by the figure of a reed 'shaken with the wind;' a slender building that rocks too and fro, ever ready to fall clouds that are carried about of winds. Its meaning, as distinguished from steadfast, may be this: 'Suppose you still retain the foundation, beware of lesser shiftings; it is not enough to hold fast the head, you must beware of those continual changes of doctrine or of life which, though they may not be inconsistent with fundamentals, are very dangerous. Do not dread being called old fashioned, strait-laced, narrow-minded in these days; cleave to the cross, to the word, in all points, great and small. Be immovable.'

(a.) Always abound in the work of the Lord.—This may either stand by itself, as a separate and third exhortation, or it may be connected with the two previous words, thus: 'Abound in the Lord's work, steadfastly and immovably; not

working by fits and starts, but perseveringly, pressing forward in it, not turning aside, nor fainting, nor growing weary.' But let us take the words generally, and we shall find that we are called to—(1.) The work of the Lord.—The Lord here is Christ. It is to His work that we are called; for He is our Lord and Master; and in His parables He refers to us as servants, and to our work during His absence. But 'the work of the Lord,' means also the work, or at least work like that, which He did while here; for while in His great work of sin-bearing He stands alone, in His daily works for His Father and for men He is our example. Let us read His life in all its details, and learn what His work was.

(b.) Abound in the work of the Lord.—Our whole life is to be filled up with this, like a vessel filled to overflowing with water. Our lives are to be like trees all covered with leaves and fruit; like fields and hills all clothed with grass; like streams all filled with water. Such is to be our 'abounding.' Nothing scanty, or occasional, but full and cheerful; never idle, but always 'serving,' either in word or deed.

(c.) Abound always.—It is not to be now a swollen torrent, and then a dried-up channel like the Kedron; but a perpetual flow like the Jordan. It is to be like sunshine, ever going forth; like fragrance of the garden, ever ascending. We are to persevere, and work without ceasing. 'Always abound.' 'Be not weary in well-doing.'

II. The motive.—Our 'labour' (not work merely, but toil, however great) is not in vain. This we know. We are assured of this; and being thus assured, we labour. Vain labour is a hopeless thing; producing heartlessness and indifference. Labour that is sure of success and recompense, stimulates and cheers. That which makes our labour not in vain, is its connection with the Lord. That which makes' our reward so sure and blessed, is its connection with the Lord. Our whole life, service, suffering, toil, are connected with Him; and it is this that prevents them from being fruitless or useless; it is this which' ennobles them, and elevates them. Human labour is often fruitless, this never. Several things show that it is not in vain.

(1.) Present fruit.—This labour bears true and real fruit,—'fruit that shall remain.'

(2.) Present blessedness.—It is joyful work; the service is not hard; 'the joy of the Lord is our strength.'

(3.) Present fellowship with Christ in work.—He works along with us; nay, it is his work more than ours.

(4.) Future approval of the Master.—'Well done,' He will say, when He comes again.

(5.) Future reward.—Glory, honour, and immortality. And this reward is waiting for us at the resurrection of the just. The past resurrection of the Lord is true and no fable; so is our future resurrection. And it is glorious beyond conception. The hope of it sustains and gladdens. We press forward with that hope in view. We toil or suffer with that hope in view. Keeping our eye upon that glory, we abound in the work of the Lord.

Be not then weary in well-doing. Persevere; press on; endure hardness. Toil on, however rough and hard the work may be. First be a believer, and then a worker. Work diligently. Do thine own work, with thine own talents, and according to the measure of thine own gifts, whether these gifts be great or small. Thine own work is the work of the Lord. It is not the work of the flesh, or of self, or of man, or of a sect. It is the Master's work; do it well and thoroughly; He will see to the success, and to the reward. Do it bravely and boldly. Do it independently of human help, or earthly applause, or the stimulus of 'public opinion.' Do it not as one of a multitude, not as part of a great and imposing organization; but as alone, with only the Master to lean upon, to guide, to cheer. Be not the hanger on of a party, or the slave of human rules, or the drudge of a committee, or the 'right-hand man' of a Diotrephes. Quit yourself like a man, like a Christian man, with a personality and responsibility all thine own.

Follow the Lord. Let thine eye be single; thine arm unhampered; thine heart uncramped; all thine actions and words simple and bold and free. Be the servant of no man; but listen only to the voice which says to thee, 'Follow me;' 'always abound in the work of the Lord.' There is no master worthy of being followed but He who bought us with His blood.

XXXV.

Mercy To The Chief Of Sinners

"But I obtained mercy."—

1 Timothy 1:13.

This is the sum of Paul's history; its alpha and omega. So is it of each saved one. It is all that he can say for himself; all the account he can give of his mighty change. He found mercy. God took pity upon him. How did you turn? we ask him. He answers, I found mercy. How did you become a follower of Christ? I obtained mercy. That is all.

Here, then, is a great outstanding fact at the outset of Church history; an illustration of the gospel and the power of the cross, while both were yet new and fresh. Paul found mercy. Sin abounded; grace much more. This is no conjecture or myth, but authentic fact. It is solid rock; a genuine piece of history, which has but one meaning, on which no ambiguity rests; one of the many illustrations of the cross and its testimony which Church history abounds in.

I. It is a very unlikely fact.—'But,' he says, 'but I obtained mercy.' No one seemed farther off; more opposed; more fitted for wrath; more unlikely; but he obtained mercy. His thorough self-righteousness; his good opinion of his life; his scorn of the cross; his dislike of the gospel,— these made it very unlikely that he should become the proclaimer of the cross, a monument of grace. Yet so it was. He obtained mercy! He was not in the way, nor near it; quite away from it. Yet he was led in! O free love of God, how strong art thou!

II. It is a very marvelous fact.—Some things are unlikely, yet cannot be called marvelous. The sudden return of an absent friend may be unlikely, but not marvelous. Warm sunny weather in midwinter may be unlikely, but not marvelous. This, however, is as marvelous as unlikely. The wonder is expressed in the 'I;' 'but I obtained mercy.' Greatest of all wonders upon earth! Saul of Tarsus,—the Pharisee,—the hater of Christ, the persecutor, the blasphemer, the

mocked, the murderer! If ever there was special joy and special wonder in heaven over a saved sinner, it was over Saul! Of all incredible things the most incredible! It has been, and it will be a wonder; an everlasting wonder; a wonder so great as to be quite beyond belief and beyond explanation, but for the exceeding riches of the grace of God. The raging wolf of Benjamin transformed into a gentle, lamb of Christ's flock!

III. It is a very blessed fact,—'I obtained mercy!' Yes, God took pity upon me! The greatness and the freeness of this mercy are the things which make it so blessed. Not only a thing to be wondered at, but rejoiced in. A thing of gladness. Mercy! God's great love exemplified and embodied in a fact like this. The lost one saved; how blessed! The chief of sinners saved; how blessed! The most lost of all saved; how blessed! Included in this mercy are forgiveness and righteousness and eternal life,—is not all this truly blessed? Bless the Lord, O my soul! This our brother was dead and is alive again!

IV. It is a very cheering fact.—It contains in itself a gospel; nay, the gospel in all its brightness. Here is the chief of sinners saved! What encouragement! Here is the pattern of God's long-suffering and boundless grace. Can any sinner say that Paul's case does not suit his, or that he has gone beyond the reach of that free love which laid hold of Saul of Tarsus? If he was saved, why not you? In him sin abounded, but grace much more abounded; why not so in you? Do you object to be a monument of grace, a signal trophy of free love? Or can you indulge the foolish thought that you are too far gone in sin to be a monument of grace,—too thoroughly set on fire of hell to be plucked from the burning?

V. It is a very glorious fact.—There is no dishonour in it anywhere or to any one. It is one of the many facts of earth which bring glory to God in the highest; and it is one which brings special glory to His name. It is one of a class, all of which are very glorious; but it transcends them all in glory. Out of it comes glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; glory greater than that which comes from the conversion of an ordinary sinner; glory on earth; glory in heaven; glory in the Church; glory through all ages; glory which no other fact has equaled; glory to the grace of God, to His power and love; glory to the cross and blood and righteousness of Christ; glory to the almightiness and love of the Holy Ghost.

VI. It is a many sided fact.—A fact of universal bearing and import, which tells on every side, in a thousand ways, on all classes; a fact which has a variety of aspects, all of them precious.

(1.) It is a fact for the Jew.—Here is a Jew, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, set forth as a monument of mercy; loved, saved, and honoured, though the foremost of his nation in opposition to the cross and the gospel. What a word to Israel! If he was saved, what Jew need despair?

(2.) It is a fact for the Gentile.—He is saved by God, in order to be an apostle of the Gentiles. As such he speaks and writes; bearing God's message to the nations afar off. His conversion is light to the Gentile,—to Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Rome, more than to Jerusalem.

(3.) It is a fact for the Church of God.—That Church is composed of sinners who have obtained mercy,—of Sauls. In him the Church sees the rock whence it was hewn, and the hole of the pit whence it was digged. No boasting here! All is grace.

(4.) It is a fact for the world.—Here is one of its worst fragments broken off and taken out. What sinner need despair? Saul obtained mercy. Why not you?

(5.) It is a fact illustrating God's character and ways.—In it we see (1) long-suffering; (2) sovereignty; (3) grace; (4) power. God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways. Here are the heights and depths of mercy; salvation to the uttermost; love to the chief of sinners. He who plucked Saul from the fire, can pluck you. He has no pleasure in your death. His desire is that you should live and not die.

XXXVI.

God's Revelation Of Himself In Flesh

"God was manifest in the flesh."—

1 Timothy 3:16.

Our subject is twofold. (1.) God's revelation of Himself in flesh. (2.) What it means.

Of Godhead generally these words are true. 'The Godhead' was manifested when the Word was made flesh; so that Christ could say, 'He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.' Of the second person of the Godhead (the Son, the Word), these words are no less true. He was manifest in flesh. He was Immanuel, God with us.

God is a Spirit; and to human senses, as such, He is invisible and impalpable. 'No man hath seen God at any time;' 'whom no man hath seen, nor can see;' 'the King invisible,'—these are some of the expressions used in reference to God. The spiritual cannot be reached by our bodily senses. Spirit may discern flesh, but not flesh spirit.

It was God's eternal purpose to make Himself visible and audible and palpable; to show Himself; to assume such a form as that all His creation might behold Him. The assumption of the angelic nature would not have accomplished this; for angels are spirits, and, as such, invisible, only becoming visible when invested with something human. Therefore 'He taketh not hold of angels' (Hebrew 2:16).

It was as man that God purposed to reveal Himself; and to prepare the way for this revelation of Himself He created man, in order to exhibit the form in which He was to reveal Himself. First He created earth, out of whose soil man was to be formed; then He took of that soil and made man; and then He took of man's very flesh or substance, and brought it by incarnation into oneness with Himself. The second person of the Godhead took hold of the flesh of Adam and the seed of Abraham. 'The Word was made flesh;' and thus 'God was manifest in flesh.'

This flesh was the true flesh of man; not something spiritual or aerial, but true and proper humanity; so that man and man's earth are represented by Him now at the Father's right hand. Of the very substance of the Virgin was His body made; susceptible of our infirmities; liable to weariness, and pain, and hunger, and thirst, and death; needing food, and sleep, and rest, and clothing. Altogether human and finite was His soul, like the soul of a true man, though not shapen in iniquity, nor conceived in sin; holy, but human; perfect, but finite; expanding as a human soul expands, and learning as man learns. In flesh it was that God was manifest; God, looking through human eyes, and shedding human tears; God, bearing with human ears, and touching with human hands. It was very God and very man; not a mixture of the two, but the full perfection of both. And all this completeness and verity of human nature, that the sacrifice about to be offered up in that nature might be suitable and perfect; for unless the 'nature' or 'flesh' were thoroughly human, the sacrifice would not have met the ends appointed.

But, looking at the Word as made flesh, at God manifest in flesh, let us see what we learn.

I. God loveth man.—To take man's nature on Him is the proof and pledge of love. Only love could do this. To pass by angels, and to take man's flesh into union with Godhead, surely this is love. It is condescension, but it is more than condescension,—it is love. It is delight in man, and in man's nature, and in man's earth. The desire for such close affinity like this, betokens a deep interest in man's welfare, as well as a high value for man's nature. It is man in whom He delights; it is man whom He desires to honour; it is man whom He selects, out of all His creatures, as the being whom He wishes to bring closest to Himself, to make partaker of the divine nature.

II. God has come down to man.—It is not a distant love; love carried on by correspondence; it is a love which has sought nearness of abode. It is not God taking up man to dwell with Him, but God coming down to dwell with man. It is not God making man in the image of God, but God making Himself in the likeness of man. This coming down of the whole infinite distance is a condescension of the most marvelous kind. Heaven, all heaven, descends to earth. God has come down to man. Man first wanted to ascend and be as God; God, to remedy man's evil case, descends and becomes as man. Then man's desire was to go as far from God as he could. God's desire was to come as near

to man as possible. This coming down of God is in itself a gospel to man.

III. God converses with man.—It is not merely for nearness, but for friendship that God comes; for converse; for interchange of thought and heart; it is to speak with us, and listen to us speaking to Him, face to face. This converse begins with reconciliation, and this reconciliation begins with blood, at the cross; for there is the first point of contact between God and the sinner. It is not God incarnate that suffices for this; there must be God crucified for us. It is over the broken body of 'God manifest in flesh' that God and we converse; His love flowing out to us, and ours to Him. Man's renewed converse with God begins at his sin. It is to the point of departure and of variance that God brings the sinner back. That is the first thing to be dealt with, and dealt with in a righteous way, through the sin-bearing death of God manifest in flesh. We, accepting God's method of dealing with sin, by the death of a substitute, enter into peace, and the eternal intercourse begins.

IV. God dispenses His fullness.—'It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell.' In the 'Word made flesh' God has framed a vessel to contain that fullness; a divine vessel to contain divine fullness. Out of that vessel God dispenses to us His riches. He has all we need, and He freely distributes His supplies to every applicant. Come and partake, is His invitation to each needy soul. Fullness of pardon, life, health, joy, and holiness, is what He proffers; and all these contained in this wondrous vessel,—'God manifest in flesh.'

V. God will dwell with us for ever.—He whose name is Immanuel, God with us, will fully unfold the meaning of that name hereafter in the new creation, when that shall come to pass which is written, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them.' This shall be the final glory and blessedness,—the consummation of all that of which incarnation contained the germ or seed.

God was manifest in flesh! What a peace bringing truth! How comforting, quickening, gladdening, and hope inspiring! What fullness of present joy and of eternal blessedness is contained in that mighty truth!

To him who says, like Philip, 'Show us the Father, and it sufficeth,' we need simply to point to the Incarnate Word, God manifest in flesh.

XXXVII.

Paul's Loving Helpmeet

"The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of any chain: but, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well." —

2 Timothy 1:16-18.

Onesiphorus means 'help-bringer.' Thus the character of the individual corresponded with his name. His deeds showed him to be worthy of such a name. He was a true helpmeet or fellow helper in the Lord. He was the apostle's help bringer. He seems to have lived at Ephesus; and certainly had not left his first love. His family were like-minded with himself. The expression is meant to include both him and them,—'Onesiphorus and his household;' and they are specially saluted at the close of this epistle. He seems to have been greatly beloved by the apostle, and to have suited him well. Paul needed such an one, and God supplied the need in giving him this loving, bold, unwearied helpmeet. We notice here—(1) Paul's prayers for Onesiphorus; (2) The reasons given.

I. Paul's prayers for Onesiphorus.—He helped Paul; and Paul helped him with his prayers. Twice over, in these verses, does Paul ask for 'mercy' in his behalf,—mercy now, mercy hereafter, or 'in that day.' It is to 'the Lord,' or Jesus Christ, that he thus prays; it is from the Lord that he asks mercy now, and mercy hereafter, in the day when He comes again. Onesiphorus was one who had obtained mercy, yet the apostle asks mercy for him; just as, although forgiven men, we need forgiveness hourly. How unscripturally they argue who say, —'You have been forgiven, why ask forgiveness in your prayers? You have found mercy, why be always asking for mercy?' Our whole life is mercy from first to last. Each cry of ours must begin with 'Have mercy,' like David, and like the publican. The word mercy is a wide and deep and large one. It contains everything we need. As grace means everything that free love can give the sinner, so mercy means everything that mercy can give him. This is the well-head of all blessing. Everything we receive or need is to be traced to this. It is

the mercy of God; infinite like Himself. 'The quality of this mercy is not strained.' Its breadth, and length, and depth, and height are beyond measure and conception. 'The Lord give mercy,' says the apostle, reminding us of its freeness; and again, 'the Lord grant (or give, for it is the same word) that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.' Yes; the mercy is the mercy of God, or rather of the Lord,—'our Lord Jesus Christ;' mercy gushing forth just now in fullness, hereafter to gush forth in no less fullness when He comes again. What a prayer! Could he ask more? Did not that include all?

II. The reasons.—These are given as reasons why Paul prays for Onesiphorus, and why he expects God to answer;—like the reasons given regarding the centurion, 'for he loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue.' Let us note these reasons. They are all more or less connected with himself. He had experienced much kindness from Onesiphorus in most trying circumstances, and he feels as if thus he were a debtor to him; nay, as if the Lord had been made a debtor to him also, because of this kindness to the servant.

(1.) He oft refreshed me.—Paul, though an apostle, needed refreshment. His spirit was often cast down within him and withered. The word means, breathing fresh life into what is dead or withered,— 'times of refreshing.' Bodily suffering, imprisonment, tossing to and fro, weariness, and painfulness,—these oftentimes brought him low. Though Christ was in him and he in Christ, yet he felt sorrow and bitterness just as we do. He needed earthly companionship, human sympathy to revive him. He got it in Onesiphorus. He was oft refreshed by him. People mistake much when they think that ministers can so soar above earthly grief and care as to be independent of consolation. They need it as much as any; perhaps more. Let their people seek to refresh them. Let each member be an Onesiphorus; if not by word and deed, at least by prayer.

(2.) He was not ashamed of my chain.—Paul was a prisoner, in a Roman dungeon, the Mamertine prison. He was bound as a malefactor, and it needed no common courage to visit him, sympathize with him. The chains and the dungeon no doubt repelled many. They were afraid; they were ashamed. They hid their faces from him. But Onesiphorus boldly and lovingly gives vent to his sympathy. He is not ashamed of the prisoner, or the prison, or the chain. The reproach to be incurred (perhaps the danger also) by showing kindness to a criminal, was nothing to him. They were one in Christ; and this oneness drew

them together. Nothing could separate them, or produce coldness or distance. Let us be in sympathy with all suffering saints; and rejoice to suffer for our sympathy with brethren.

(3.) When in Rome, he sought him out very diligently.—He would have great difficulty in finding him. Rome was an immense city, like London. How difficult to find out a poor Jewish prisoner in it! Yet he did it. 'I was in prison, and ye came unto me' (Matthew 25:36).

(4.) He ministered to him.—Yes; Onesiphorus ministers to Paul; frequently and in many things. For in how many things can the members help each other! Every day; every hour. They may bear burdens, bind up wounds, speak words of comfort, be serviceable constantly. Let us learn the duty of ministry, and feel that we are all, in a measure, ministers. We are called upon to serve. And for this service the apostle asks that he may be recompensed. He can only reward him by his prayers; but is not that enough?

The day of the reward is coming; 'that day.' Then all shall be recompensed. A recompense for the very smallest favor or service, however feebly and imperfectly performed. Not a cup of water shall be overlooked; not a word spoken or action done but shall have its reward. Let us serve, then, the Master in the servant; let us serve faithfully and freely. The reward of the faithful servant shall be great at the Master's coming. We do not, indeed, work for hire; yet we get recompense,— glorious recompense. Let our eye rest on it, and on that day which is to bring it to us. 'Let us have respect unto the recompense of reward.'

Let us remember that we are debtors to all saints,—ministers or not; young or old; debtors to the whole world, but specially to the Church. Let us serve as such, 'looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.' For, 'behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me.'

XXXVIII.

The Great House—Its Master And Its Vessels

"In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good worth."—

2 Timothy 2:20, 21.

How full of admonitions and warnings is this epistle! Some of them are such as we should hardly have thought that Timothy required. Yet what warning is there which a sinner needs that a saint does not? Hear how the Holy Spirit spoke to Timothy, and speaks to us: 'Be not ashamed of the testimony of the Lord;' 'Hold fast the form of sound words;' 'Shun profane and vain babblings;' 'Flee youthful lusts;' 'Foolish and unlearned questions avoid,'—these are some of his exhortations to his son Timothy.

He then takes for illustration the figure in our text,—of the great house, with its various vessels,—and uses this to enforce his counsels. Let us look at it now, in order to quicken ourselves thereby.

I. The house.—It is called a great house,—a house of many rooms, many servants, many vessels. It may be a palace, or a temple, or the house of any man of wealth. In all these senses it shadows forth the Church of God.

That is 'the house of God' (2 Timothy 3:15). And it is truly a 'great house;' great, when we consider its Builder and Maker, and the eternal purpose of the divine Architect; great, when we consider its cost; great, when we consider the length of time in building, the number and preciousness of its living stones; great, when we consider its size and glory and eternal duration. Truly there is no house like it for greatness; neither shall be in all time to come. It is so great, that it is called a city,— the city which bath foundations; so great, that it is called the habitation of God, the palace of the great King, the temple of the Holy Ghost.

II. The Master.—(Mark 13:35; Luke 14:21) One house and one Master, one

proprietor, one head, from whom the house gets its name. The earthly master and the earthly house (from which the figure here is taken) are of no consequence to us. But of the great house, the Church of the living God, it is of no small moment that we know the Master. Sometimes God, and sometimes Christ, is called by that name. The Master of the house and the Master of the family is Christ; the Head of the house is the same with its Builder and Maker; the Master and the house are worthy of each other,— both of them glorious. The house has cost the Master no small cost and labour and pains; and its glory is His glory. He Himself is its foundation, its cornerstone, and its headstone. Its walls are cemented with His blood; and everything about it has been provided with His own hands, and at the expense of His suffering and death. It is the house of life; yet its foundations are laid in death. He is the living Master of a living house; yet His death was needed for its erection. He is the best, wisest, kindest, noblest, and mightiest of Masters. Blessed are they who belong to His house; blessed the stones of its walls, and the dust of its pavement; blessed the vessels that are used in it, and the servants to whom the Master entrusts these in His varied service.

III. The vessels.—In this passage the vessels are evidently the persons, whether ministers, or saints merely, whom Christ employs for the service of His house. Primarily and directly it is of ministers, such as himself and Timothy, that he is speaking; but his language is such as to include all the members of the Church—his 'great house.' Elsewhere these are called the house itself, the habitation of God, the temple of the Holy Ghost, the living stones of the great fabric; here they are 'the vessels' or utensils used in the various chambers, and in the manifold work of the house.

These vessels are various,—some gold, some silver, some wood, some earthen; each for a different purpose; yet all for some use in the house, more or less honourable. For the words, 'some to honour, and some to dishonour,' do not mean that these latter were 'vessels of wrath fitted to destruction,' vessels to be broken or cast away, but simply for less honourable use; still useful, nay, indispensable, as in the case of some of our bodily members, of which the apostle speaks, as 'more feeble,' 'less honourable,' nay, 'uncomely,' yet 'necessary' (1 Corinthians 12:22, 24).

Great, then, is the variety of service in the Church of God; of all different levels

and ranks and purposes. The most honourable is the golden vessel; the least honourable is the earthenware; but the great house needs this variety. The gold would not do the work of the earthenware, nor the earthenware of the gold; the silver would not do the work of the wood, nor the wood of the silver. Each has its own value and its own department. Each is useful, each is necessary, and none to be despised. Some are costly, some common; some for more, others for less dignified purposes; still none can be dispensed with. The work of the house could not go on without all.

But the apostle speaks of the possibility of rising in the scale of dignity and usefulness; of a less honourable vessel becoming more honourable; of the earthenware becoming silver, and the silver becoming gold. 'If a man purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour;' the 'these things' being the evils and deformities and inconsistencies against which he was warning Timothy, such as profane and vain babblings, youthful lusts. There are Christians who are just Christians, and no more. There are Christians who live at a low rate, who are not very consistent, but cold and worldly. They have their use, however. They are vessels; but they are only of wood or earth. These the apostle exhorts to seek a higher elevation. Purge yourselves, he says, and you may yet become more honourable, rising from level to level, as you get quit of your inconsistencies. Thus you will become, (1) honourable;

(2) consecrated; (3) suitable; (4) useful. Covet earnestly, then, the best gifts. Aim high. Press forward. Seek holiness, purity, honour, usefulness, in the great house of God.

XXXIX.

The Blessed Hope

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."—

Titus 2:13.

A Christian looks backward, and gazes on the cross with all its wonders of grace, 'the grace of God that bringeth salvation' (verse 11), the love of Him 'who gave Himself for us' (verse 14); he looks downward, and realizes the hell from which he has been plucked by the power and love of God; for he has been 'saved by His mercy' (verse 3,5); he looks round, and surveys that world from which he has been taken, with all its ungodliness and worldly lusts' (verse 12); he looks upward, and sees Jesus sitting at the right hand of God, loving and pleading, shedding down 'the regeneration' and the Holy Ghost (verse 3,5); he looks forward, and sees the promised glory; he sees the day of his Lord's appearing (verse 13). He is 'full of eyes, before and behind;' his eyes of faith and hope turn in every direction, and pierce the inner and upper circle, into which the eye of sense cannot penetrate.

It is to the forward look of the saint that our text turns us. We are here told what he is 'looking for,'—what he has been looking for ever since he knew 'the grace of God that bringeth salvation' (see 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10). For a knowledge of this 'grace' is presupposed. This 'free love' was preached to him; he heard it; drank in the good news; was saved in so doing; and as a saved man, 'delivered from the wrath to come,' he desires to see Him face to face, who has thus brought him salvation. Having 'tasted that the Lord is gracious,' he 'looks for that blessed hope.'

He is a man with 'a hope;' with a 'blessed hope.' Not a hopeless man in a hopeless world; but one who has a hope, and who holds it fast, and knows that he shall not be put to shame. He is 'saved by hope;' this hope which he has, is to him salvation. In general, 'hope' or 'the things hoped for' refer to the future inheritance and kingdom, as the land of promise was to Abraham a hope, and here it possibly has this meaning; as in 1 Peter 1:3 we are said to be 'begotten

again into a lively (or living) hope,' which 'hope' is the incorruptible inheritance.

This hope is not only sure but blessed. It contains in it everything which, both in present prospect and future possession, can make the saint 'blessed.' All things are his; he is an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ. It is a 'blessed' hope in every sense and aspect. In it is wrapped up 'joy unspeakable and full of glory.'

This 'blessed hope' is to be entered on at 'the appearing of the glory of Him who is the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.' Till then, the 'hope,' however sure and blessed, is simply a 'hope.' The 'things hoped for' cannot, till that day, be realized; for of all of them He is the center and the fountain. Apart from Him there is no blessedness, either now or in the expected future. Is that future precious and bright to us because it contains Him? He is 'the blessed one,' and things or scenes or persons are blessed only as connected with Him. Thus we 'look for that blessed hope' (the hope promised); and we look for the appearing of the glory of Christ.

The attitude of a Christian man, then, is that of 'looking for' this hope and this appearing. It was so in the primitive age certainly. It ought to be so still. The reasons for doing so are not less strong than formerly; nay, they are stronger than ever. Let us note some of these reasons.

I. Our Lord's command.—Once and again He has said, 'Watch' (Matthew 25:13); 'Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning' (Luke 12:35); 'Be ye also ready' (Matthew 24:44). How often does that word watch appear in our Lord's discourses! How urgent was He in regard to this duty! He foresaw the coldness and slumber that would steal over His Church, and He repeated the earnest word, 'Watch.' He knew how great the temptations to be heedless, to sit down contented, without thinking of that duty at all; how much also would be lost by thus falling asleep and forgetting His advent; and He spoke with a voice meant to be heard to the end of time, 'Watch.' That voice is still speaking to us; not less loudly, but more loudly than at first; for the lapse of ages (like the valley and cliffs of earth repeating sounds) but increases the voice, and prolongs as well as loudens the reverberation. Watch, then, watch; for in such an hour as we think not, the Son of man cometh.

II. The day of His advent is uncertain.—The times and seasons are kept

secret by God. Of that day and hour knoweth no man. The event is no secret; but the time is one of the great secrets of God; which nor man nor angel knoweth. It was always a secret; it is so still. Certain signs and dates have been given as connected with that great day; but these all tend to keep up the uncertainty, not to remove it. They who use them for dispelling that uncertainty, use them amiss. The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. 'Behold, I come quickly.' 'Behold, I come as a thief.'

III. The world is growing old.—It is now eighteen centuries and more since our Lord bade us watch; and this is a long period in the lifetime of the world. Days and years and ages have passed over her. The things that were spoken of as near at the first must be much nearer now. Grey hairs are on its head. Its youth and manhood are gone by. The apostle warned us, 'In the last days perilous times shall come.' Our Lord compared the latter age of the world to the days of Noah and of Lot. Let us, then, be watching. The night is far spent; the day is at hand; let us be looking for that blessed hope. Watch! for it may be that these days of ours are the last of the last days.

IV. This looking will greatly profit us.—It is no speculation, no prying curiosity, no presumptuous irreverence. It is a meek and reverent obedience to the Master's precept. In many ways it profits us.

(1.) It gives greater reality to the future.—It shows us Christ as the center of that future,—the man Christ Jesus, as Him round whom all its scenes revolve. At present faith realizes Him in absence; but when He comes again, His glorious person shall be like the sun in the firmament, which cannot be hid. Do your prospects all center in Him?

(2.) It separates us more from the world.—It keeps us in mind of a coming Christ, and so makes us feel the necessity of living more separate from the world, that we may be ready to meet Him when He appears. 'Behold, I come quickly,' ever sounding in our ears, is a great deterrent from worldliness, either the grosser kind or the more refined. Yes, the thought of Christ's coming is fitted to make us holy men.

(3.) It makes us zealous.—It does not paralyze; it rouses and stimulates. If the Master be at hand, how much in earnest should we be! how eager to get His work done while yet there is time! They who think He will not come for many

an age, may loiter or be at ease; they who believe Him near, must be up and doing. Work and watch! Watch and work!

(4.) It comforts us.—If Christ be near, we have little time left to mourn. If He be near, resurrection is at hand, and the day of reunion with our friends is at hand. If He be near, the glory and the kingdom and the New Jerusalem are near, and with them the everlasting joy. 'Comfort one another with these words.' Let looking to Jesus remove all doubts, and let looking for Jesus dispel all sadness. He comes to gladden us! He comes to glorify us, and to be glorified in us. Let our consolation abound. The Lord is at hand.

XL.

The Influence Of A Holy Family

"That the communication of thy faith may become effectual, by the acknowledging of every good flung which is in you in Christ Jesus."

Philemon 6.

A small epistle this! To one man, too, and upon a private, personal, or family matter! Paul, the prisoner, writes it from Rome; and writing it, he associates Timothy with himself,—Timothy, in one place called his son, but here his brother. He writes to Philemon, the beloved fellow labourer; and to his wife Apphia, also 'beloved;' and to Archippus, perhaps their son, a young servant of the Lord; and also to the church in their house. Thus Philemon and Apphia and Archippus come before us as partakers of faith, like Abraham and Sarah and Isaac.

Then Paul tells us how he mingles thanksgiving with prayer, as he hears of the love and faith of this believing family; lovingly linked one with another, and with the whole Church of God. Next he comes to speak of Philemon's faith, and its happy influence.[6]

A Christian man's life was intended to tell,—to tell upon the Church, and to tell upon the world. He, like his Lord, is a light, and as such he must operate upon a dark world. He is to be fragrance, diffusing itself all around. He is to be a magnet, exercising attractive and energizing influence. He is to be a city set upon a hill, to which thousands of eyes are turned from all the region round. He is to be an epistle of Christ, known and read of all men, out of which men learn what Christ is, and what a Christian is.

A Christian man's life is to be a telling one. It is to be a productive walk,—not barren or unimpressive; it is to be effective; fruitful not only in what it bears itself, but in what it provokes others to bear, in what it calls forth from all who see it. Every man's life,—even that of the poorest,—tells either for good or evil upon those around. No one is wholly isolated. What he is, what he does, what he

says, must work. And here is responsibility; from this no man can shake himself free. Specially is this the case with the Christian man. His is a greater responsibility; for his life is meant to tell upon the highest characteristics and destinies of all who at any time come within his circle, either in seeing him or hearing of him. The salt is meant to season the world. If it retains its savor, it will do so without any special effort; if it does not, then what is it fit for? What a call to watch our lives, that they may tell! What a call to consistency, that we may not make one part neutralize the other; doing and undoing, building up and pulling down alternately. What need of circumspection, holiness, and vivid reflection of the Master's own image in all things!

It is specially Philemon's faith that is here dwelt upon; a faith that is seen taking on all the features of Christ's character,—receiving and reflecting every good thing which is in Christ Jesus, so that all who beheld him saw the various excellencies of Christ in him. Thus his faith was diffusive, operative, telling. In him there was a full and detailed ('every good thing') exhibition of Christ. Bystanders saw these, recognized them, imitated them. In the highest, widest sense, his was an influential life. It was a 'power' in the Church, and it was a 'power' in the world. No life is wholly dumb; but some lives speak with a louder voice than others. Such was Philemon's. Such ought ours to be. There is no need of what men call demonstrativeness. In consistent, tranquil, holy silence, there is often a more effective model given us than in clamorous proclamation or obtrusive zeal. We do not need to lift up our voice in the street in order to work on others; silence, in some cases, is better than speech. There is a too silent, and there is a too noisy witness bearing; both extremes are evil, but the results of silent consistency are always deep and enduring.

1. Let our faith be alive.—Let it be instinct with life. A dead faith works no miracles; does no mighty deeds; speaks no mighty words.
2. Let our faith be awake.—Sometimes faith, though alive, falls asleep. Let us not thus slumber, but be roused up. A sleepy or a sleeping faith does nothing.
3. Let our faith speak.—It must be no dumb faith. It ought to speak. The faith of Abel and Enoch and Abraham spoke; so let ours do. Faith ought to find utterance for itself, and to give no uncertain sound. The words of faith are telling

words; they are irresistible.

4. Let our faith be energetic.—There may be life without energy. A living faith is not always energetic, or vigorous, or aggressive. It ought to be all these: devising, doing, enduring, sacrificing; full of fervor and zeal, full of power and devotedness.

5. Let our faith be single-eyed.—All men seek their own, said Paul, not the things that are Jesus Christ's. So let it not be with us. Selfdenied, not self-seeking,—single eyed, straightforward, and sincere, should a believing man be. No double-mindedness, no crookedness, no self pleasing should be seen in him. Without guile, without hypocrisy, and without vainglory should he be.

6. Let our faith be reflective of Christ.—It should exhibit every good thing that is in Christ Jesus. All the good in us is to be copied and derived from Christ. We reflect Him, and this reflection tells upon others. We are to be like the moon and planets, which shine with borrowed light. Yet ours is not to be the feebleness of moonshine, but warmer and brighter, because our sun is more glorious.

Let our faith, then, be communicative, influential, infectious,—telling on all around. Let our life, as believing men, help to mould the believing life of others. Let us not be useless or unimpressive; but decided and unmistakable, holding forth the word of life, giving light to a dark world, and increasing the light of our fellow believers.

XLI.

The One Great Purging

"He by Himself purged our sins."—

Hebrews 1:3.

There is no difficulty in ascertaining who the 'He' is here. He is well described to us. He is the 'Son;' the 'heir of all things;' the 'maker of the worlds;' the 'brightness of Jehovah's glory;' the 'express image of His person;' the 'upholder of all things.' Such is He; the Word made flesh; the only begotten of the Father; infinite, eternal, divine!

The special thing which this glorious One is described as doing, in our text, is 'purging our sins.' For this He descended, lived, died, and was buried. And this work is one which comes in between a glorious past and a glorious future,—a brief but marvelous interruption or interposition. He, the eternal Son, descends to do a work on earth; He does it in thirty-three years, and then reascends to eternal glory. Yet, ere He went, He could say, 'It is finished.'

We should be led to conclude from His person and character and past eternal history, that the work He comes to do will be thoroughly well done; and we should no less conclude from His subsequent history of exaltation and honour, that it had been fully and satisfactorily accomplished. His sitting down on the right hand of the Majesty on high implies that He Himself is satisfied, and that the Father is also satisfied. He is glorified because His work is done.

The work is that of purging our sins; and these He purged 'by Himself.' Let us consider this; it is literally, 'Through Himself He made purgation of our sins.'

I. A purgation or cleansing is needed.—The need of purgation arises from the existence of sin. It has come in as guilt and as evil. It has come in to defile us; to pollute our consciences; to render our persons unacceptable to God. It has made us filthy, so that God cannot approach us; and it has produced such a sense of filthiness that we cannot approach God. Purgation, then, is needed because of

pollution. It is needed to satisfy God, and to satisfy us. So long as this defilement exists, there can be no approach to God; no intercourse, and no peace of conscience; no safety; but distance, terror, isolation like that of the leper; fearful looking for of judgment;—no service, no safety, no peace, no strength, no love, without it. If our sins are not purged, we are yet in them, and they in us; God is yet angry with us, and we at enmity with God.

II. It must be sacrificial purgation.—The washing away of sin is something special and peculiar.

(1.) It is not indifference to sin, or forgetfulness of it, either on our part or that of God. This cannot satisfy God, or relieve our consciences. Yet this is all the purgation to which most betake themselves!

(2.) It is not God's love to us.—God's love in itself cannot purge sin. It may, and does, lead to the adoption of measures for the purgation; but it must not be confounded with these. It cannot pacify the conscience.

(3.) It is purgation by pardon.—Our consciences cannot be purged without forgiveness. No pardon, no purgation. Where there is righteous pardon, there is true purgation.

(4.) It is purgation by priesthood.—The purging of the conscience is a priestly act. It is by priesthood that the relationship between us and God is established on its true footing. There must be priesthood in everything pertaining to the removal of sin; and this priesthood must be divine.

(5.) It is purgation by blood.—It is the blood that purges; the blood of the Lamb; the blood of the Priest. This blood is the blood of the Substitute. It purges, because it is the life; and purgation can duly come by the giving of life for life.

III. Christ Himself has made this purgation by Himself.—It is not merely that He purged our sins; but He did it by Himself. He was High Priest, altar, temple, sacrifice. It was His own blood, His own death that did the work. That which He did on earth is our purgation; He wrought that thing which purges, pacifies, pardons. In consequence of it, it was a righteous thing in God to draw near to us, and a safe thing for us to draw near to God. God looks at it and says, It is

enough, 'I draw near;' we look at it and say, It is enough, 'let us draw near.' All that sin and guilt and condemnation produced of distance, displeasure, dread, are done away by this. The sacrifice has been offered, the blood has been shed, life has been given for life; it is finished. Not by our works of righteousness, but by the one work done by the Son of God, we are saved, our sins are purged, our approach to God is provided for. Nothing more is needed to propitiate God, or to purge our conscience, than the sacrifice of Calvary. Without this, God would have remained unpropitiated, and the sinner's conscience unpurged, unpacified. Mark—

(1.) The love of God is here.—Herein is love. Love originated the propitiation. It is not, God gave His Son that He might love the world; but, God so loved the world that He gave His Son.

(2.) The open gate is here.—It is the blood that has rolled away the stone, and opened the gate; not love alone; but love working its way to us through the blood. The veil is rent. The flaming sword is removed or quenched.

(3.) The removal of dread is here.—It is not mere love that removes the distrust and terror. More than love is needed. The sacrifice presents that which is needed. Now we do not need to fly from God, nor dread Him as an enemy. Now He is both gracious and righteous, loving and holy. We need not be terrified at the mention of His name or law.

Here is the purging sacrifice. You are not actually washed till you believe; but here is the cleansing work. Receive God's testimony to its meaning, its nature, its efficacy, its power. It purges all who believe.

XLII.

The Rest Of God

"My rest."—

Hebrew 3:2.

It may seem strange that God should speak of rest or unrest for Himself. Yet He does so; and our business is, not to evade the announcement, but to ascertain its meaning.

He speaks of rest in connection with previous labour as when He tells us that, after the work of the first creation, He rested, and was refreshed. He speaks of rest in relation to trouble; as when it was said of Noah's sacrifice, 'The Lord smelled a sweet savor;'—literally, a savor of rest;— and the Lord said, 'I will not again curse the ground any more' (Genesis 8:21); and when He said, by the mouth of Zechariah, 'These have quieted my Spirit' (Zechariah 6:8).

We speak truly, then, and scripturally, when we speak of God's rest, and God's unrest.

There is rest in heaven. No labour, no disquietude, no tumult, no tempest there. There was rest throughout the universe before creation existed. Among the angels, before they left their first estate; and on earth, before man broke off from God, there was rest,—rest for the creature; rest for the Creator. There is still rest in heaven,—rest among the unfallen; but on earth there is unrest. And it is to the existence of this that God refers when He asks, 'Where is the place of my rest?' (Isaiah 66:1;) and when, pointing to Mount Zion and His sanctuary, He says, 'This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.' Let us consider—

I. God's unrest.—It is not an unrest like ours,—an unrest of confusion, and weakness, and uncertainty. Still there must be something which can only be made intelligible to us by some such expression. It is this something which is indicated in these words: 'It repented the Lord that He had made man upon the

earth, and it grieved Him at His heart.' It is this that is implied in such expressions as these: 'How shall I give thee up, O Israel?...Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together;' 'Is Ephraim a dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him.'

From the hour of man's rebellion this state of unrest has existed; indicating the conflict between grace and righteousness, between hatred of the sin and compassion for the sinner. When God finished His six days' work He 'rested;' for this earth, then untainted, was such as to afford Him this blessed Sabbath rest, while the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy. He could then 'rest in His love, and joy over it with singing' (Zephaniah 3:17). But that Sabbath soon came to an end; God's rest was soon broken; and the scenes of evil and darkness which earth has increasingly exhibited, age after age, have only tended to aggravate the unrest. God abhors these spectacles of wickedness, and in them His soul cannot rest. It is because of these that He has not found a rest or a resting place here such as heaven affords, and such as He intended earth to be. Not that man's rebellion and misery have disturbed the profound and ineffable tranquility of the divine bosom, or made the infinitely blessed One less blessed than before. That cannot be. And yet He intimates to us that the rest which He had expected to find on earth, and because of which He had created it, was nowhere to be found below. So awfully have the waters of sin's deluge overflowed it, that, like the dove of the ark, He has found no resting place anywhere, at least in the manner and measure which He might have done. All is sin;—sin; and this hinders rest; for holiness cannot rest in the midst of sin. What fellowship can righteousness have with unrighteousness? What rest can there be where wrath and the curse are working, where grace says, Spare, and righteousness says, Destroy? What rest can there be for such a God as ours in this vast lazarus-house of disease; this haunt of death, and dwelling-place of corruption; this battlefield, on which is waged the unceasing warfare with the principalities and powers of hell?

II. God's rest.—The dove of Noah, amid the dark waste of devouring waters, found one resting-place—the ark: so God, in the midst of earth's wide and long deluge of sin, found in every age a spot of which He could say, 'This is my rest.' In patriarchal times, both before and after the flood; the altar of the burnt-offering was the place of resting. There, where the blood was poured out,

in token of sin at once punished and pardoned; there God rested in His love. In Jewish times there was first the tabernacle, and then the temple, with altar and mercy-seat, with blood and incense; and there God found the rest which could be found nowhere else. It was of Mount Zion, and of the temple, that the words of the Psalm were spoken, 'This is my rest: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.' It was from that temple that the 'savor of rest' came up before Him, in which He delighted. From every other spot there came up only the 'smoke in His nose' (Isaiah 65:5).

But yet these were not real. They were but shadows of the true, and they only ministered rest, as prefiguring the true temple, the true altar, the true blood, and the true incense. It was in Jesus only that Jehovah found rest; and it was this rest of His soul that He gave utterance to when the voice came out from the glory, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' Here, then, it is that God has found His true resting place. In Jesus His soul rests; not simply because of His perfection, but because of His sin-bearing character and work; because in Him the conflict between grace and righteousness is brought to a perpetual end; because in Him wrath finds its exhaustion, and by Him the curse is borne; because in Him all that could trouble holiness, and displease righteousness, and exasperate the law, is put out of the way; because on Him the angry waves and winds have spent their force, and died away for ever; because in Him there is at once the punishment and the pardon of sin, the condemnation, and the deliverance from condemnation; so that all that had broken God's blessed rest was taken away, and all things prepared for being restored to that holy state in which they were, when God's rest was first broken in upon by sin. From the cross of Christ there has gone up the savor of rest,—the sweet-smelling savor in which God delights,—by which His anger is turned away; so that He can now 'rest in His love,' where, but for this, He could only have poured His vengeance as a consuming fire.

III. The soul's rest.—The soul's rest can only be found where God has found His. There is unrest in the soul of the sinner. He is like the troubled sea, which cannot rest. He is tossed up and down; driven to and fro. He is a wanderer like Cain. He is weary and heavy laden. Sin troubles him. He goes about asking, Who will show me any good? God pities him, and has provided a restingplace. Where God rests, there the sinner finds rest. The altar, with its sprinkled blood, was the place to which the eye of the sinner was first pointed for rest and he was

invited to rest where God was resting. Now it is the cross of Christ that is the rest pointed out by God;—the sure and abiding rest. There, where God has found rest, the soul of the sinner finds it. There he finds deliverance from other things that troubled his soul. There he sees sin condemned, yet sin forgiven. There he finds God pacified, and righteousness taking the sinner's side. Everywhere else there is storm; here there is calm. He hears the voice of God, inviting him to rest here, say, Let thy soul rest where mine is resting; let that which has 'quieted my Spirit' quiet yours; let the reconciliation of mercy and truth, in which I am rejoicing, be that in which you rejoice; I can meet you righteously and honourably, and you can meet me safely and surely here: look where I am looking; be satisfied with that which has satisfied me. He hears, too, the voice of the crucified Son of God saying to the troubled waves of his soul, 'Peace, be still;' and to himself, 'Come unto me, and I will give you rest.' Here, then, is the soul's resting place; here is the refuge for the tempest-tossed. The sinner needs no more than what he finds here, to calm every tempest of his soul; and if he remains still ruffled and troubled, it is because he refuses to be satisfied with that rest with which God is so entirely satisfied.

There shall yet be rest for creation; rest for this tempest-troubled earth; and this shall flow forth from the same source as that which gave rest to the soul. The whole earth shall rest: Israel shall rest; the Church shall rest; Christ shall rest; God shall rest. For there remaineth a rest for the people of God. It shall be glorious.

It is not every kind of rest that will do for a troubled soul. Peace which is no peace, and rest which is no rest, are but too common. But all this is vanity and falsehood. Only God's rest will do. It is sufficient, and it is free. The sinner needs only to accept that which God has accepted. He hears God saying, 'This is my rest for ever;' and he takes up the divine words and says, 'This shall be my rest for ever, and here will I dwell.'

This rest, which the soul gets in fixing its eye on Him in whom God is resting, is a sure and perfect and everlasting rest. It is divine rest, and yet it is altogether suitable to meet every part of human unrest. It is God's own rest; for as He speaks of giving us His joy and His peace, so He speaks also of giving us His rest; so that the rest which we get is not merely divine, as being God's gift to us, but as being of the very nature of His own rest; nay, His own rest itself.

It is rest poured into the troubled spirit by God Himself. It is rest from knowing that God is now altogether for us, and not against us; nay, that all things which were against us are now for us, and that forever. All things that broke our rest, or that might hereafter have broken it, have been made to contribute to our rest, and to the establishment of that rest forever. Heaven and earth and hell have all been laid under contribution, and made to further and consolidate this rest. Heaven and earth may pass away, but it cannot pass.

That which man's weary, empty soul is seeking for in vain is here, only here. That which can uproot all doubt, which can dispel every cloud, which can soothe each misgiving, which can remove every fear, nay, which can place us beyond the possibility of any return to these troubles and uncertainties, is here, only here;—in Him who is God's rest and ours;—God's rest, and therefore ours!

Nay, and in us too God has found a resting place, by reason of our connection with Him with whom faith has identified us. He dwells in us, and we in Him. There is a mutual resting and indwelling. He rests in us, and we in Him. He says of us, and we of Him, 'This is my rest for ever.'

XLIII.

The Mischief Of Unbelief

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."—

Hebrews 3:12.

Unbelief in Scripture is spoken of as the sin of sins. As faith is the root of all good, so is unbelief of all evil. God hates it; Christ condemns it; our own hearts cannot but say it is evil. 'The evil heart of unbelief' is the most evil of all.

Let us consider unbelief in its bearings on what is divine and what is human; what relates to God and to ourselves; its injustice in the one case, its injury in the other.

I. It's injustice.—It does injustice.

(1.) To God.—It assumes that He is not to be trusted or credited; that He is not the being that He has said He is. It does gross injustice to His whole character; His love, His grace, His veracity, His unchangeableness. It misinterprets and misrepresents Him in all respects, and so dishonours Him, and separates us from Him.

(2.) To Christ.—It rejects the testimony which God has given of Him; it refuses to accept the character which the Father has given of Him, and treats Him as one like ourselves. Every act of unbelief, every doubt, every suspicion is an injustice to Him,—to one who has not deserved such treatment at our hands. It keeps us apart from Him, and Him from us; it will not allow us to be satisfied with what Scripture has revealed concerning Him.

(3.) To the Holy Spirit.—All unbelief is a rejection of the Spirit's testimony to the Son; a grieving of the Spirit. It is a doing injustice to His love and power; to His willingness to bless. It is making Him a liar. It is casting discredit on that Book which He has written for us concerning the love of God.

(4.) To the cross.—All unbelief, more or less, directly assails the cross. It says—
(1) That cross is insufficient, it cannot save unless assisted by goodness in us; (2) That cross may save ordinary sinners, it cannot save me; (3) That cross is not the place of substitution, but merely of example of a divine self-surrender. Thus it insists that we shall not take our peace from the cross alone.

(5.) To the blood.—The special thing which marks the cross is the blood; and unbelief specially sets aside the blood in its value and efficacy. It refuses to take peace from the blood alone. It rejects the simple meaning of such a text, 'He hath made peace through the blood of His cross.' It sets aside or invalidates the finished work; and maintains that we shall put away all peace and all assurance of forgiveness that comes to us from a direct and simple recognition of the great propitiation. It does grievous injustice to the cross, and blood, and work of Christ.

(6.) To the gospel.—It makes void the good news, and turns them into evil tidings, or at least into no tidings at all. It makes the faith which receives the gospel a work to be done, a condition to be performed; and upon the right doing of that work, and the right performance of that condition, it makes our peace to turn. What grievous injustice to the glad tidings! What a mockery of the gospel!

II. Its injury.—It does most grievous injury to ourselves; and through us to the Church of God; nay, to the world. It is a deadly poison. It is a dismal shadow. It is our worst enemy. It does infinite injury to us in every possible way.

(1.) It mars our peace; either forbidding it altogether, or subjecting it to continual breaks; turning it from the continual flow of a river, into a tide with ebbs and flows.

(2.) It hinders progress.—It brings us to a standstill; instead of moving forward and upward, we revolve in a narrow circle of useless routine, or perhaps slide backward.

(3.) It checks prayerfulness.—Prayer implies expectancy: 'Ask, and ye shall receive.' Where unbelief comes in, this expectancy is stopped; and prayer becomes irksome, and in the end brief and infrequent.

(4.) It destroys fruitfulness.—Without faith how can we be fruitful? Unbelief takes the sap out of the tree. None of the graces of the Spirit can grow up in an unbelieving heart. We may do many outward things, but the true, the inner, the acceptable, can only be done by faith. In proportion to our faith will be our good works.

Thus unbelief injures—

(1.) Ourselves.—It keeps us dark, and gloomy, and useless, and in bondage.

(2.) The Church.—For of what use are we to the Church in this unbelieving state? We are not helpers of the brethren in any sense, nor bearers of each other's burdens, nor assisting the growth of the body.

(3.) The world.—We are not useful to the unconverted. We do no good in our families or neighborhood. The world is not the better for us at all. Our good outward life does not tell upon the world, if it is not the fruit of faith.

XLIV.

The Deceitfulness Of Unbelief

"But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."—

Hebrews 3:13.

We do not walk alone in our way to the kingdom. We go in company, each one helping the other in various ways. We are not isolated, so as neither to be helpful nor hurtful to others; we are so called and situated as to be necessarily either the one or other. We are not like plants or trees, each with an individual root, and growing without reference to others. We are branches of one vine; stones of one temple; members of one family, one body. This the Epistles all take for granted; this our text does. We are to help each other onward; watch each other's steps; lovingly reproofing, or comforting, or animating, or rousing, or cheering; looking not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

In reference to this condition of things in the Church of God, mark, in the words of our text, two points: (1.) The duty. (2.) The danger.

I. The duty.—It is that of 'exhortation.' The word has four meanings, or shades of meaning,—exhort, beseech, comfort, plead for. The idea is that of calling one to your side to speak something to him or for him; and implies nearness and personal intercourse, as well as concern for the individual. As father, or friend, or brother, or advocate, we thus exhort, or beseech, or comfort, or plead for.

This duty is here presented to us in the following aspects: It is to be mutual; daily; urgent.

(1.) Mutual.—It is not the exhortation of the pastor; it is that of the members one to the other. 'Exhort one another' is the precept. Keep your eye on the condition of all the brethren, and endeavor to be helpers of each other in spiritual things. In regard to knowledge, holiness, consistency, progress, faith, love, zeal, we are to exhort one another.

(2.) Daily.—It is not to be occasional and inconstant. It must be neither too frequent nor too seldom. 'Daily' is the word. We set out each morning for a daily walk or race, so we must remember our daily duty of mutual exhortation. It must be part of our daily work, done conscientiously and with love.

(3.) Urgent.—It must be done 'today,' while the proclamation is made 'today.' There must be no procrastination. The thing must be done without delay. For the time is short; the evil will wax greater; the duty is neglected. Exhort one another daily while today is proclaimed. It will be tomorrow soon, and tomorrow may be too late.

Let love, then, abound; let it be in constant exercise; for it is only love that can animate such duties. It is love that dictates, and love that gives effect to the exhortation, love yearning and watching over a brother's welfare.

II. The Danger.—There are many dangers to which Christian men are liable; but the apostle singles out one to which they were specially exposed,—hardness of heart, impenitence, obduracy. It is to Christian men that he addresses the warning. This hardening implies such things as these—

(1.) A losing our first love.—When iniquity abounds, the love of many waxes cold. The affections get dull and blunted.

(2.) Losing the edge of our conscience.—The conscience ceases to be sensitive and tender. It does not shrink from sin as it used to do.

(3.) Callousness as to truth.—We get so familiarized with truth, that it ceases to affect us. It loses its power over us.

(4.) Insensibility to sin.—Our own evils are not felt as they used to be; sin itself is not so hated and shunned as formerly.

Thus our whole man gets hardened; our feelings become dull; and spiritual things no longer tell upon us. Great is our danger of becoming hardened; greater still our danger after we have become hardened. Oh, beware of sliding back and sliding down; beware of coldness and indifference. Keep your whole man ever on edge; let not hardness creep in.

This process of hardening is accomplished through the deceitfulness of sin, or rather of 'this sin,' that is, the sin of unbelief spoken of in the previous verse. All sin hardens. The sight of it hardens; connivance at it hardens; indulgence in it hardens. But especially is this true of unbelief. There is nothing so hardening as unbelief; and one great reason for this is, that there is nothing so deceitful. It does not look a great sin; nay, sometimes not like sin at all, but like modesty and humility. It pretends to be jealous for God; to be conscious of personal unworthiness; to be unfit to venture on a hope of acceptance. Thus it deceives. It makes us think that no sin which is the sin of sins. It actually hides itself; palliates its own enormities; veils its hatefulness under the name of humility. In all these ways it contrives to destroy faith, to cherish itself, and so to harden the heart.

Let us then specially beware of unbelief and its deceitfulness. Let us be on our guard against the hardening process, which it effects. Let us dread the evil heart of unbelief which leads us away from God. That which leads us away from God must harden; that which denies the love of God must harden; that which separates the word and promise of God must harden. Have faith in God, if you would preserve a soft and sensitive heart.

XLV.

The Beginning Of Our Confidence

"For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end."—

Hebrews 3:14.

Here is—(1.) The privilege. (2.) The way of possession and continuance.

I. The privilege.—'We are made partakers of Christ.' 'We' means, of course, all saints; not apostles merely. But there may be, as frequently elsewhere, an emphasis on the word, connecting New Testament with Old Testament saints. We, as well as Israel, and the saints of old (4:2) showing the identity of standing and of privilege among the saints of all ages. 'Are made,' or 'become;' intimating that we were not originally so, but have been made what we are by God; 'created unto good works.' 'Partakers of Christ.' The expression is a peculiar one, and very striking. (ετοχος and κοινωνος are nearly synonymous. See Luke 5:7, 10.) The word partaker, or partake, is frequently used in this epistle: 'Took part of the same' (2:14); 'Partakers of the heavenly calling' (3:1); 'Partakers of the Holy Ghost' (4:4). It implies that we obtain a part or possession in Christ and of Christ; that we become participators with Christ in all that He is, and has, and gives.

(1.) In what He is.—He makes us partakers of the divine nature; one with Himself; sons of God; joint heirs; kings and priests; lights of the world. He gives Himself to us, as He gave Himself for us.

(2.) In what He has.—The Father's love (John 16:27); all fullness of grace and blessing; a kingdom, a crown, a throne, an inheritance. 'All that I have is thine.'

(3.) In what He gives.—These gifts are 'life' ('I give unto them eternal life'), forgiveness, salvation, strength, holiness, consolation.

Thus our possession is Christ Himself; nothing less than this;— Christ, and all His fullness; Christ as the divine and eternal fullness,—a personal Christ; not a

mere doctrinal Christ, or a mere theological Christ, or an ecclesiastical Christ, or a ritualistic Christ, or a rationalistic Christ, or a sentimental Christ. But a true and living Christ,—the very Christ of God. This is the Christ we need; of this Christ we are made partakers. He is one with us; we are one with Him,—we in Him, and He in us! We possess Him, and He possesses us! We are His inheritance, and He is ours. As He took our sins to give us His righteousness, as He took our shame to give us His glory; so He took us to give us Himself.

II. The way of possession and maintenance.—'If we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end;' or, as it is expressed in a previous verse, 'Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.' Let us look at each of these words.

(1.) The confidence.—This means firm, bold, unreserved, childlike confidence in God. It is not the same word as is used elsewhere for 'boldness'; 'In whom we have boldness' (Ephesians 3:12); 'Let us come boldly' (Hebrews 4:16); 'Boldness to enter into the holiest' (10:19); 'That we may have confidence' (1 John 2:28); 'Then have we confidence toward God' (3:21). But it is even more expressive of certainty, or assuredness, or substance (as Hebrews 11:1); it might be rendered, 'that assured substantiality'—the one word referring more to the actual, or objective certainty (ὕποστασις); the other to the conscious assurance of it subjectively. 'This is the confidence that we have in Him' (1 John 5:14). The basis, then, of all true religion and acceptable service is confidence; 'for without faith it is impossible to please Him.' A religion of distrust and uncertainty is no religion at all. It lacks that special element which God recognizes and delights in. Whether, then, does your religion exhibit the trust, or the distrust; the confidence, or the want of confidence? Do not say that confidence is presumption, and diffidence humility. It is no presumption to take God at His word, and deal with Him in confidence; not supposing that anything in us can furnish ground for distrust, seeing everything invites, nay, demands trust.

(2.) The beginning of our confidence.—That confidence has a beginning; it has certain first principles. We were not born with it. Unbelief, distrust,—these are the native roots of bitterness. The beginner of that confidence is the Holy Spirit. Only He can eradicate the distrust and impart confidence. But in what way does He operate? Through what media does He produce the trust? Through the gospel of the grace of God; for faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of

God. The natural heart shows itself in two ways: (1) By misrepresenting the character of God; (2) By hating that which is not misrepresented, i.e. whatever of His true character which it apprehends. The Spirit works in counteraction of both of these. Take the case of Adam. Before he fell, he had confidence; not a shadow of mistrust. The moment that sin entered confidence fled, and distrust came in. In what way did God remove the distrust, and reproduce the lost confidence? Not by any mere command, not by law, not by terror and threat, but by the revelation of His grace. It was the exhibition of God's true character as the friend of man, and the enemy of man's enemy, that reproduced Adam's lost confidence, and drew him back to God. Thus Adam's confidence was rekindled. Thus ours begins; at the cross; through the right discernment of God's true character, as exhibited in the gospel of His grace.

(3.) The holding.—We are to hold, or grasp, the beginning of our confidence to the end. In order to the holding, there must be the having. We must begin, before we can go on to the end. It is not merely our confidence that we are to hold, but the beginning of our confidence; and our confidence can only be rightly held by holding the beginning. That which gave us confidence at first (and not something else), is to give us confidence to the last. We do not merely begin at the cross, but we go on as we began. We began without deriving any confidence from our goodness or our graces, but simply from God's gracious character as exhibited in the cross, and we are to continue in the same way. How easily we forget this lesson; and so lose our confidence altogether! And when we lose it, how foolishly we try to regain it by some different way, or from some different source, than that from which we got it at first! Instead of going back to the blood for fresh peace and fresh confidence, we try to find out or work up graces, or recall evidences, as if out of them we might extract confidence and peace! Alas! they contain no peace; how can they give it to us? In spite of every temptation from within or without, let us hold the beginning of our confidence; and let us hold it not for a day, but for a lifetime,—to the end! Let us hold it fast, and not let it go.

How much happier should we be in this case! We should be kept in perfect peace. How much holier should we be! We should be strong against sin and the world; for confidence towards God is the great preservation against sin. How much healthier should we be spiritually! for our religious health depends greatly on our confidence towards God. How much more useful should we be! For this

confidence is the spring and stimulus of all zeal, and devotedness, and self-denial.

XLVI.

Bold Access To The True Mercy Seat

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."—

Hebrews 4:16.

Let us note—(1) The throne of grace; (2) The bold approach; (3) The blessings obtained.

I. The throne of grace.—This is the apostle's interpretation of the Old Testament word 'mercy-seat,' which was the covering of the ark in the tabernacle. It was of gold, to signify that it was holy, divine, and glorious. It was in the holiest of all; sprinkled with blood; covered with incense; overshadowed by the shekinah or glory; the place where the cherubim stood, and over which they stretched their wings. Such was the symbol of 'the throne of grace.'

(1.) It is the seat of authority and power.—As a throne, it is necessarily such, the place of royal dignity, from which come forth royal words, royal messages, royal blessings, in sovereign power, and with almighty efficacy. Irresistible and omnipotent are the sentences which issue from it.

(2.) It is the seat of royal favor.—'Grace' is the foundation and the substance of the throne. It is radiant all over with the free love of God. It is not the throne of judgment, but of grace. There are no terrors here; nothing to repel, or alarm, or forbid. All is grace,—unmixed, unconditional, boundless grace; grace that has found its way to us through the sprinkled blood of the great Sacrifice. The blood did not buy or create that grace, but it provided a righteous channel for its outflow to us. Thus God and the sinner meet at this throne; the golden scepter is here held out, that all, without exception, may touch it.

(3.) It is the place for presenting requests.—God has erected this throne for the special purpose of receiving petitions from the sinner. From every other throne the sinner would be turned away, and his requests unheeded. But this is just the very place for his petitions. Here he may lay them, and here God takes them up

and answers. Lay your requests on this throne, and of necessity a favourable answer must be given. For the throne does not say merely, You may come, and perhaps you will get an answer; but, You are sure of an answer. The nature of the throne, as a throne of grace, pledges the answer. Were God to refuse, He would be dishonouring the very throne which He has erected, repudiating the purpose for which it has been prepared, and wronging the High Priest there.

(4.) It is the place of invitation.—The throne itself invites. It waves its banner of invitation to all. He who understands its meaning, feels that he, as a sinner, is invited to it. There is a loud and urgent voice coming out from it to sinners. It speaks, and says, 'Come.' Its gold says, 'Come.' Its blood says, 'Come.' Its incense says, 'Come.' The cherubim upon it say, 'Come.' The overshadowing glory of Jehovah says, 'Come.' The sympathizing High Priest says, 'Come.'

(5.) It is the place of universal access.—It is open to all without exception. The veil is rent. There is no hedge, no barrier; there is no exception made of any. The throne stands open on every side. All may come. Too many cannot come. The throne will receive all; the High Priest will welcome all.

II. The bold approach.—'Let us come boldly,'—not simply with confidence and expectation, but without fear; not shrinking, nor trembling, but without dread of the throne or of Him who sitteth thereon. Certainly, doubting should give way at the sight of such a gracious throne; but it is not of assurance mainly that the apostle speaks, it is of simple boldness in the presence of God, which may co-exist with many misgivings as to our getting answers. I do not depreciate assurance, or confidence, or expectation; but I would say, that it is simply to the casting out of fear that the apostle speaks. The worshipper at such a throne ought to feel that he is in no danger from his approach; that the God to whom he comes does not inspire terror. The sinner coming to it has his fears quieted, his anxieties relieved, and he himself brought into calmness of spirit, as the throne, by its very name, assures him that there is no danger in drawing near. God has erected such a throne as disarms all trepidation; the sight of it cheers the comer; for it says, 'Be of good cheer; it is I, be not afraid.' Even when crying, 'Help my unbelief,' let us come 'boldly.' Even when troubled with misgivings as to getting the very things we come for, let us come 'boldly.' Job was speaking and coming boldly, when he said, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.' Habakkuk was very bold when he said, 'Though the fig tree should not blossom,

and there be no fruit in the vine, yet will I be glad in the Lord.'

III. The blessings obtained.—These are summed up in the words 'mercy and grace,'—'needful help.' Minute blessings are not specified, but the wells of salvation are presented to us as open and full. We come to the throne without fear,—this is the first thing. We come to obtain mercy,—this is the second. We come for seasonable and suitable grace,— this is the third thing. And how much do these blessings imply and include! All that 'mercy' can do for us as 'sinners,' and all that 'grace' can do for us as 'needy ones,' are here set before us. Every sin is covered by this mercy; every want is covered by this grace. And this grace is described as 'seasonable' or opportune; always at hand, always ready at the time we need it, and for the want felt; so that there is always abundance of all blessings for us, the whole fullness of Christ being placed at our disposal. Why, then, be empty? Why lack anything, either great or small? The sinner, at first, may come and get all he needs, and the believer, to the last, may come and get the same. Each day, each hour, each moment brings out new exigencies, new sins, new burdens, new troubles, new sorrows. Let us go with all of them to the throne. The love that sent the Son is there; the love that shed the blood is there; God's free, unconditional, unmeasured love. And the great High Priest is there! Therefore, says the apostle, let us come. He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, therefore let us come.

XLVII.

Dullness Of Hearing

"Seeing ye are dull of hearing."—

Hebrews 5:2.

Much is said in Scripture about 'hearing' and about the 'ear.' The latter word occurs above 300 times, and the former above 1000 times; whereas the words 'eye' and 'seeing' are not found above half this number of times. The ear is the great inlet for truth into the soul. To shut the ear is to shut out wisdom, to exclude the voice of God. In early ages this was peculiarly the case, when all teaching was oral.

In regard to hearing, we find a great contrast between God and man. God has such an open ear for man; man has such a deaf ear for God. God is ever listening to man,—to his faintest sigh or breathing; man refuses to hear God's loudest, sweetest, and most earnest voice. He is the deaf adder, that shutteth her ear against the charmer.

God's desire is that we should hear Him. He has given us the ear, and He expects us to hear. He wishes us to be listeners. 'Hearken unto me,' is His entreaty. He mourns when we refuse to listen, knowing not only the guilt of such a refusal, but the blessedness from which we are shutting ourselves out. 'Let every man be swift to hear.' 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.' The 'hearing ear' is what God looks for.

We must hear, (1) aright; and (2) we must hear the right things. We too often are deaf to the right, while we listen to the wrong; and we listen to the right in a wrong way. There is a right listening and there is a wrong listening; there is a listening to the right thing, and there is a listening to the wrong thing. As the consequences of hearing are very momentous for good or for evil, we must be careful. 'My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto Him' (Hosea 9:17).

Let us look now at the whole passage, and see for what purpose the apostle thus speaks.

He had named Melchisedec, the royal priest of Salem, as type of the Son of God, the greater than angels, or Moses, or Aaron; but he stops short, as if unable to proceed farther. Many and great things (for the word means both) had he to say of this Melchisedec in connection with Christ; but there is a hindrance to his saying them. They were lofty truths, requiring many words of explanation to make them intelligible, and these Hebrews were not 'able to bear it.' They had become (for this is the force of the word) dull of hearing; their minds had lost their acuteness and sensitiveness; they were not in a state to comprehend him. They once were more acute in their hearing; but they had lost their acuteness, and were becoming like what Isaiah had predicted of their unbelieving brethren (Isaiah 6:9). By this time they might have been teachers; but they had so gone back, that they required to be re-taught the first principles of the divine oracles; to go back to a second childhood, and to be fed once more on children's food. They had not gone so far back as the Galatians, requiring a second birth (Galatians 4:19); but they had at least stopped growing into manhood, or rather had become so weakly, as to be children once more, and to need milk, not strong meat, for their diet. He could not, therefore, present them with the strong meat about the Melchisedec priesthood and kingship; it was too much for them. They could not digest it nor be nourished by it.

There are two things which our text suggests to us, as the personal and practical bearing of the subject.

I. The necessity for progress.—For that word progress suits the Church no less than the world. We are made to grow: we are not iron, nor stone, nor ice, but life; and life makes progress; life does not stand still; when life begins to stagnate, death is at hand. We are by our new nature made for progress; the new creation is ever advancing and rising. We are called to progress; motion onward and upward. God expects us to advance. The path before us is illimitable, and along it we must be ever moving. The evils of standing still are great; our only safety lies in making progress. The truth presented to us by God is meant to produce this: it contains unbounded stores, out of which growth in every sense springs. There is, then, a necessity for progress; the necessity of our new nature, the necessity of our calling, the necessity of the provision made for us in the

word. Advance! Forward! This is our watchword. No sloth, no stagnation, no love of ease and rest. Progress, in the highest sense of the word, is our motto. Progress in knowledge, progress in holiness, progress in zeal and love. We have a line of progress, which, if followed out, will more than keep us abreast of the age; and we have a living spring of progress, which impels us onward. The indwelling Spirit is the Spirit of progress; the example of past ages is the example of progress. Necessity is laid on us, yea, woe is unto us if we do not advance.

II. The apostolic theory of progress.—Contempt or rejection of the old is not progress, nor love of the new. The mere addition of what is new is not progress. Progress in Scripture is a very definite thing, and the root or spring of which may be summed up in two inspired expressions: 'Increase in the knowledge of God' (Colossians 1:10); 'Growth in the knowledge of Christ' (2 Peter 3:18). By means of these we move onward to perfection. It is Christ, then, especially, whom the apostle presents to us as the fountainhead of all progress. Every new discovery of Him is progress; every fresh participation of His fullness is progress; the knowledge of His Melchisedec glory is progress. It is in studying Christ that we make progress.

We get this knowledge of Christ by listening to God,—to the Father's voice and testimony concerning His Son Jesus. In regard to this we are to beware of being 'dull of hearing.' Listen, then, to God! Listen to His revelation! Listen to His Spirit! Listen to His apostle! Listening promotes faith; for faith cometh by hearing. Listening enlightens the understanding; listening quickens the soul: 'Hear, and your soul shall live.' Listening comforts; for the words are the words of the everlasting consolation. Listening heals; for the words are the words of health. Thus, in listening to God, all that produces growth is poured into us. In our day it is especially needful that we should thus listen, seeing there are so many things distracting us, and a thousand earthly voices saying, Listen to me. Science, philosophy, pleasure, literature, all say, Listen to me. But it is the voice which speaks from above, which alone has authority; the voice of that God that made us, says, Listen to me; and again, 'This is my beloved Son, hear him.'

XLVIII.

God's Loving Memory

"But, beloved, we are persuaded 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, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." —

Hebrews 6:9,10.

These Hebrew Christians were not making progress; and it is against the danger of thus standing still that the apostle warns them in the 4th verse. He puts their danger hypothetically; and every warning of any kind takes for granted that they who are thus warned are in danger of falling away.[7] If they turn their back on this Christ, there is no other Christ to fall back upon. God's secret purpose will keep all His own secure; but this does not make it less true that such and such a course of defection has the tendency in itself to plunge the backslider into ruin.

Having thus warned these Christians of the danger of backsliding, and pointed out the clear and awful consequences of this, He brightens up and cheers them in the 9th verse: 'But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things connected with salvation (not with destruction), though we thus speak.' He clearly intimates that the cause of this danger, the root of the whole evil, was their standing still, and he tells them his purpose of carrying them on to 'perfection,' that is, to fuller and completer knowledge of divine truth, which alone could preserve them; and the special truth which he proceeds to unfold is that concerning Christ's Melchisedec priesthood. He first shows them the precipice over which they were about to fall, and then, by this glorious exhibition of new truth, he draws them back from it. For though his first words (verse 8) were stern, his after-words are gentler; he softens his voice, and, recognizing them as brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, whom God had kept, and would keep, proceeds to give them a word of kindness and encouragement: 'God is not unrighteous to forget you.'

The reasons which he gives for thinking that God would not forget them are striking and peculiar,—such as we might have feared to present, looking, as they

do, so like the doctrine of creature merit,—such merit as has been proclaimed by Popery in her theology. Yet, seeing the Holy Spirit here presents these reasons, let us consider them. They are in substance this, that God's righteousness is pledged to keep those who have served Him in ministering to His people, however poor that service may have been, even that of supplying temporal wants.

The truth contained in these words is substantially the same as that in Proverbs 19:17: 'He that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again;' Mark 9:41: 'Whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, He shall not lose his reward;' Matthew 25:40: 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.' Note then,

I. Christian work.—Here we have the divine estimate of it; call it either Christian work, or the work of a Christian man. It is first spoken of simply as 'work,' including every kind of doing for Christ, great or small; and then it is called 'labour of love;' loving labour or labouring love, or labour proceeding from love, or love giving vent to itself in labour. The 'work' and the 'labour' are 'in the name of Christ;' done as to Him, not to man or self; as seeing Him represented by the objects ministered to. It is ministry to the saints, whether in supplying their poverty, or aiding their bodily wants, or comforting them under trial, or giving them a cup of cold water; for the works done unto them were works of the simplest and commonest kind,—contributing a little money to their support; not once, it may be, but once and again, as they required it. Christian work is a wide expression, comprehending a large variety of good deeds, some of them, it may be, costly and difficult, most of them simple and cheap and commonplace,—a mere cup of water, a mere kindly look, a happy and cheering word.

II. Divine remembrance.—God remembers all that is done for His own; nothing is overlooked. We forget what we did, He does not; we perhaps did it unconsciously, He notes it in His book. He charges us not to let our alms be seen of men, not to let our left hand know what our right hand doeth; but He sees and marks and records. There is no overlooking, no forgetfulness with Him. Nay more, any such forgetfulness would be unrighteous! That cannot be. God is not unrighteous to forget your works and words of love to the saints. As it is said,

'He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,' so it may be said, He is faithful and just to remember our doings. Forgetfulness of one good deed, however small, to one of the least of His own, would be unrighteousness! Yet, in the case of our evil, forgetfulness is the divine prerogative: 'Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.' This is righteous forgetfulness; and it is the righteous forgetfulness that we plead in approaching Him as sinners. Strange yet blessed contradiction! He is just in forgetting, and He is just in remembering!

III. Present and eternal recompense.—God not only remembers, but He rewards. He rewards bountifully; more than a thousandfold. He rewards just now, and it is of this that the apostle specially speaks. The present reward is the keeping us from going back. Work for Christ thus helps in two ways: it has a claim upon God for upholding power; it carries in itself an upholding influence. God pledges Himself not to let those who minister to His saints fall back. Is not this comfort and encouragement? Is there not in this both strength and stimulus? There is a way in which we may thus call to mind our past work for Christ, and comfort ourselves in the remembrance of it. He enabled me to work for Him in days past; He will not let me go now. He is not unrighteous to forget my work and labour of love, however small and poor. And then the future reward is infinite and eternal. We are laying up treasure in heaven, and it will all come back to us multiplied beyond measure. Everything done here for God goes to swell our eternal recompense. 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom.' 'Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me.'

Let us rouse ourselves to work. We can all do something. The poorest can do what in God's sight is as much as that which is done by the richest. A loving word in common intercourse; a comforting verse spoken at a sickbed; a gentle pressure of the hand; a kindly glance of the eye; a petition presented to the heavenly throne; a friendly visit; a cup of cold water. Oh, there is not one of these that shall be forgotten.

Aim at being useful Christians; seeking the welfare of others; denying self; trying to be a blessing to every one; ministering to the saints and to all men.

XLIX.

The Divine Anchor And The Soul's Anchorage

"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."—

Hebrews 6:19.

'The 'hope,' or 'thing hoped for,' is the promised glory, the inheritance of the saints in light. Of this hope God has given us the 'full assurance;' and this full assurance we are to hold fast unto the end; that is, until the things hoped for become the things possessed. This 'hope' is to us what Canaan was to Abraham; only it is heavenly. God has assured us of it by word and oath, 'two immutable things;' and thus we have strong consolation (or cheer), having fled out of all false hopes, to take refuge in this, which is true, divine, and infallible; a hope presented and secured (as Canaan to Israel) to all who will trust God for it. Let us see, then, what this 'hope' is, and what it does for us.

I. It is an anchor.—The apostle assumes that something is needed to hold us fast. That which holds us, and that to which it is fastened, must be firm. Anchor and anchorage ground must be immovable. The need of an anchor reminds us of an unstable element on which the vessel floats; it reminds us of winds and waves and tides; it reminds us of that stormy night in which Paul's sailors cast four anchors out of the stern and wished for day. This hope is all we need to keep us steadfast; it is both anchor and anchor ground, for both thoughts may be here combined; the things hoped for, and God's true testimony concerning them, on which our hoping rests.

II. It is the soul's anchor.—It is not merely the Church's anchor, or the saint's anchor, but specially the anchor of the soul—that by which the soul is just now kept safe and immovable. For it is our inner man that is tossed by the warring winds of this present evil world. Satan, the prince of the power of the air, lets loose these upon it. Darkness, doubting, unbelief; infidelity, superstition, pantheism, with errors of every kind; tribulation, danger, reproach, opposition, inducing fear, and doubt, and weariness, and depression,—all these beat upon the human spirit, labouring to set it adrift or wreck it utterly. What, in such a

case, can stay it? Not innate strength, nor human appliances, nor the wisdom of this world; not science, nor reason, nor creeds, nor churches. These are all impotent before such storms as Satan often raises within. Nothing can keep our vessel from drifting or wrecking but a divinely provided anchor; and God has given us that in the glory set before us, and in His sure testimony regarding that glory. For the truth of that testimony we have His word and His oath; making us doubly sure; putting us beyond the possibility of uncertainty. We are made to feel that whatever the present may be, the future is calm and blessed.

III. It is a sure anchor.—It is safe, firmly fixed; it will not drag. The ground on which it is fixed is firm; of that it has strong hold; and everything connected with its fixture tends to increase the security. What are the winds of earth or hell to an anchor thus fastened!

IV. It is a steadfast anchor.—It is strong in itself, as well as firmly fixed. No fear of its giving way or breaking. It will stand every strain. God's testimony cannot give way; and no attack of man upon it, or on the Bible which contains it, can affect it.

V. It entereth into that within the veil.—The vessel is outside, upon the stormy sea; the cable is also outside; but the anchor itself is within. It is attached to the interior, the innermost part of the sanctuary, where all is calm and sure. And the vessel, whose cable is attached to that anchor, will ere long enter full sail into that blessed haven. Its being fixed within is not merely our assurance of its immoveableness, but our pledge that we shall ere long enter where it is fixed.

Thus, then, the soul is the vessel; this life is the stormy sea; the cable is faith, our belief of God's testimony; the anchor is the testimony of God; the anchor ground is that which is within the veil, the glory to be revealed.

It is, then, on truth we rest; divine truth, confirmed by the oath of God; truth concerning things to come. That truth is immoveable. Nothing can shake it. The vessel and the cable are still outside, exposed to wind and wave; that is to say, we are still in this evil world, and our faith is assailed on every side. But the truth, the testimony, the inheritance are beyond the reach of change. Let us recur to this in all our doubts: we know these things are true; we know the gospel is true; we know the report is true; we know that the glory is true. All these things

are true; on the truth of them our faith rests.

The anchorage ground was formed by Him who made heaven and earth. The anchor has been forged upon no earthly anvil. The cable is the creation of an almighty hand. We know the certainty of these things. They are absolutely sure. Heaven and earth may pass; they cannot.

Yet the cry arises on every side of us, What is truth? Where is it to be found? and is there such a thing as absolute certainty? Few seem content with the old answers which have satisfied the Church of God in other days; and each must have something new. One fool says there is no Bible; another, there is no judgment; another, there is no Christ; another, there is no God. Men's hearts are shaken, and the thoughts of many wander hither and thither without a resting place. Nevertheless the foundation of the Lord standeth sure; and all the questionings raised by modern progress, and culture, and science, and sentimentalism will avail nothing. God has answered them long ago in His Book; and if men will not take these old answers, there are no others. Will God write a new Bible for the scoffers of the last days,—for our men of thought and criticism? 'He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision.'

Let us then be at rest; calm, untroubled, without carefulness; keeping our eye on that point where our anchor is,—looking towards the veil. This will steady us, elevate us, comfort us. We cannot see within it; but we can see up to it. Let our faith, then, be the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

L.

The Introduction Of The Better Hope

"For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before, for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God."—

Hebrews 7:18, 19.

While our translation brings out the substantial meaning of the passage, the following paraphrase will better show the point and force of the argument. 'There is thus, on the one hand, the disannulling of the preceding commandment on account of its weakness and unprofitableness (for the law made nothing perfect); and, on the other, there is the introduction of a better hope, by means of which (introduction of the better hope) we draw nigh to God.' Keeping this in view, we take up the apostle's statements in the following order:—

I. The disannulling of the commandment.—The commandment here is not the moral law; but rites and ceremonies, and such outward ordinances. These have all passed away; not swept away by the spoiler, but cancelled and removed by God Himself. The taking down was effected by the same hands as built up. In both we see God. Both have a special significance. 'He taketh away the first,' is the announcement which turns our eye away from all types and shadows to the true blood and the living Christ. Outward things can do nothing for the conscience; no amount of blood could give us a good conscience. Blood must cease to flow; the lamb must no more be offered; altar and temple must be swept away, that God and the sinner may come directly into contact with each other through the one medium, a dead and risen Christ. The same Architect who planned and built the temple, takes it down to erect something more glorious in its stead.

II. The reasons for the disannulling.—(1.) It was weak; or it had no spiritual power or life. (2.) It was unprofitable. It did not accomplish anything; it left all things in the same state in which it found them. (3.) It made nothing perfect. God's object was perfection; perfection of the conscience, of the heart, of the whole man; perfect worship, perfect service; but the law could contribute

nothing to this. This ritual law was in itself an imperfection, and it could not communicate what it did not possess. It spoke of perfection, but did not effect it. It was not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin. It could not remove it out of God's sight, or from our consciences. It accomplished no pardon, no acceptance, no reconciliation. It did its best, but that best was imperfection. And if a divinely instituted law could not secure peace or pardon, how can our own self selected performances do this? All is weak, unprofitable, imperfect. We need something better and more satisfying.

III. The introduction of a better hope.—Hope means the things hoped for; the things promised through Messiah; the good things to come, whether connected with His first or second coming. This hope is in all respects better than anything going before; better in its nature, its foundation, its objects, its results. This better hope was pointed out by the temple ritual, but not realized. Ere it could come fully out into view, the ritual must be disannulled; ere the glorious building can be seen, the scaffolding must be taken down. On the ruins of the temple there rose up this better hope. Thus it was that Messiah introduced this hope. He took away the first that He might establish the second. His blood made perfect; it purged the conscience; and that which the Church from the beginning had been hoping for,—to which all sacrifices, from Abel's downward, looked forward,—was now introduced and established. And this better hope still endureth. On it we stand.

IV. The object and result of this better hope.—To draw us nigh to God. In this better hope many things are contained. It contains the glory and the kingdom, which are still future; but it also contains such a revelation of grace and righteousness, as emboldens us to draw near to God. It shows us Messiah Himself, the new and living way; it shows us the rent veil, the sprinkled blood, the golden mercy seat, the High Priest after the order of Melchisedec sitting on it,—all things provided to make the sinner's approach safe to himself and honourable to God. Christ as the High Priest of good things to come, beckons us in, takes us by the hand, blesses us with all spiritual blessings. Without Him and His blood, there was no access to God; only distance, separation, dread. The sinner could not look on God without terror; nor God on him without abhorrence. But now he does not need to stand afar off or without. Blood has been shed, which removes terror, which gives a good conscience, which makes the inner shrine or presence of God not only safe, but the safest place of all; nay,

the only safe place anywhere for the sinner. So that it is not now the question, 'Dare I venture in?' But it is, 'Dare I stand without?' There is now no safe place anywhere but in the very presence of God. For safety, as well as for favor and blessing, we must draw near. This hope does not say, You had better come, but, You must; you dare not stand without, amid wrath and peril and darkness. Nor does it say, Come and take your chance of being received; it says, Come and you shall be received,—at once, and without qualification, solely on the ground of the one great sacrifice. Come boldly; draw near with a true heart, and in full assurance of faith; for that which bids you come at all, bids you come at once with boldness. It is not what we see in ourselves, or our prayers, or our experiences, that emboldens us, but simply what we see in the blood and in the throne. We are believers in the blood, not believers in our own faith.

Are you waiting for more substantial faith before you are bold? What! is the excellence of your faith better than the blood? Can it do what the blood cannot? How can we do anything else than come boldly? How can we come doubtfully, uncertainly, despondingly? It is, moreover, a daily drawing near; or, rather, it is a constant dwelling there, as in our proper home.

LI.

The High Priest Of The Good Things To Come

"But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."—

Hebrews 9:11, 12.

The meaning and argument of these two verses may be brought out in the following propositions:—

I. All Israel's varied service was but a figure or shadow; giving us the mere outline or idea of what was coming; no more.

II. This figure has passed away; the shadow has disappeared; the reality of the foreshadowed good things has come; the picture has vanished, the things painted have taken their place.

III. The Christ Himself has come. He in whom all the good things are wrapped up, is no longer 'the coming one.' 'We know that the Son of God has come.' This is our message, 'The Christ has come.'

IV. He is the High Priest of the good things. These are now in His custody and at His disposal. They have been placed by the Father in His priestly hands. These good things are not all yet come; some are still 'the good things to come,' reserved for His appearing as Priest and King.

V. He has gone into the holy places, or 'heavenlies.' He is not here. He is risen. He has ascended on high. He is on the throne.

VI. He has done so by His own blood. 'Not without blood' was the divine commandment. As the High Priest He has been at the brazen altar, He has taken the blood, He has gone through the outer court and the holy place, into the holiest of all. He has 'passed through the heavens' (Hebrews 4:14).

VII. He has thus gone in because He has obtained eternal redemption. He had gone out to seek it, He has returned having found it. With this redemption in His hands He goes back to the Father, and reenters the heaven of heavens.

Such is the substance of the passage. But there are only three things in it that I mean to dwell upon. (1.) The redemption. (2.) The good things to come. (3.)

The administration of these by Christ the High Priest.

I. The redemption.—There are three words used in the New Testament in connection with Christ's redeeming work. There is simple 'buying,'—ye are bought 'with a price' (1 Corinthians 7:23). There is 'a ransom' (λύτρον),—'to give His life a ransom for many' (Matthew 20:28); where it is the price or purchase money needed for buying back a captive or doomed one that is meant. Then there is the word in our text (λύτρωσις), which is more than ransom. The redemption (λύτρωσις) is the actual doing of the thing for which the ransom (λύτρον) was obtained or paid down. As in the case of the firstborn. They were to be redeemed by the payment of five shekels. These five shekels were the ransom; but the actual deliverance of these firstborn from the doom which otherwise would have fallen on them was the redemption. So Christ's blood or life was the ransom; our deliverance by means of it from death is the redemption. It is of this latter that the apostle is here speaking. Not only has a ransom been found; but the result of it, viz, the deliverance from going down to the pit, has been secured and carried out. Hence the song of the Church is not merely 'Thou hast found a ransom,' but, 'Thou hast redeemed us to God.'

There is redemption then! Not only a ransom, but redemption. Both have been 'obtained;' or, as the word more exactly means, 'found;' according to the words of Elihu (Job 33:24). Christ came, seeking the sinner, providing the ransom, securing the redemption. He has not come in vain. He has found them all. Redemption has been obtained! The cross has won it. Banishment, captivity, ruin, death are no longer necessary. The ransom has removed the necessity; and the redemption has made certain what the ransom made possible. The message descending from the heavenly throne, and sounding over earth to sinners, is 'Deliver from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom.' Long hidden in the Father's everlasting purpose, the Son has found it! Long hidden from the

eyes of men, like an unsprung seed in the earth, He has sought for it and found it, and brought it up to the light of day!

Redemption has been obtained! It is no longer a purpose or a promise, but a fact, a certainty! The price has not merely been obtained for the ransom of the captive exile; but the vessel has been dispatched to bring him. Nay, and that vessel goes furnished with a goodly company of the King's own guard, to make sure that he is set free, and to convey him on board. Nay, and it is loaded with all provisions for the voyage home, and fair raiment for the delivered exile. Everything has been arranged for making his return a certainty, in spite of all hindrances from himself or from his enemies. This is the redemption that Christ has found!

And it is eternal! The deliverance is for evermore. No dread of a second captivity through failure of the redemption. The security is everlasting. The love is unquenchable. The pardon is forever. The righteousness is forever. The life is forever. The salvation is irreversible. The inheritance fadeth not away. He has obtained eternal redemption for us!

II. The good things to come.—These good things flow out of the redemption; but they are not the same as either the redemption or the ransom. When a rich man redeems a slave or captive, he provides for him, feeds him, cloth him, brings him into his house, perhaps adopts him, making him his son and heir. These are the good things bestowed on the redeemed captive; but they are neither the ransom nor the redemption, though without that ransom and redemption not one of them could have been conferred. Were the wealthy Rothschilds to redeem Palestine for their nation from the Turk by the payment of some millions, they would straightway proceed to have its unlawful occupants dispossessed, its soil cultivated, its mountains terraced, its valleys ploughed, its cities rebuilt, Jerusalem restored in all its former splendor, and made the metropolis of the land. These would be the 'good things' following up the redemption of the land, but evidently not the same as the redemption.

So is it with Christ and our redemption. Having secured that redemption, He has gone up on high to administer it according to the Father's everlasting purpose. In Him dwells the infinite and eternal fullness; and that fullness is the treasure house of the 'good things.' It is of His unsearchable riches that the redeemed from among men are made partakers. These 'good things' are not now wholly

future. Some of them have come; though some are yet to come. Christ's first coming brought many, but His second coming is to bring many more. We get many at the cross; we wait for more in the kingdom. Forgiveness, reconciliation, peace, love, light, joy, life, consolation, holiness, with the earnest of the Spirit, we get now; but glory, honour, incorruption, the inheritance, the kingdom, the crown, we shall not obtain till He returns. These are still 'good things to come;' and for these we wait the arrival of the Son of God.

All that these 'good things' imply, it is impossible for us here to conceive. Even of those which we obtain just now, how little do we comprehend or enjoy! How much less of those which are still wholly future! Yet we know that they are surpassingly excellent; worthy of God, worthy of Christ; fit to satisfy the travail of His soul, and to bring the highest honour to Him, in whom and through whom we shall possess them all. They are far beyond our worthiness, but not beyond the worthiness of Him for whose sake they are conferred. The unworthiness of the bride shall but enhance the bounty and the glory of the Bridegroom. The greatness of the inheritance, and the kingdom, and the joy, shall be all to the praise of the glory of His grace, who hath not only delivered us from the wrath to come, but, as if that were a light thing, hath made us accepted in the Beloved, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.

II. The administration of all these by Christ as the High Priest.—He is 'the High Priest of the good things to come.' To His priestly hands have all things been committed. The reins of universal government are the prerogative of His priesthood as well as of His kingship, for His is a royal priesthood; He is priest upon His throne; He is Melchizedek, king and priest in one. Our King is our priest, and our Priest is our king.

It is with a priest that a sinner has specially to do; for without priesthood, kingship and prophetship would be vain to one whom 'sin had separated from God. It is to a priest,—the High Priest of the good things to come,—that God invites us: 'Let us come boldly to the throne of grace.' It is of Him, and of our connection with Him, that the apostle speaks: 'Having an High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near;' and it is to His priestly intercession that he refers, when he says, 'Wherefore He is able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.'

It is our knowledge of this that removes our fear and uncertainty in drawing near for blessing. Less than this would not give us boldness. All that we need is in priestly hands! This thought meets every difficulty, and strikes down every rising doubt. The thought of kingly hands, kingly grace, and kingly bounty, would not do. It would leave each difficulty unremoved; and the sinner could but stand afar off, to weep and tremble. But the thought of priestly hands does well. This meets the sinner's case. He is now safe in going to get all he needs; for the very end of priesthood is to provide for the sinner's intercourse with God. The sinner is unworthy; but the priest is appointed to deal with such. The sinner is unfit; but the priest is just for the unfit. The sinner is guilty; the priest is here to pardon. The sinner is filthy; the priest is here to wash. Priestly grace is for the undeserving; priestly blessing is for the cursed; and priestly fullness is for the empty. The feeling that we are sinners, and, therefore, not entitled to expect good things, but evil, is completely removed by the knowledge that these good things are in priestly hands,— hands sprinkled with atoning blood, hands once nailed to the accursed tree. Our pardon is in priestly hands; let us go and get it. Peace is in priestly hands for us; let us go and get it. Health is in priestly hands; let us go and get it. The whole of salvation is in priestly hands; let us go and get it. Holiness is in priestly hands; let us go and get it. Life eternal is in priestly hands; let us go and get it. But let us go with boldness, for less than boldness implies a doubt of our High Priest's sufficiency. Let us go with a true heart, and in full assurance of faith, not supposing it possible that a sinner can go and be sent empty away. An angel might go to the High Priest and return with nought, for he is holy;—and it is with the unholy that the High Priest has to do;— but not a sinner! No; not a sinner! That is impossible; and it is impossible, not because the sinner has done or felt something to ensure acceptance, but simply because our High Priest is what He is,—God's appointed channel of blessing for the unworthy and the unholy.

As sinners, needing everything, we go to our High Priest, and we get at once the good things which have already come. The possession of these makes us children of God, saints, heirs of the kingdom. And as such we live on earth, enjoying the reconciliation, and the peace, and the love. But then, as men possessed of these things, we look forward to, the possession of more. In the days of the Judges, when Eli was high priest in Shiloh, Hannah went to him with 'the abundance of her complaint and grief' (1 Samuel 1:16, 17). He received her at once, and sent her away with his priestly blessing, 'Go in peace;' adding, 'The

God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him.' On this it is said, 'The woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.' It is thus we go to our heavenly High Priest, to pour out before Him the abundance of our complaint and grief. And He at once receives us in the fullness of His love. 'Go in peace,' is His message to every soul that comes to Him. We believe Him, as Hannah did Eli; and we go upon our way, and our countenance is no more sad.

Having tasted the grace, we look for the glory. Receiving such of the 'good things' as are already come, we press forward to those which are still future. Standing beneath the shadow of the cross, we cast our eye upward to the promised glory, and realize the crown of righteousness, which the same priestly hands that ministered the pardon shall ere long place upon our heads. Christ's first coming has brought us many good things; His second coming shall bring us more. The eternal redemption shall be consummated in the eternal inheritance. The deliverance from a present evil world shall end in our possession of the wondrous world to come, the inheritance of the saints in light, the new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

LII.

Entrance Into The Holiest By The Blood

"By His own blood He entered in once into the holy place."—

Hebrews 9:12.

It is of no earthly high priest that these words are spoken; but of 'Christ, the High Priest of the good things to come.' It was into 'the holy places' (see Greek) that He entered; it was by His own blood that He did so. He entered once; for with such blood as He had to present, it was not needful that He should repeat the offering, seeing by that blood of His He obtained eternal redemption.

Thus He finished transgression and made an end of sin upon the cross. He offered the sacrifice; He completed the propitiation; He bore the sin; He rent the veil, and opened up the mercy seat. With a finished expiation, an accepted atonement, He entered in to the presence of God.

The work, then, is done; 'it is finished;' nothing can be added to it or taken from it. Eighteen centuries have not changed it. They have altered all human things, —thrones, kingdoms, laws,—but they have left this untouched. It is today just what it was in the days of Pontius Pilate,—as full, as perfect, as efficacious, as suitable for sinners. No man nor angel can add to it; no devil can take from it. What it did for the men of the first century, it can do for us of the nineteenth.

As one loaded with sin, though not His own, Christ could not enter into the holy places; as one 'made sin for us,' 'made a curse for us,' He must have blood of expiation before He can cross the threshold.

He has found that blood; it is infinitely precious; it avails not for a day or a year, but for ever: He has obtained eternal redemption. The blood has done the work, once and forever.

I. The work that saves is done.—He came bringing salvation; righteous salvation. He carried out and consummated the saving work upon the cross. All that is needed for saving the guiltiest was finished then. Not a fragment is left for us to do. That work of the Substitute is meant to place the sinner in the same

position as if he himself had done it. Our part is simply to recognize the completed work, and to enter on its fruits. Thus the great salvation comes to us. It is God's free gift; priceless, yet without price; bestowed on us in such a way as to leave nothing for us to do, but to receive and wonder and rejoice.

II. The work that brings pardon is done.—Remission of sins is man's first and great necessity. This has been secured; not made possible, or probable, or accessible, but secured; and secured through what was done upon the cross. That work was not meant to make forgiveness a thing which we could work out for ourselves, but a thing which is presented to us as a completed gift, to be received at once. Yes; the work that secures pardon is done.
'Through this man is preached the forgiveness of sins' (Acts 13:38).

III. The work that reconciles is done.—We are not pardoned and kept at a distance; made to stand outside, kept in estrangement, or in ignorance of favor, or in any uncertainty about it. The result of the work is to annihilate the distance, to sweep away the barrier, to bring the prodigal into his father's house and arms. We who were afar off are made nigh by the blood of His cross. Reconciliation, complete and certain, as the result of our simple recognition of the completed work on the cross; this is God's message to us. Not reconciliation by prayer, or effort, or merit, or money, or feeling, or repentance, but by that blood shedding which was finished on Golgotha. He who realizes the completeness of the work, enters on the joy of friendship with God, without any addition of his own.

IV. The work that purges the conscience is done.—The evil conscience is the result of sin; we shrink from God. We must have that conscience made good, so that we shall feel safe and happy in His presence. There is but one thing for the purgation of the conscience,—the completed work of Calvary. He who understands that work sees in it that which delivers him from guilty dread, which makes his conscience feel as thoroughly at rest as if he had never sinned; keeps his conscience continually at peace, by reminding him that righteousness is satisfied, and that God is well pleased with every one who will recognize that work as finished. Thus peace at first, and peace all the days of our life, flows into us; and the most tender conscience is set at rest, being thoroughly pacified by the blood of the great Propitiation.

V. The work that recommends is done.—Vainly does man try to recommend himself,—to do or feel what will recommend him. All such certificates are vain, worse than vain. The one great and perfect certificate is the finished work. That is our recommendation. He who makes use of this is sure of a gracious reception from God. Nothing less than this will do; nothing more is needed. 'Behold, O God, our shield.' The value of the great sacrifice is infinite. Its excellency in the sight of God is beyond all conception; and this excellency is not merely intrinsic, but communicative. Its superfluity of merit and value overflows wide and far; lifting to the level of its own perfection the most imperfect of those who will credit that perfection. It spreads its divine mantle over the nakedest of all who will consent to be indebted to such a covering. It dispenses its out flowing and irrepressible influence to all who will accept it. It covers as with a canopy; it shelters as with a shield; it imparts its heavenly preciousness to all who will receive God's testimony concerning it. Nay, and is it not to the smoke of this great burnt-offering, ever ascending and encompassing this accursed soil, that earth is indebted for her preservation in ages past, as well as for her present security from the devouring fire?

Christ, then, has gone into the holy places, and He bids us follow. He has rent the veil, sprinkled the way, made the access safe and sure. Follow me through that rent, along that way, is His message to the sinner now.

LIII.

The One Offering And The Great Reappearing

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment; so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many: and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation."—

Hebrews 9:27, 28.

There are three special things presented here: (1.) Man's one dying. (2.) Christ's one offering. (3.) Christ's one great reappearing.

I. Man's one dying.—This refers specially to the first sentence, 'unto dust shalt thou return;' 'Thou shalt surely die.' This was the great visible penalty; not the only one, but the great visible one, which proclaimed the curse and the condemnation, and with which were conjoined many others. The one loss of the one life was to be the penalty. It was not two deaths, but only one. Not as many deaths as sins, but only one! This is 'appointed to man.' The word is not a judicial or governmental one; it is the same as elsewhere translated, 'laid up'—'Henceforth there is laid up for me.' This one dying is 'laid up' for man by God. Awful and mysterious treasure! Laid up, and then given out at the appointed time. The stress here is evidently on the 'once.' It is this one dying that God keeps in reserve for man! Only one dying! Then how solemn a thing is death, and how terrible its proclamation of God's hatred of sin! Only one dying, and then the judgment! How irrevocable the consequences! No retracing our steps, or undoing what was at first done amiss! Only one dying, and then the final settlement! How great a thing does God reckon this being of ours, when the taking to pieces of His handiwork is thus recognized as the visible doom of sin!

II. Christ's one offering.—Let us note here the following things:—

(1.) Christ offered.—It is the same Christ that is referred to in verse 24, who is gone into heaven: the Christ of God is the propitiation for sin. The word 'offered' means presented, brought to the altar of God, there presented to God as a victim. Yes, Christ has been offered! He suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust. The offering is done. The presentation has taken place, and been accepted. God is so

well pleased with it, that on the footing of it He is willing to accept the guiltiest.

(2.) Christ once offered.—This one offering corresponds to the one death. Not two deaths, so not two offerings. One sacrifice to meet, and undo the one death. 'Once, in the end of the ages, hath He appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.' What stress the apostle lays on that once! Once, yet complete, perfect! No need of repetition. It has ceased to be offered, for it accomplished all that was needed. What a gospel the word once contains! All that was needed for the taking away the sinner's sin, and bringing Him nigh to God, is contained in that one offering.

(3.) Christ offered to bear the sins of many.—The many are the great multitude that no man can number; and their sins are as the sands by the seashore. These sins are laid on Him. He carries them up to the altar,—to the cross, and there He expiates them to the full. He is the Sin-bearer; the Propitiation; the Atonement; the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

This, then, is our gospel. The Christ, the Son of God, has been once offered for sin! He has finished the work. It is done! No second Gethsemane or Golgotha! No second cross or grave. The first did it all! No sooner had He done the work than the altar (the cross) was taken down, in testimony that it was not to be required again. The old altar stood for ages; this but for a day, not to be reared again. Nay more, in testimony that the once giving of His life for us had done the work, that life of His was given back to Him by God, and He was raised from the dead! O gospel of gospels! The atoning work is done. Jesus has finished transgression, and made an end of sin!

III. Christ's great reappearance.—How closely does the apostle connect the two comings! The one is, in his eyes, the necessary sequel and consummation of the other.

(1.) He shall appear the second time.—It is, literally, 'He shall be seen,'—'every eye shall see Him;' He shall no longer be hidden, or far off. He shall be as visible the second time as He was the first. This same Jesus shall so come as He went! The second coming is to be as personal, as visible, as real as the first. It is to this visibility that reference is so frequently made: 'Behold He cometh with the clouds!' 'The Son of man shall come in His glory;' 'A fire goeth before Him.'

So His coming is compared to the rising of the morning star and the sun. No one shall mistake that coming. It shall be too striking and too glorious to be mistaken for anything else than the appearing of the Son of man. There is but one offering, but there are two comings. The one offering was completed at His first coming; but the fruits of the offering are to be gathered at His second.

(2.) He shall appear without sin.—At His first coming 'He was made sin for us.' He knew no sin, yet sin and the curse were on Him; He was treated both by God and man as such. But when He comes the second time He is done with this. He does not come as the Sinbearer, but as Judge and King. He is done with all sin-bearing work. The cross is taken down; the scars may still be in His hands and feet, but they are only the marks of a thing completely done, not to be repeated. He appears without sin; He suffers no more; He dies no more. The one death was enough.

(3.) He shall appear to them that are looking to Him for salvation.— This is the proper order and meaning of the words. In one sense every eye shall see Him; but in the true and blessed meaning of the word, He shall appear, or show Himself only to those who are now looking to Him as the Saviour. As He showed Himself to His disciples, so shall He show Himself then. 'When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory.'

Thus Christ's two comings are here announced. Let us receive God's testimony to both.

1. Let us look to Jesus.—He died for our sins. Let us realize His one offering. It did its work on the cross. It is doing so still; communicating its perfection to the imperfect; purging the conscience; securing everlasting forgiveness to the guilty; and providing a channel through which the great love of God may freely flow to us.
- 2.
3. Let us look for Jesus.—He is coming the second time. That great reappearing is for glory to Himself and to us. Let us desire it; watch for it; pray for it. 'Even so come, Lord Jesus!'
- 4.

LIV.

Conscience Pacified For Ever

"No more conscience of sins."—

Hebrews 10:2.

Mark, at the outset, it is not said 'sin,' but 'sins;' not, no more sins, but no more 'conscience of'—not consciousness of.

One great object in sacrifice is to provide acceptable worship; such as God can accept, and by means of which He will be glorified. All His works are to praise Him; all His creatures are to worship Him. It is His prerogative and joy to be worshipped; it is His creature's part to give this worship. Our praise goes up, His love and blessing come down.

But in order to acceptable worship, there must be an acceptable worshipper. Hence the first thing in sacrifice is to provide such a worshipper. For we do not worship in order to be accepted by God, but because we have been accepted. It is not first worship and then acceptance; but first acceptance and then worship. Acceptable worship is the worship of an accepted man.

Sacrifice then provides for acceptance; secures it. It does so by substitution and exchange. It substitutes the just for the unjust, in the bearing of that guilt the existence of which was a barrier to all acceptance. Sacrifice is no mere piece of self-denial; and the sacrifice of the cross is no mere specimen of self-surrender which we are to imitate, and, in imitating, commend ourselves to God. It is substitution, suretyship, exchange; the innocent taking the place of the guilty, that the guilty may take the place of the innocent. It is this transference that produces the accepted worshipper; for worship, such as God delights in, can only come from one who has found favor in the sight of God; and the favor which a sinner finds in the sight of God, comes from his being identified with one who is already in favor, even the only-begotten Son.

But this is only one side of the great truth contained in sacrifice,— the side that

looks God-ward; for every truth has a twofold aspect, a divine and human side. We have seen the bearing of sacrifice as to God; let us mark its bearing on man, which is the great object of this epistle.

It is with the conscience that it has to do. Not with the heart, or the understanding, or the imagination; but with the conscience. An evil conscience is the great barrier to acceptable worship. And what is an evil conscience? Not simply that which testifies against us that we have sinned,—in that sense there are no consciences but evil ones on earth,— but one with the pressure of guilt still upon it; with no sense of pardon, no knowledge of the removal of sin; with the persuasion that there is still something between the soul and God, some variance or estrangement; something which makes God frown upon him, which makes him afraid to look up to God, which makes it not safe in him to approach God because of sin; sin unremoved; unpardoned guilt.

Sacrifice, then, bears directly upon the conscience, by showing God's way of removing guilt. The knowledge of the one sacrifice, the belief of God's testimony regarding it, operates immediately on the conscience; because it is written, 'Through this Man is preached the forgiveness of sins, and by Him all that believe are justified from all things.' This immediate forgiveness and acceptance, as the consequence of our belief of the divine record regarding the finished sacrifice, places us at once in the position of accepted men on the one hand, and of men delivered from an evil conscience on the other; brought back, in so far as the conscience is concerned, to the position of the unsinning and the unfallen.

There are two things special in sacrifice, blood and fire: the blood, the substitution of life for life; the fire, the righteous displeasure of God consuming the victim and exhausting the penalty, satisfying righteousness, vindicating holiness, so as to set the guilty free. In the fire conscience recognizes the wrath due for sin,—the 'condemnation;' in the blood it sees that wrath exhausted and extinguished,—the 'no condemnation.' It needs to see both; both together; else its idea of each will be imperfect. Not the blood without the wrath (that would have no meaning); nor the wrath without the blood (that would only terrify). It is this double sight that relieves the conscience from the pressure of guilt and the dread of meeting God. Until this great sight is seen the sinner is not in a state for worship; for dread and darkness and uncertainty as to the gracious mind of God are hinderers, nay, destroyers of all true worship; as well as of all true and happy

service.

One great object of sacrifice, then, is to purge the conscience; to give us a 'good conscience' and a 'true heart;' to remove the dread of God, arising from the thought of His being our enemy, and of our sin being unpardoned. Revealed to us in the cross, we learn to trust Him; interpreted as His character and purposes are by the death of His Son, we are attracted to it; we 'draw near with a true heart, in the full assurance of faith,' having 'no more conscience of sins.' Instead of flying from God, we fly to Him, and rest in Him for evermore.

O blood of Christ, what a refuge art thou for a troubled conscience and a wounded spirit! O love of God, what a resting place art thou for the sad and weary!

LV.

The Imperfect And The Perfect Priesthood

"And every priest standeth daily ministering, and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool." —

Hebrews 10:11-13.

It is to the contrast between Christ and the ancient priesthood that I ask your attention; between the priesthood of the earthly and of the heavenly temple. It is this contrast that brings out the true nature and character both of Christ and of His work.

I. The many priests and the one.—'Every priest,'—'this man,' or 'this priest.' The Old Testament priests were many. Not one of them fully accomplished the priestly work. A continual succession was needed; and even by these many the work was not done. It remained at the last just where it was at the first. For these many were, after all, not doers of the work, but symbols or prophetic representatives of the great Doer of it all who was to come. They said, 'The work shall yet be done; it shall be done completely; God shall be approached; the conscience shall be purged; but not by us; the Doer shall come; He will accomplish what we can only foreshadow.' These many passed away, and in their stead there came the one—one to do the work which hundreds and thousands of priests and Levites could not do. Yes, one Doer; one work; one sacrifice; one blood shedding; one atonement. Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many. What a contrast! The whole tribe of Levi for ages; the tens of thousands of sacrifices; the rivers of bloodshed, and all incomplete! And, on the other, the one single Man, taking up the incomplete work of these thousands, and doing it all at once! This Man! This Priest! But what a Man! What a Priest! The High Priest of the good things to come! The others might do their symbolic work well; but the real priestly final work was beyond their power. That consummation was reserved for the greater than Aaron or Moses, the Son of God Himself. O finished work, how sufficient! O perfect High Priest, how glorious and complete!

II. The many sacrifices and the one sacrifice.—In two senses were the sacrifices many. They were many (1) as to number, almost innumerable;

(2) as to kind, burnt offering, trespass offering, sin offering, meat offering, drink offering, peace offering. Christ's sacrifice was one, in both of these aspects. Only one sacrifice, once offered; and all the various kinds of sacrifice gathered, in Him, into the one sacrifice, which by its fullness satisfies the utmost need of the worshipper in every case. One full, complete, perfect sacrifice! 'It is finished;' 'by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.' His one sacrifice did the whole work. 'By Himself He purged our sins;' by His blood He purged our consciences. Let that one sacrifice do its work for us. We need no more.

III. The many ministries and the one ministry.—Besides the offering of sacrifice, there were many duties connected with priestly ministry, some smaller, some more important. Each day and hour had their ministries or services. In a hundred different ways they ministered. Priest and Levite ministered in the various parts of the manifold temple worship. But now Christ has taken up all their various ministries into Himself. All the little or great things which we need as the sinful or the helpless, are ministered by the one priestly servant. Through His hands alone come to us the numerous blessings which we need every hour. Let us deal with Him about these. He is exalted a Prince and Saviour to bestow these. We have not to deal with many priests, nor are we perplexed with many ministers. All the channels and instruments through which blessings come to a sinner are now found in Jesus only. His one ministry has superseded all the rest. It is with His one priesthood that we have to do.

IV. The daily and the everlasting work.—It is the daily many, and the everlasting one that are contrasted. Oh, what a routine of endless sacrifice and service for ages,—daily, daily,—yes, almost every hour! Always doing, never done! Each hour a repetition of past hours, without prospect of end! But the daily ceased, and the 'for ever' came at length. Everlasting salvation; eternal redemption! Once and for ever! Once for all! No second sacrifice; no daily repetition. How unsatisfactory that daily work; how satisfying, how pacifying, how perfecting that one everlasting atonement! Yes, it is for evermore! He has offered it once for all! What a gospel is brought out to us in the contrast between

the daily and the forever! A pardon that lasts for ever! A peace that lasts for ever! A salvation that lasts forever! A reconciliation that lasts forever!

V. The effectual work and the ineffectual.—What was daily offered up could never take away sin; it could not purge the conscience, nor give us confidence in drawing near to God. But the one true work was 'for sin;'

i.e. it was meant to take away sin. The other sacrifices could not. This could and did. It was truly and fully sin bearing. Nothing else can avail but this. Guilt but half borne, half exhausted, will avail nothing. Sin laid on any one save the appointed priest and sacrifice, will not be taken away. It must remain. The one Sin bearer is He 'who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree.' He is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. He has finished transgression and made an end of sin.

VI. The standing and the sitting down.—The priests and Levites all stood. From morn to night they stood. There was no time for sitting down, for at any time they might be called on to offer a sacrifice; so that their work was never done. There was no place for sitting in any part of the temple where the service was going on, and the sacrifices were offered. There were rooms at the side for sitting, but not in the courts of the altar and laver. There the priests must stand or move about. Theirs was perpetual and unfinished work, as their posture indicated. The king might sit when ruling and judging. The prophet might sit when giving his message. But the priest must stand. What a symbol was the priestly posture! What a truth was embodied in it!

The one Priest sat down. As soon as He had finished His sacrifice He sat down. And this said, in language beyond mistake, both to heaven and earth, 'It is finished!' He sat down—

(1.) On the throne of grace.—The mercy seat was His throne. He sat down to dispense the free love of God to sinners. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace.

(2.) On the seat of honour.—The throne of grace is the throne of heaven. It is the seat before which the 'many angels' as well as the 'elders' and 'living creatures' bow, singing, 'Blessing, and honour, and glory' (Revelations 5:11, 12).

(3.) On the place of power.—The Father's right hand is the place of power. Seated there, He is, in every sense, 'able to save to the uttermost.'

(4.) On the height of expectation.—His throne is a 'glorious high throne.' From it He looks down on earth, sees its iniquity and rebellion, and calmly waits for the time, when His enemies shall be made His footstool, and earth become His glorious kingdom. Are we, too, looking for this?

'Sit Thou at my right hand,' is the Father's word to the Son. In answer to that He sat down, and He is now sitting. That throne He occupies for us. From that throne He dispenses the gifts which, as the glorified Christ, He has received for the rebellious. All that belongs to Him of excellence and fullness is there; it is there for us. The glory of His person, the riches of His varied offices, the suitableness of His great propitiation, and the love of His gracious heart, are all there,—available for sinners, and that to the uttermost. Such is their value, and such their efficacy, that no amount of evil in us, of whatever kind, can in the least obstruct that availableness. It may be the evil of long and dark transgression, or of obduracy and stout-heartedness, or of backsliding and inconsistency and worldliness, or of imperfect faith and feeble repentance; it may be evil committed before our connection with this High Priest, or evil after our connection with Him, or evil in our deficient way of apprehending His work, or evil in our want of love and confidence, evil in our defective sense of sin and guilt, the evil of a hard and stony heart,—it matters not. None of these evils in us can exceed the boundless value of the expiation or the Expiator; nor surpass the divine perfection of the finished work either as bearing upon God or man; nor neutralize the preciousness of the blood of the Lamb; nor prevent the great burnt offering from sheltering the sinner beneath its wide shadowing and impenetrable canopy; nor repel the free love that comes out from the cross to the unworthiest of the sons of Adam; nor render less potent the fragrance of the sweet incense that is continually going up from the golden altar of 'the more perfect tabernacle not made with hands.' The fullness of the finished work covers all deficiencies, were they a thousand times greater than they are or can be. Nothing but our rejection of that fullness, and our preference for something else, can prevent our being saved by it. Its sufficiency is infinite; its suitableness is perfect; its freeness unconditional; its nearness like Him in whom we live, and move, and have our being.

Such is the provision made for the taking away of our sin, and for our drawing near to God. Such is the great love of God. There is nothing like it for greatness, either in heaven above or in the earth beneath. Truly He has no pleasure in the sinner's death. He is not seeking occasion to destroy him; He is not trying to find out reasons for rejecting him or for disregarding his cries; He is not waiting for further amendment and repentance, or greater earnestness or bitterer remorse. He is stretching out His hands to him, just as he is. He is most sincerely desirous to bless even the worst. His compassions are infinite; His bowels yearn over His prodigals; He wants them to come back to His house. He knows what hell is, and He wants to save them from it; He knows what heaven is, and He wants to win them to it.

His grace and pity are beyond all measure; and he who, on the credit of the divine testimony to them, given in the word of the truth of the gospel, goes to Him for pardon and life, shall be welcomed and blest, receiving not only what he goes for, but exceeding abundantly, above all he asks or thinks.

LVI.

Unseen Things And Their Influence.

"Things not seen."—
Hebrews 11:1.

In writing to the Corinthians, the apostle says, 'We walk by faith, not by sight;' meaning that it is the things which we believe, not the things which we see, regulate and influence our Christian course, our daily walk; making us, like Enoch and like Noah, to 'walk with God.'

Elsewhere, says the same apostle, 'He endured as seeing Him who is invisible;' showing us, in the case of Moses, the influence of an unseen God upon a believing man, in respect of holiness and courage and power.

Let us, then, 'look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.' Let us ask how faith operates upon us,—faith, which is 'the

substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.' What is the exact influence of the unseen upon us?

I. It is in and by the things unseen that our Christian course has its origin and commencement.—Our mere natural is a life of sight and sense; in which everything is influenced by what we see, and hear and touch, and taste; for beyond these the natural man does not go, save when he gives his intellect scope to speculate, or dream, or fancy. This part of our course ends and a new one begins, by the opening of unseen things to the eye. These separate us from former objects, and deliver us from a present evil world. It is the sight of an unseen law that makes us tremble; the sight of an unseen judgment in the distance that rouses us up to feel that this is not our rest. So it is the sight of an unseen Christ, an unseen cross, that detaches us from the world, and forms the commencement of our new career. Our soul lets go its hold of the seen and grasps the unseen. Thus the new course begins. It begins with joy and peace in believing.

II. The things unseen keep us separate from the world.—It is not merely a rending asunder at the outset; but a keeping asunder all the days of our life; a walk of separation from the world every day; even in those things which we have outwardly in common with the world, such as business and recreation; even in such things we walk by faith and not by sight. Our business, our amusements, our conversation, our reading, our employments, our family life, our private life, our public life, all are regulated by the things unseen. In all of these we manifest nonconformity with the world.

III. The things unseen sanctify us and lift our affections above.—We need to be drawn upward, and the things unseen are all above; so that their influence is all upward. The unseen Christ, the unseen glory, the unseen inheritance, are all above: in realizing them we are lifted upward. And as we are lifted upward, so are we sanctified by the heavenly vision. Sin is made hateful; lusts and carnal feelings are more loosened from us and fall off. We become more unlike the men of earth, more like the citizens of heaven. The clearer that these heavenly objects appear, the more influential, the more sanctifying, and the more elevating they are. In beholding them we are made like them; purified, changed into the same image from glory to glory.

IV. The things unseen strengthen us.—The feebleness, fadingness, vanity, poverty of things which we do see here, are very enfeebling and disheartening; whereas the greatness, enduringness, glory, excellence of the things which we do not see, strengthen, nerve, animate, invigorate us. These glorious invisibilities quicken our steps, kindle zeal and love, make us willing to endure hardness,—to count labour, privation, suffering, poverty, as nothing. Thus we walk in strength, with erect heads, zealous, earnest, untiring, because of what faith shows us, the things within the veil.

V. The things unseen comfort us.—Our walk here is not all smoothness and sunshine. Tribulation, weariness, pain, sickness, bereavement, throw their thick clouds over us. We take refuge in the future from the present. Our prospects, ever bright, ever glorious, cheer, sustain, and console us. Life is so brief; its sorrows will so soon be done; Christ will so soon be here; resurrection and glory and, gladness will so soon dawn on us! We need not be overburdened or over-sorrowful because of the present. Faith shows us the light beyond the darkness, and that comforts us. The eternal kingdom will make up for all!

Whatever may lie before us here, our eternal future is that to which we look. We weigh everything by that; regulate, judge everything by that. 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him.'

The translation of Enoch, referred to in the 5th verse, was the first open proclamation of the truth, of which after ages are full, that redeemed man is to have a home above,—an inheritance in the heavens,—something better and more glorious than paradise. Hitherto he had looked up from earth to heaven; but he was taught that ere long he should look down on earth from heaven. Hitherto earth had been his kingdom and his home; now he was made to see that though when renewed it might be his kingdom, yet heaven above was to be his palace and his abode. His connection with things terrestrial was not to be broken, but only to be carried out on a far higher footing, himself a dweller amid the things celestial.

Enoch's translation gave intimation of this purpose of God,—a purpose which connects itself with His elect Church of every age,— a purpose which shall be fully brought out into manifestation in that day when they who are alive and

remain, along with those who have fallen asleep, shall be caught up, as Enoch was, into the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.

Enoch's translation reminds us not simply of that truth taught us in the death of Jared and Methuselah before the flood came, viz, that the righteous are taken away from the evil to come; but it points to the translation of the living saints which are on the earth, when the Lord comes, by which they are caught up out of the last great day of terror, to be with the Lord, far above the reach of the deluge of lire that is covering earth beneath them,—not, like Noah, carried through the flood, but taken out of it, and beyond it altogether, caught up into the cloud of glory to be with the Lord for ever. Are you ready for translation? I do not ask, Are you ready for death? I ask, Are you ready for translation? Ready to put off this vile body, and put on the glorified body,—ready to go up into these heavens, like Enoch and Elijah, to meet and welcome your returning Lord? For He will come suddenly,—who knows how soon! Oh, let not that day overtake you unawares!

In the circumstance of Enoch's translation there was nothing visibly striking or terrible to the world. No token was given. No signs of terror,— the earthquake, or the tempest, or the darkening of the heavens,—no signs gave notice of his hour being come, or heralded him up into the sky with pomp and outward glory. 'He was not,'— 'he was not found;' this is all we learn. He disappeared from among the children of men! He walked with God, and in the midst of this calm and blessed walk, he passed upwards, as by an invisible ladder, into the presence of his God. How sweet, how blessed, how calm, how congenial, this termination of a holy, heavenly walk! So natural the transition from the fellowship below to the communion above! He was not, for God took him! As in the case of Elijah, they might seek him, but he was not found! Without a sick-bed, or a death-bed, without the pains or weaknesses of decaying age,—in the full maturity of primeval manhood he went up to the inheritance above. Such will be the translation of the saints when the Lord comes; though not with the same secrecy. Two shall be in the field,—a believer and an unbeliever,—one shall be 'taken,' that is, caught up, and the other left. Two shall be grinding at the mill,—a believer and an unbeliever,—one shall be taken, and the other left. Two shall be in one bed,—a believer and an unbeliever,—one shall be taken, and the other left. Then the vengeance of the Lord shall be poured out, according to Enoch's awful words, 'Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints, to

execute judgment upon all.'

O sinner, are you ready for these days of darkness that are even now gathering over us? Can you brave the wrath or bribe the justice of the great Avenger? Your mirth will then be dumb; your songs will then be silent; your gaiety will be exchanged for wailing, and your security for terror; your cup of pleasure will be turned into a cup of trembling; the devouring fire, and the blackness of darkness, and the second death, shall be your only prospect then. You might have had love for your portion, but you have chosen wrath; you might have had life, but you have chosen death; and as you have sown, so shall you reap, in that awful harvest day for which the world is fast ripening now.[8]

LVII.

Noah's Faith And The World's Condemnation

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."—

Hebrews 11:7.

Here are six things in the life of Noah: (1) The warning; (2) The fear; (3) The ark; (4) The salvation; (5) The condemnation; (6) The righteousness.

I. The warning.—The word is the same as that used regarding Joseph and the young child (Matthew 2:12, 22); regarding Simeon (Luke 2:26); regarding Cornelius (Acts 10:22). The warning to Noah was a divine one; how given we know not, whether by voice, or vision, or dream, or angel. As the sons of God before the flood worshipped in front of Paradise, where the Shekinah rested, it might be from the glory that 'the God of glory' spoke to Noah, as afterwards to Abraham in Ur. The warning was explicit and unconditional, regarding coming doom. God announced that He meant to bring a flood upon the earth, for total destruction, whereby the world was to perish. There has been a warning sounding through the ages, 'Behold, the Lord cometh;' it is the warning of a more terrible deluge than that of Noah, a fiery deluge, in the day of the vengeance of our God.

II. The fear.—The word does not mean dread or terror, but pious, reverential awe, at the prospect of divine judgment. God's words,— 'The end of all flesh is come before me;' 'I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth,'—had sunk deep into his soul. He was not alarmed, but he was solemnized. He had heard God's verdict on the earth and on man; he knew how God hated sin; he saw the wickedness around; he knew that God would fulfill His word; he knew also that he and his family were safe, for God had said it; he thought of the calamity that was coming, and solemn awe took possession of him. Let us be of those who 'tremble at His word!' Let the prospect 'of the great day of the Lord,'—of the world's destruction and of our own salvation in that day,—make us solemn men. Noah's 'fear' is the contrast of the world's want of

fear. He feared, they feared not; they went on in their feasting and reveling without fear, till the flood came. Let us have reverence and godly fear; fear that solemnizes; fear that separates from the unfeeling world; fear that leads to forethought, and making ready for what is coming on the earth.

III. The ark.—This was God's means of salvation in the evil day. It was His way of preserving Noah when He destroyed the rest. It was a thing of difficulty, cost, labour, ridicule. It was to some a stumbling block, and to others foolishness; but to the saved ones it was the power of God. It was the first intimation of deliverance in the midst of danger; as Enoch's translation was of removal from danger. It was a vessel of God's planning and man's making, like the tabernacle; type of Him who was made of a woman. It was a vessel of earthly materials, as was the tabernacle, and as He was who was made flesh. There was nothing supernatural or miraculous about it, yet it was meant to protect against the supernatural and miraculous,—viz. the deluge.

IV. The salvation.—Its object was salvation,—salvation from the flood,—to Noah and his house. It did not help to save; it saved. It was effectual. Noah built it for this end. He knew what he was doing; for he acted in obedience to God. He was persuaded that it would come because God had said so. He believed in a coming destruction, and he believed in a coming salvation. Both of these might seem dreams to the millions round him, but to his faith they were realities. The ark might seem a piece of folly to the world; to him it was salvation. It was God's ark, not Noah's ark. It was salvation not only to himself, but to his family, for his sake. God saved them because he had found favor in His sight. He is the second specimen of God's representative dealings with man: Adam the first, then Noah, and then Abraham.

V. The condemnation.—It was the world that he condemned; the seed of the serpent; they who are elsewhere called 'men' and 'sons of men,' whom Christ calls 'the world,'—the chosen of the evil one. That world Noah condemned. He did so,

(1.) By his faith.—His faith was the condemnation of their unbelief. His walk of faith was the condemnation of their walk of unbelief. So is it that we, by faith, condemn the world. There is nothing so condemning to the world as the faith of believing men,—that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the

evidence of things not seen.

(2.) By his building the ark.—That ark meant both salvation and destruction. It was Noah's warning to the world, and it was God's warning. For many a year he persisted in his work of building it; and every plank laid, every nail driven in, every stroke of the hammer, was the condemnation of the world. We have no ark to build, but we have to enter one already built,—Christ Jesus Himself; and in doing so, in reckoning ourselves safe simply because of our connection with it, we condemn the world.

(3.) By his preaching.—He was a preacher of righteousness. Like Paul, he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. In him, and through him, Jesus Himself went and preached unto those who were disobedient in the day of God's longsuffering. Noah condemned their unbelief, their violence, their licentiousness, their luxury, their worldliness. Let our words so condemn the world.

(4.) By his life.—He lived what he preached. He kept himself unspotted from the world. His life was a protest against the lives of all around. So let our lives be. Thus let us follow Noah,—let us follow Christ,—being holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from the world; for the friendship of the world is enmity with God.

VI. The righteousness.—He became heir, or served himself heir, to the righteousness which is by faith. Not that now he first became a justified man,—he was so before. But now his faith came out conspicuously, and exhibited him as one of the great company to whom belongs the righteousness which is by faith. To him it might be said, 'Thy faith hath saved thee.' His life and actings proved him to be an heir of the righteousness. He acted out what he believed. He lived and spoke in faith. God testified of him that he had found favor in His sight; that he was a justified man.

Are we of this blessed Company,—the company of the justified? Do we believe, and, in believing, find favor with God? Do we stand by Noah's side as justified men, condemners of the world, witnesses for God in a godless world?

LVIII.

The Better Choice Of Moses

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."—

Hebrews 11:24-26.

Moses had everything to bind him to Egypt, to Pharaoh, to Pharaoh's house: ties of silk, chains of gold; natural affection, gratitude, learning, pleasure, love of ease, pomp, splendor, riches; everything that the flesh desires, that the intellect covets, and that the world contains. For what was there of worldly glory, pleasure, learning, pomp, and power, that were not to be found in Egypt?

Yet he broke every tie; he came out; he separated himself; he ceased to touch the unclean thing; he flung aside the riches of Egypt, and trampled on the crown of Pharaoh.

What prompted this severance? Was he a disappointed man? Had his life been a failure? Had Egypt used him coldly? Was there no prospect of rising in it? Had its pleasures run dry, or its riches failed? No, these were not his reasons. But he had met with something better than all these. It was this which disentangled his feet, and which broke the bonds.

Yet that which had come across his path was not a new thing. As an Israelite he had known it long, but now his eyes had been opened to see it aright. Nor was it a noble thing or honourable in the eyes of men. It was known as a reproach, a matter of scorn. It is called the reproach of Christ, or the reproach attaching to all who held Israel's hope of a coming Messiah. This hope was a mockery and derision to all in Egypt. Yet it was this decided hope which Moses took hold of, 'preferring it to all the treasures of Egypt.'

This was, if not Moses' conversion, at least the turning point in his life, when he

was compelled to make an open choice. We know not what the occasion was, but it brought matters to a crisis. It compelled him to decide for Jehovah or for Osiris, for Christ or for the false worship of the Egyptian temples. It was faith that led him, and enabled him to make the choice; faith that saw through the falsehoods of heathen idolatry, and the vanities of human pleasure and learning; faith that saw the realities of divine truth and joy as centered in Him who, even when seen afar off, was the way, and the truth, and the life.

What then does faith accomplish for us? and how? and when?

As to the when, we may answer, the moment that it comes into action by the power of the Holy Ghost. In its state of death or dormancy it effects nothing, whatever its words or professions may be. Has the when in your life come yet, O man? Or is it still a futurity, an uncertainty? When art thou to believe and to act upon what thou believest?

As to the how, we answer, it is the substance of things hoped for. It operates by giving to the future its proper magnitude, to the present its proper littleness; to the heavenly things their true fullness, to the earthly their true emptiness. It sets all things on their right basis, and represents everything in its true proportions.

As to the what the answers are endless. What is there that faith cannot do? But the special thing noted in our text is Moses' change of choice and estimate.

I. His change of choice.—He chooses affliction and oppression, degradation and hardship. He chooses them deliberately, joyfully, and not by compulsion. He chooses his company, 'the people of God,' as distinguished from Egypt and from earth. With them he casts in his lot for better or for worse. In making this choice he rejects what the world calls pleasure,—the pleasures,—the short lived pleasures of sin. They are worthless and unenduring, as well as evil. He had once chosen them, now he chooses them not.

II. His change of estimate.—'Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches.' Faith alters the value of everything to us. That value in itself is incapable of change; but to us it is altered. What we once esteemed we esteem no more; what we disesteemed we now prize, and honour, and love. Faith applies new tests to everything, and finds dross in what we counted gold, and gold in what

we counted dross. It changes our estimate,

(1) Of sin; (2) of self; (3) of righteousness; (4) of Scripture; (5) of God; (6) of Christ; (7) of earth; (8) of heaven. The aspect of all these things is altered to us. They are not what they were to us, and we are not what we were to them.

Or, to use another figure, faith is the great unveiler. It takes off the mask, or veil, or covering from every object, and shows them to us as they are. There are two kinds of veils or masks on everything here,— bright and dark. The former hides deformity, and makes objects appear fairer than they are; the latter hides beauty, and makes objects appear uncomely. Faith removes both of these. It takes off the bright veil, (1) from earthly pleasure; (2) from worldly riches; (3) from human learning; (4) royal glory. It shows us the dark interior,—the hollowness of all these. It does not misrepresent them or belie them, but simply removes the unreal attractions which deceived and misled us. It does not underestimate, yet it does not over-estimate. It takes off the dark veil, (1) from Christ, and shows Him to us as altogether lovely; (2) from holiness, and shows us what a blessed thing it is to be holy; (3) from the kingdom to come, and shows us what a recompense of reward it is; (4) from the Church of God, showing us what a glory belongs to her, though it doth not now appear what she shall be; (5) from reproach and affliction, showing us how good it is to be afflicted, how honourable to be reproached for Christ, and as He was.

Thus faith works. It does wonders in us, and for us, and through us. It separates us from the world. It brings us out, of the haunts of vanity; it leads us out of the ballroom, and the theatre, and the gay party; it shows us better riches, better pleasures, and brighter glory than the world contains.

LIX.

Faith's Vision Of An Invisible God

"Seeing Him who is invisible."—
Hebrews 11:27.

The eye of Moses was the eye of faith. It saw afar off. It saw within the veil. It saw beyond earth's skies. It saw through the mists of the world; through the wisdom of Egypt; through the pleasures of a palace; through the honour of royalty; through the wrath of the king. It pierced through all these. It was like the eye of Isaiah when he saw the glory; like Stephen's, when he saw heaven opened, and the Lord standing; like John's in Patmos, when he saw the Son of man.

It was what he saw that rendered him impervious to fear, and insensible to the seductions of pleasure and honour. Nothing else but a sight of the invisible could have made Moses the man that he was.

I. What did he see?—The invisible. The unseen One, and His unseen kingdom. He saw both. The far off; the impalpable; the immaterial, the infinite, the divine he saw these. The King eternal, immortal, and invisible, whom no man hath seen, nor can see. But is not this a contradiction? We answer, No. It looks like one, because it expresses heavenly things in earthly words; and because great thoughts, such as those of God, can only be expressed by apparent contradictions. Moses saw the unseen; and so does every one who walks in his steps.

II. How did he see it?—By faith. His faith was the evidence of things not seen. It is not the eye of science, or fancy, or genius, that penetrates the unseen; it is the eye of faith. Faith is not like Paul going up to the third heaven; it is not the eagle mounting above the clouds. It is more than these. Faith sits here, in the lowest valleys of earth, and yet sees upward, even to the heaven of heavens. Faith is not transporting the man to some lofty mountain, to see the vast vision from its summit: it is the enabling him to see all that he could see from that summit (and far more), from his closet, or his sick-bed, or his prison-cell. Moses

did not need to go out of Egypt to see the Invisible,—he saw Him in Egypt. It was not his leaving Pharaoh's house that enabled him to see it; it was his seeing it that made him leave that house.

III. What it did for him.—It made him an enduring man,—a man fitted for coping with danger, and terror, and pain, and the anger of this world,—as it did to John Knox: 'I have looked upon the faces of angry men, and not been afraid.' It made him brave Pharaoh's anger, and nerved him for all work and hardship.

Thus faith operates in many ways upon us,—

(1.) Upon our souls.—It operates directly upon these,—elevating, expanding, quickening, purifying. The vision of the invisible tells mightily upon our spiritual faculties and feelings. We resemble the things with which we are most conversant: if these be earthly, we become earthly; if these be heavenly, we become heavenly. It exercises transforming influence, molding our inner man, changing us from glory to glory, making our faces shine.

(2.) Upon our religion.—Often is our religion low and earthly, even when correct and regular. It becomes a routine, a mechanism, a form, an external work, which, instead of connecting us with God, acts as a screen between us and Him. The sight of the unseen God and His kingdom lifts us out of forms and routines. It makes us feel what religion really is,—intercourse with the Unseen. If it is not this, it is nothing; it is mockery. Besides, the vision of the invisible takes away the littleness, the selfishness, the narrowness that attach themselves to our religion. It imparts life; it thaws our frosts; it gives animation and energy to our prayers and praises.

(3.) Upon our daily life.—That life is made up of what is secular and what is spiritual. The seeing of the invisible operates on both, fitting for each sphere, with all its duties.

(a.) The secular.—It tells on our family life and our public life; upon our business; upon our duties as citizens, or neighbors, or relations, or friends. The sight of the invisible quickens and strengthens us in all these.

(b.) The spiritual.—It tells upon our work as saints and members of Christ's

Church; our working in any way for God; the bearing of our testimony; our zeal; our separation from the world.

Generally, it mellows and molds us. It nerves us for labour, or trial, or sorrow; for crosses and losses; for life and in death. Under the influence of the invisible we are able to do or to endure what otherwise we should certainly sink under.

LX.

The Holy Fire Of The Altar

"For our God is consuming fire."—
Hebrews 12:29.

Is it not written, 'God is love?' Is it not also written, 'God is light?' Yet here we read, God, nay, 'our God is a consuming fire.'^[9] We have like words, once and again, in the Old Testament. 'The Lord thy God is a consuming fire' (Deuteronomy 4:24). 'The sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount' (Exodus 24:17). 'A fire goeth before Him, and burneth up His enemies round about' (Psalm 97:3).

There seems in our text special reference to the fire of the altar, which consumed the sacrifice without consuming the worshipper. 'There came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat' (Leviticus 9:24). 'When Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices;... and when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the Lord' (2 Chronicles 7:1, 3).

It does seem strange to read, 'Our God is a consuming fire.' How is this? Where is the grace here? Where is the gospel, and the pardon, and the childlike confidence? Let us see.

The expression is sacrificial and as such let us consider it. It is either the fire coming down from heaven upon the altar, or it is the fire upon the altar fed continually by the wood laid thereon. It is probably both of these; for these are properly one fire, its use being to consume the sacrifice.

I. The fire itself.—It is the symbol of divine anger against evil,—holy, righteous anger,—not the symbol merely of holiness or righteousness (the symbol of these is light), but of holiness and righteousness in their estimate of

sin, and in their dealings with sin and the sinner. From Genesis down to Revelation fire is referred to, and always in connection with divine displeasure against the workers of iniquity. We have the flaming sword of Paradise, Sodom and Gomorrha, the doom of Korah, the destruction of the three fifties at the command of Elijah, and the lake of fire. Holy anger against sin,—holy anger consuming the object of its displeasure. It is this that is to blaze forth so terribly against the rejecters of the Son of God when He comes in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God.

II. The place of this fire.—The altar of burnt offering. God has set a place where this fire shall display itself perpetually, burning day and night. It touches nothing but what is on the altar. However many may be standing round, the fire touches them not. It exhausts itself on the sacrifice. The altar receives it, and the victim absorbs it. All else is safe. It is concentrated on this one spot, and pours itself out on the one object, like lightning attracted by a slender conducting-rod, and turning aside to nothing else, but expending itself there. Earth,—the whole earth,—is the guilty region, on which the fire should be poured. But God in His grace withdraws it from this wide sweep, and concentrates it on the one single point, the brazen altar. Nowhere else is it permitted to burn. Earth is safe. The wrath is gathered together and poured down on one spot and one victim. Here is substitution. Here is grace. Here is the withdrawal of the anger from its deserved objects. Here is the assurance that God has no pleasure in the death of the sinner.

III. The power of this fire.—It is the fire of God. It is consuming fire, irresistible fire. It has showed itself in former ages; it is yet to show itself more terribly in the great day. Who can stand before it? Who knoweth the power of Thy wrath? When it waxes hot, it devours all before it. O fire of God, how irresistible art thou! O wrath of God, how terrible art thou! Who can dwell with the devouring fire? who can dwell with the everlasting burnings? Shall not the sinner tremble before it? Shall not the saints of God stand in awe, and rejoice with trembling? An angry God is fearful. Let the sinner turn. A God whose anger is turned away is still to be revered and feared by His own.

IV. The effects of this fire.—It may be truly said to have all the properties of earthly fire: (1) it destroys; (2) it purifies; (3) it burns up wood, and hay, and stubble; (4) it separates the dross from the gold; (5) it draws out odor from what is odorous; (6) it makes the bright shine brighter.

But it is of the effects of the fire in connection with the altar that we speak. It quenches itself in the blood of the burnt-offering, and so completes the sacrifice. After this, the sinner who accepts this altar as his place of worship and of approach to God has nothing to fear. The fire is exhausted in so far as the sinner is concerned. The blood waited for the fire, and the fire for the blood. They came at last together, and all was done. 'It is finished.' The cry of the victim, 'Why hast Thou forsaken me?' showed the completion of the propitiation, and the exhaustion of the holy wrath. The fire is now satisfied. It needs no more. The sin which drew it down (transferred from the sinner to his offering) has been condemned and punished. The offerer is free. There is no condemnation for him. His guilt has been expiated. The fire has consumed the victim, and atonement has been fully made.

Stand by this altar, O man, and this 'no condemnation' becomes thine. Meet God here, where the fire and the blood have met, and thou hast nothing to fear. Righteousness propitiated and magnified bids thee come in peace, and go in peace, with 'Who is he that condemneth?' upon thy grateful lips, as thy song of praise.

LXI.

Let Us Go Forth

"Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach."—
Hebrews 13:13.

This is the sound of a trumpet. It is the voice of one who speaks out, and who speaks with authority; of one who has himself been spoken to by another; who has obeyed and gone forth; who calls on us to follow his example. It is the voice of a leader, like Moses, calling on Israel to follow him, as he puts himself at their head, and bids them quit the land of Egypt and the house of bondage.

Let us go forth! The call is urgent. It must not be slighted. We dare not linger.

Who calls? It is Paul the apostle, the servant of Jesus Christ; he who was once Saul of Tarsus, a persecutor, a blasphemer, a murderer; he who assisted in casting out Stephen,—he now cries aloud, Let us go forth! Nay more. He who, years before, had gone forth, leaving all for Christ, counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus,—he now, as if he had never gone forth at all, cries aloud, let us go forth! This going forth, then, is not a thing done once, when we believed and were forgiven; it is a lifelong thing, like the taking up of the cross 'daily,' of which the Master speaks (Luke 9:23). We do not go forth once, and then have done with it, like Abraham quitting Ur of the Chaldees, encountering but once the shame, and the scandal, and the reproach, and the bitterness. Then would our conversion be a swift passage to the kingdom of the holy. But in this case there is a constant going forth, and yet a remaining here; a forsaking all for Christ; a coming out and being separate, and yet continuing here on earth, amid the temptations and uncongenialities of a world where all is evil.

To whom does he call? To the Church of God, the 'redeemed from among men,' the 'delivered from a present evil world.' To the Church of all ages he speaks, and as truly to us as to the Hebrew saints whom he was instructing in this epistle. To each of us he speaks; and leading, as well as pointing the way, like a captain at the head of his troops, or a shepherd at the head of his flock, he says, let us go forth! There is not one of us to whom this appeal is not made,—not one

of us who can excuse himself and say, 'This does not apply to me; my circumstances do not require a going forth at all. I am a Christian man among Christian men, the member of a Christian church, engaged in lawful business, living an irreproachable life. It cannot apply to me.' It does apply to you.

The servant says, and his voice is but an echo of the Master's, to all His disciples, let us go forth!

Where are we to go? Without the camp; to the place of shame and reproach, the place where Jesus suffered, that we may be identified with Him, and have fellowship with Him in His endurance, 'filling up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ' (Colossians 1:24), and also of His shame. The camp here spoken of is certainly not 'the camp of the saints' spoken of in Revelations 20:9. It is of the 'camp' of Israel that the apostle speaks; and he is making use of a figure taken from the encampments of that people in the desert. It corresponds to 'the city,' outside of whose gates our great Sin offering went, bearing our sins, and leaving us an example that we should follow His steps. Let us go forth without the camp, and be content to be what He was,—rejected of men; to be what the sin-offering was,—an outcast thing, the off scouring of all things. It is not merely, Let us go forth out of Babylon, or out of Egypt, or out of the world; but it is out of the camp. It was Israel that rejected Christ; it was Jerusalem that cast Him out,— Jerusalem, once the city into which all were to enter and dwell, now out of which all were to flee; it was not the Roman but the Jew that cried, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him! not this man, but Barabbas.' It was professedly religious men, such as the Pharisees, that hated and reviled Christ from first to last, and stirred up the people to seek His death. From all such hollow profession, such formal Christianity, such mere churchism, such nominal religion or religiousness, let us go forth. It is around us on every side; it tempts us, or it opposes us, or it reproaches us, or it maligns us as presumptuous, hypocrites, righteous overmuch, morose, selfsufficient, and imagining that both wisdom and religion will die with us. But let us not, because of these taunts or temptations, give ground, and endeavor to meet it half way. Let us resist; let us go forth. We must come daily into contact with it; let us not become assimilated to it, or lower our protest against it. We must be in the midst of it, but let us stand aloof from it. From all this unreal religion, dubious Christianity, time serving discipleship, let us go forth! If we are to be Christians at all, let us be so out and out,—in word and deed, in the inner and the outer man, in our

nonconformity to the world, and in our protest against the lifeless, powerless 'form of godliness' which, in all churches and lands, has shown itself from the beginning, and always shown itself most when religion is in fashion. Out from all this hollowness, this unreality, this heartless formalism, let us go forth, even though in doing so we have to bear the reproach of Christ. The picture, the statue, the mummy,—these are not the living man; and woe be to him who is content with death instead of life, with the shell instead of the kernel, with the dogma instead of the person, with the routine of duty and devotion, instead of the joy and light, the love and liberty, the health and energy of soul, which, under the power of the Holy Ghost, are realized where the gospel is credited, and God's testimony to His own Son accepted as true and divine! Living religion must expect reproach, specially from those to whom Christianity is only a creed, or a church, or a name. Let us count upon this, and be prepared to bear this reproach as the reproach of Christ.

Let us go forth! And in so doing, let us follow Christ, let us follow Paul, let us follow those saints of whom we read, 'Ye are washed, ye are sanctified.' Let us be decided, consistent, bold; let our trumpet give no uncertain sound, nor let any doubtful inscription be engraved upon our banner. If formalism be religion, take it, use it, and see how it will serve you in the great day. If mere membership of a Christian church will do your turn, try it; see if it will stand the fire.

Men and brethren, the time is short, and the issues are infinitely momentous. Let us make sure. Is it sand or is it rock on which our house is built? Will it stand the storm and the flood?

It is good to be called by the name of Christ; but let us remember how it is written, 'Let him that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.' We are responsible for acting up to all that God has revealed; we are specially responsible for acting up to all that our profession implies. And how much does that profession imply? How much is expected of us?

Let us go forth! Whatever it may cost us, let us shake off all falsehood and uncertainty in the things of God. Let us deal honestly with ourselves, with our consciences, with our Bibles, with the gospel, with our creed, with Christ, with the Spirit of God. All is sincerity on the part of Him with whom we have to do; let all be sincerity on our part. Let us deal boldly alike with error and with truth, with unbelief and with faith. Let us not be cowards in the things of God, or in

the battle of the Cross. Let us not hesitate, and doubt, and halt, as if Christ had never come; as if His gospel contained no good news; as if it mattered little whether we served Him believingly or doubtingly, in the liberty of conscious sonship, or in the bondage, and gloom, and feebleness of men who know not whose they are.

Let us go forth! And let us do so, rejoicing that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. Let us not be afraid of the enemy, nor quail before the sneer, or the taunt, or the worthless jest of the scoffer. Let us not be ashamed of Christ and His gospel, of His cross, and crown, and kingdom. It is but a little, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Let us live as men who believe this. Let the world know our hope; let it see our joy, not once nor twice, but always, day by day, till it become envious of our peace, and never rest till that peace becomes its own. Let our faces shine,—shine with gladness,—the gladness of men who know the Lord. The joy, the love, the patience of the primitive Christians, struck their heathen enemies, and often won them. Let our joy, and love, and patience do the same in these days to all around us.

Let us go forth! What though this make us strangers here? We have before us something better than the tents we leave,—'the continuing city,'—'the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.' We are citizens of no mean city, though we have not yet reached it. Let us live as men who know their citizenship, and believe in the glory of the city to which they are fighting their way. With such prospects as ours, what is reproach, or hatred, or the loss of all things? The incorruptible inheritance will make up for all, and it will soon be here. Let us be 'separate from sinners;' let us 'keep ourselves unspotted from the world;' let us, on no pretext, lower our standard, as if we could win souls by being unfaithful to Christ. In business, in recreation, in public life, in the family, in the sanctuary, in the shop, or market, or countinghouse, or court of law, let us be Christians,—unmistakable Christians,— abstaining from all 'appearance of evil,' and shining ever as lights in the world,—lights not growing dimmer, but brighter; lights not fitful, but constant.

Let us go forth! To Him! Yes, to Him! for it is with Him, even with Him who died for us, that we are associated here in labour, and suffering, and shame, as we shall be hereafter in rest, and joy, and glory. The companionship of Christ! This is what we are called to partake of and enjoy. We go forth to Him; He

comes in to us. 'Lo! I am with you always.' To love Him and to know His love; to lean on Him unceasingly; to taste His boundless grace; to work for Him, counting it no hard service; to speak for Him as He may give us opportunity; to lie down each night under His approving smile; to give as well as to work and speak for Him; to spend and be spent in His service,—this is our calling. Let us not grudge the cost, but count the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures we abandon. He took our reproach; let us gladly take His. Let us rejoice that we are permitted to share His shame. With Him all shame is glory, all sorrow gladness. The wilderness with Him is paradise. And if His companionship can make even the desert bright and green, what will it not make the kingdom?

LXII.

The Father Of Light And Love

"Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."—

James 1:16,17.

The writer of this epistle has two special forms of address in it,— 'brethren,' and 'beloved brethren.' As a Jew writing to Jews, he felt the closeness of the brotherhood, the kinsmanship. Both in the flesh and in the Lord they are 'brethren.' Hence the frequency with which he uses the word. But he conjoins with this 'beloved,' as when here he warns and exhorts; so that each such warning may come as the message of love, not of pride, or anger, or austerity, or self-will.

The warning here is against 'erring,' going astray, making mistakes; and the special point respecting which they needed warning was the character and the ways of God. Our text is not a mere general exhortation, but has special reference to the misapprehension or misconstruction of God, pointed out in the 13th verse. Here we are warned,—

1. Of our liability to err.—The tree of knowledge has borne bitter fruit. The intellect is off its balance. It craves gratification, but is not particular as to what it gets. It seizes error quite as readily as truth, nay, error is the more congenial of the two. Our mind is not merely finite, but defective, dark, rash, biased. We are very liable to make mistakes, specially on religious matters; for they are not only things beyond our reach, but they are more or less influenced by our natural enmity to God.

2. Of the danger of so erring.—It is no trivial thing to err. A man may not err and be guiltless. All such error, all misconstruction or misapprehension of God, is fraught with evil and infinite peril to the soul. It imperils peace and salvation.

But the 17th verse comes in to obviate or correct any such misapprehension.

God is the doer and the giver of good, not of evil. We are to connect all His doings and givings with Himself, and to beware of separating between the two. Let us mark the meaning of the words; each is striking.

'Every;' not some, but every,—all without exception,—'good gift,' or 'giving,'—referring to the act of giving, or to the feeling of the donor.

'Every perfect gift,'—the thing actually given, the gift. All kind or good giving, and every perfect gift, is from above, not from beneath, not from earth, not from the creature at all,—it 'descends;' and from whom? from Him who is Father,—Father not of darkness, but of light, nay, of lights, of everything that deserves the name of light, or can be symbolized by light. And there is no dark side of His character; both sides are equally bright; He is bright all over. With Him there is no variableness, nor shadow produced by turning to us another side, such as in the case of earth or moon.

I. Let us not misjudge God.—Let us not give way to hard thoughts of Him, as if He sought our injury. He is no austere man, but kindly and loving. Let us not draw any such misjudgments from the Bible; from our own experience; from the experience of others; from our ignorance of His ways. All unbelief is misconstruction of God; it is denying that God is gracious, that God is love. Such misjudgment wrongs Him grievously, and profits us not,—nay, does us unspeakable harm. It is sin, the worst of sin,—the sin of blaspheming the true God, or of worshipping a false. It is a fearful thing to misapprehend or misjudge God.

II. Let us connect His gifts and Himself.—Let us interpret Himself by His gifts, and His gifts by Himself. Let us not look suspiciously on His gifts, as if He did not mean all the love which they imply, or as if He did not mean to speak to us in giving them. Let us take the sunshine, and say, It is for me; it is good, and it means God is love; I will connect it with Himself and rejoice in Him because of it. I will take it as a help to faith, as a rebuke to unbelief. So with the flowers; so with our daily food and raiment; so with our health, and all that each day brings to us.

III. Let us look to Him as the Father of lights.—God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. He is light; yes, He is the Father of 'lights.' This is good news

to us. He is just such an one as a dark sinner can go to,—suitable to him, just because there is such light in Him. It is the darkness of earth that makes the sun so suitable. So with the Father of lights. He is altogether suitable for us.

IV. Let us rest on Him as the unchangeable One.—There is no caprice, no variation with Him. What He was in the first promise He is in the last. What He was in the first century He is in the nineteenth. What He was to the first sinner He is to the last. There is no darkness in Him; no dark side of His character that only frowns on us. Even His righteousness and greatness are on our side. There are 'beams coming out of His hand,' light from His holiness and majesty shining to us. Let us take Him and trust Him as He is. Let us not judge Him by our frames or our changes. Let us take His own account of Himself. That is a foundation which cannot be shaken. Let faith rest there.

V.

LXIII.

The Christians Continuance In The Law

"Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."—

James 1:25.

It is of 'blessedness' that the apostle is speaking here; the blessedness of doing, not of believing, or rather, of doing as the result of believing. Paul dwells on the latter, James on the former. Both are to be kept in view. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven (Psalm 32:1); and blessed is he 'that believeth' (Luke 1. 45; John 20:29). But blessed also are 'they that do His commandments' (Revelation 22:14); blessed are 'they that keep His testimonies' (Psalm 69:2); blessed is the man 'that delighteth greatly in His commandments' (Psalm 62:1). Let us see the apostle's statement here.

I. The law.—This is the Hebrew torah, the Greek nomos, the Latin lex, and the English law; all of them expressive of two great ideas,—a superior that instructs and enjoins, an inferior that learns and obeys. It touches our minds as instruction; and our wills as precept. Through these two it touches or operates upon our life. In some parts it touches more the former, as in the psalms, in others our wills, as in the ten commandments, though sometimes it is mixed, as in Proverbs and the prophets. We do not take up the question whether 'law,' as used by James, refers exclusively to the Sinaitic code. We affirm, however, that it includes these, as is evident from ch. 2:8, 12, 4:2, where two of the ten are specified, and the summary of the law is given, 'the royal law.' Plainly, then, the apostle refers to the moral law in his epistle. If any one say that James was writing to Jews, we answer, (1) Paul, writing to Gentiles, uses law in reference to the ten commandments (Romans 13:8-10). (2) This makes no difference, for they were believing Jews, members of the body of Christ.

II. The perfect law.—By this we understand the same as in Romans 7:12: 'The law is holy (as a whole), and the commandment (each of its commandments) holy, and just, and good.' It is altogether 'perfect,' complete in

all its parts; not reduced, or narrowed, or modified; fully unfolded; more fully now than ever; established (Romans 3:31); not destroyed; fulfilled by Christ, and to be fulfilled by us as His disciples. The law is now expanded to the uttermost, and exhibited in all its parts; held forth in all its fullness. Never was its excellence and righteousness seen so gloriously. Some of the excellent names applied to it are,—(1) spiritual, Romans 7:14; (2) holy, Revelation 7:16; (3) just, *ib.*; (4) good, *ib.*; (5) fiery, Deuteronomy 33:2; (6) perfect, Psalms 19:7. The 119th Psalm is full of expressions denoting in manifold ways its excellence and glory; its entire and divine perfection.

III. The law of liberty.—It is only bondage to the unforgiven. To those in reference to whom its penalty has ceased, it is a law of liberty. Obedience to it is true liberty. The greater the obedience, the greater the liberty. Disobedience is bondage. 'I will walk at liberty, for I seek Thy precepts' (Psalm 69:45). Twice over in James it is called the law of liberty; for the law, fulfilled in Christ, and presented to us in the gospel, though unchanged and unmodified, is a law of liberty. In obeying it we are enjoying and exercising true freedom.

IV. We are to look into it.—This means stooping down so as to gaze closely into, as in 1 Peter 1:12. We are to study the law, the whole law. It will unfold its riches to us. There is no terror in it now to make us shrink back. It smiles on us. Let us hide it in our hearts. Thus David speaks: 'I will meditate in Thy precepts' (Psalm 69:15); 'In His law doth he meditate day and night' (Psalm. 1:2). 'Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things' (Psalm 69:18). 'Thy servant did meditate in Thy statutes' (*ib.* 23). *ib.* 30, 40, 48, 71, 78, 93, 94, 95, 97, 99, 131, 148. In the cross we see the law magnified and made honourable; let us then study it as thus illustrated and interpreted by the cross. The cross is a magnifying glass for revealing the breadth and purity of the law, yet with all that could terrify us taken away.

V. We are to continue in it.—Looking and study is not enough. We are to abide in it, be molded thereby. 'I do not forget Thy law' (Psalm 69:153). 'I will have respect unto Thy statutes continually' (*ib.* 117, 112, 102, 93, 83). It is not a look, nor even a compliance, nor many compliances; it is a continuing in the law that is enjoined on us. Steep yourself in its spirit; abide in it (Proverbs 28:4). 'Thy law is within my heart' (Psalm 90:8).

VI. The blessedness of so doing.—That man shall be blessed in the doing; not merely after the deed, but in the doing. In keeping Thy commandment there is great reward. 'Great peace have they that love Thy law' (Psalm 69:165); that delight in the law (Psalm 69:24, 77). The apostle delighted in the law, found blessedness in keeping it. Obedience is blessedness. Each act of obedience is so. Fill the whole life with such acts, and you fill it with blessedness. Love is the fulfilling of the law, and each act is a flowing out of love to God and man. All acts of love are blessedness.

We are delivered from the law's condemnation. We are 'not under the law, but under grace.' But shall we obey it the less? No, the more; for to this end we are delivered, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us. The condemnation of the law is cancelled, that the righteousness of the law might be free to exhibit itself in us, who are still 'under the law to Christ;' for the law is still good, if a man use it lawfully.

LXIV.

God's Delight To Bless The Sinner

"Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you."—

James 4:8.

At the outset, let me remind you of the following passages: 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out;' 'Ye who were afar off are made nigh;' 'Let us come boldly to the throne of grace;' 'Let us draw near with a true heart;' 'To Thee shall all flesh come.'

Here is a very wide invitation, an explicit command, and a gracious promise.

I. A wide invitation.—'Draw nigh to God.' The word 'draw nigh,' addressed to Jews, must have sounded strangely; for their Scriptures taught them that they were already 'near to God' (Numbers 10:10). Yet they needed something more than this. There was a drawing nigh which they needed as well as the Gentiles who were afar off. This drawing nigh refers, (1) to reconciliation generally; and (2) to every act of prayer. We are 'made nigh by the blood of Christ:' this is the reconciliation. But even for those who are thus nigh, there is a constant drawing nigh in prayer. There is, first, 'Be reconciled;' and then there is, 'Pray without ceasing;' 'Let us come boldly to the throne of grace.' The invitation of our text takes in both of these classes. It is a very wide invitation in itself, quite unrestricted; and it assumes a still wider aspect when we notice the characters of those to whom it was addressed. Though called 'Christians' and 'brethren,' they seem to have been truly a mixed multitude. There was much among them of the faith that was 'dead,' of the spirit of strife and ambition (3:1), of the unruly tongue, of bitter envying and strife, of envy and pride. It is strange to hear the apostle saying to them, 'Ye lust, and have not; ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts; ye adulterers and adulteresses.' To such it is that he says, 'Submit yourselves to God; resist the devil, and he will flee from you; cleanse your hands, ye sinners; purify your hearts, ye double-minded.' Nay, to such it is that he says, 'Draw nigh to God.' This surely is the very gospel

itself: it is so wide, and full, and gracious. It is the very 'Come unto Me' of Jesus; 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.' It takes for granted our natural distance from God, and that even those who come nigh are constantly relapsing into distance; but it forbids none. It says to none, You are too far off to be brought nigh. It says to all, 'Draw nigh;' yes, just as you are, 'draw nigh to God.' God Himself invites, nay, beseeches. He has no pleasure in your remaining afar off. He truly wishes you to draw nigh. He knows that distance from Him is sorrow and darkness; that nearness is joy and light. Therefore He invites and entreats. He says not only, 'Look unto Me,' or, 'Listen to Me,' but 'Draw near,'—ask, seek, knock. He sends out His invitation in many ways, all of them expressive of His tenderness, His yearning, His longsuffering, His gentle, patient love. He wants you to ask, and is grieved at your not asking. Hear His urgent invitation to you, and draw near. It is spoken to you, O man! to you, O sinner! whatever you may be, and however far off. The Father sends His message to His prodigal. He knows that nowhere save in His house, and with Himself, can you be happy or safe. He is in earnest; and His invitation is a wide one,—wide as the name of man and sinner. 'Draw nigh to God.' Seek, and ye shall find. Your not seeking displeases Him; your seeking is what He desires, and will own.

II. An explicit command.—'This is His commandment,' that men should 'draw near.' The words of our text are very explicit, as such.

God speaks to us here with authority, claiming obedience. Distance from God is disobedience. In drawing near, we obey. Who, then, can ask, May I come? Am I at liberty to draw near as I am? Most certainly; and if your remaining afar off is an act of resistance and disobedience, you dare not do otherwise than draw near. Though God is not speaking to you from Sinai, yet the command is no less explicit and imperative. Do not disobey. Do not resist. Do not make excuses of any kind for a moment's delay, specially the excuses of a fancied humility, that you are not fit, nor ready, nor worthy. 'Draw near' is the divine command, O sinner!

III. The gracious promise.—He will draw nigh to you. The drawing nigh includes in it such things as these:— (1.) Reconciliation.—It is for the healing of the breach, the reconciliation, that we come to God, and that God comes to us. (2.) Friendship.—Entrance on a perpetual, never-ending friendship. All nearness, confidence, happy intercourse now. (3.) Safety.—Nearness to God is

security. We abide under the shadow of His wing. No enemy can wound us there.

(4.) Blessedness.—Nearness is blessedness; for it is nearness to Him who is love; nearness to the rivers of pleasure; nearness to the fountain of joy and life.

The promise itself, as here put and presented to us by God, is—

(1.) Very gracious.—It is God speaking out to us His own free love, as of old: 'Return to Me, and I will return to you. Do not suppose Me backward in such a matter, or less eager to meet you than you are to meet Me. Your drawing nigh of itself has been the fruit of My having already drawn nigh to you. You could not, would not have thought of such a thing, had I not put it into your heart.' The faintest wish or sigh after God is created by Himself. Not a foot has any soul ever advanced to God, till God had advanced to him, and drawn him. What encouragement is here to every one that is seeking God! Was it ever heard that a man sought, and did not find? Seekers are always finders.

(2.) Very sufficient.—It comprehends everything, and it pledges everything. For what is there that is not contained in God drawing nigh to us? What will He not do for those to whom He draws nigh? How full, how ample, is this promise! how direct, how personal, is the way in which it is put! How large and full in His promises is the Lord our God!

(3.) Very certain.—As certain as if God had given His oath; as certain as God can make it. His word is pledged. His love assures us. His tender pity and long-suffering make us feel that refusal is impossible. Certainty is here. Yes, certainty. As surely as you draw nigh, so surely does He. And this drawing nigh on our part is nothing mysterious. A breathing of the heart sent up to God; a sigh, a longing, a desire, feeble and faint it may be,—that is drawing nigh. God does not stand upon ceremony with us.

LXV.

The One Lawgiver And His Power

"There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy."—

James 4:12.

It is of God as Lawgiver that the apostle here writes. He is not only a lawgiver, but He is the Lawgiver, he is the one Lawgiver. He is the maker, the giver, the executor of the law. None of these three functions has He left to us; nor has He made any creature, man or angel, partner with Him in any of them. If, then, we attempt to usurp any of these functions, we are interfering with the prerogatives of the one Lawgiver; and we make such an attempt every time we speak evil of another. For in that case we pronounce the law unfit and inadequate for its intended purpose without our help, and so sit in judgment on, and speak evil of both the law and the Lawgiver.

It is a solemn thing to interfere with such a Lawgiver. He is one; there is not another to whom we can fly should we provoke Him. He is in heaven, and we are on the earth; He is the Creator, we the creature; He is infinite, we finite. Who are we, then, that we should find fault with Him? But the special thing in Him to which the apostle points is His omnipotence. Who are we that we should do battle with Omnipotence? What hope of success in such a case? And this omnipotence is twofold in its character, for salvation and for destruction: 'He is able to save and to destroy.' It thus embraces everything that can concern us. Let us look at both these aspects:—

I. Able to save.—It is as God the Lawgiver that He is able to save, not merely as the Almighty One. He is mighty to save; able to save to the uttermost. Our salvation comes from the Lawgiver. In what, then, lies His ability to save?

(1.) His power.—For salvation, it is required that the Saviour be powerful,—all-powerful, in the usual sense of the word,—that His hand be 'strong,' His right hand 'high,' and His arm 'full of might;' for the work is so great, the enemies so mighty, the difficulties so arduous, the number to be saved so many, and the duration over which salvation is to extend is so vast, even the eternal ages.

(2.) His righteousness.—Mere power in the common sense would have been unavailing where law is concerned; for law makes little account of power. There must be righteousness! The salvation must be righteous, the process righteous, and He who saves must be the righteous One. In dealing with sin and pardon, righteousness must have full scope.

(3.) His love.—Power and righteousness would not originate or carry out salvation. Love must begin, and love must actuate all from first to last. Love sets power and righteousness in motion, and keeps them ever at work. The free love of God, though, strictly speaking, it does not constitute ability to save, yet it is that without which salvation would have been unthought of, would have been impossible.

II. Able to destroy.—Yes, able to cast both soul and body into hell. It is the Lawgiver, the one Lawgiver, that is able to destroy. The destruction of a sinner is from the hands of the great Lawgiver. Thus, in some respects, His ability to destroy resembles His ability to save.

(1.) His power.—He is irresistible. Who can withstand the almighty arm? Who can contend with the Almighty? All created power is but an emanation from His uncreated and infinite power, and cannot avail for resistance, far less for victory. Of no creature can it be said, he is able to destroy; for a creature can only injure, or deface, or change. The power to destroy belongs to God alone. He only knows what destruction is, and He only can effect it.

(2.) His righteousness.—It is the righteousness which dwells in Him that makes destruction so sure and terrible, inevitable and everlasting. A righteous avenger or destroyer is an awful word. Many here, when they suffer, comfort themselves with the thought that they are innocent martyrs. There will be no such feeling hereafter. No martyrdom in hell. It is all righteous punishment; and the power of the destroyer is that of law and righteousness, which is infinitely terrible.

(3.) His wrath.—It is no longer love, but wrath; it is this that gives such weight and terribleness to the blow. The wrath of God! the wrath of Omnipotence! the wrath of righteous Omnipotence! God's wrath kindling, how terrible! Ah, this is destruction. For this Christ comes the second time, 'to take vengeance.' Yes; God is not weak, or soft, or indifferent. The Lawgiver is inflexible, when once His

wrath is kindled but a little.

How do we measure this ability to save and to destroy? What is the extent of it? We measure it by Himself. He is the infinite Jehovah. What an ability for both must be in Him! Is there any one that He cannot save? any one that He cannot destroy? We measure it by His law, for law is power; divine law is divine power. That law, through means of the cross, can now take the sinner's side, or be against the sinner to destroy. Blessed to have law upon our side, terrible to have law against us. In the one case we are absolutely safe; in the other, hopeless.

But God has given some facts by which to measure His ability to save and destroy. He has shown us what, and how many sinners He can save. He has shown us what a horrible pit He can save from. He has shown us how He could deliver our Substitute, when all our sins were upon Him. What sinner can He not deliver, when He could deliver Him who was bearing our sins? Ah, He is able to save to the uttermost. Come and be saved! Jesus Christ came to save sinners. Which of you is beyond His power?

He has given us facts by which to measure His power to destroy. He cast out the angels. He cast out Adam. He poured down fire on Sodom.

He overwhelmed our race with the flood. He fills our world with pain and death. He has prepared His throne for judgment. Is He not able to destroy? And will He refrain in the day of His wrath?

LXVI.

Patient Suffering

"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the Judge standeth before the door. Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."—

James 5:7-11.

It was to the saints among the scattered Jews that the apostle wrote this epistle. They were doubly trodden down,—first as Jews, among the heathen; and, secondly, as Christians, both among the heathen and their own kinsmen. He writes to them as men suffering hardship, persecution, contempt. Yet in writing to them he throws in a word to their unbelieving kinsmen. It is they especially that are singled out in the beginning of this chapter in these awful words: 'Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl, for the miseries that shall come upon you.' Though exempted from the national miseries that the Roman destroyer was bringing on their city and land, yet there was misery in store for them. A dark future, the chief object in which is the advent of that very Jesus whom they despised. They might be gathering to themselves the riches of the Gentiles; but what would riches profit in the day of wrath? Riches and raiment were perishing; gold and silver were rusting; treasure was heaped up for the devouring fire. Oppression, vanity, wantonness, condemnation of the unresisting just,—these were their crimes.

Then the apostle turns to the little flock, exhorting them and comforting them in this day of evil. Two things he presses on them, patience and firmness.

(1.) Patience.—Persecution towards themselves, and ungodliness all around, would be apt to ruffle them, the latter perhaps more than the former. They might

fret themselves because of evil doers. They might become impatient,—impatient because they were suffering so much; impatient because iniquity was abounding so greatly; impatient because the Lord was so long in coming. Let us cherish patience under wrong; patience in tribulation; patience in provocation; patience in the midst of error and iniquity. In patience let us possess our souls; let patience have her perfect work.

(2.) Firmness.—We are not to be waverers, men of a divided or double heart, tossed to and fro like a leaf; yielding, compromising, unstable, undecided; but firm, steadfast, and unmoveable; not bending like a reed, but erect as the palm; not driven about like chaff, but rooted like the bills; 'stablished, strengthened, settled.' Be firm, be brave; set your faces like flint to the enemy; be not carried about. Hold fast that which ye have received; be faithful unto death.

For these two things he gives this great motive, 'The coming of the Lord draweth nigh.' He would have them be influenced by this coming; he would have us also. Be patient and firm; for,

(1.) The Lord is to come.—This is a certainty; no mere peradventure or conjecture, but a certainty. The Lord shall come. Therefore be patient and steadfast.

(2.) He is coming suddenly.—Like lightning, like a thief, like a snare; when men are saying peace and safety. Therefore be patient and steadfast.

(3.) He may come soon.—Very soon. How soon we know not. These are the last days. The world is growing old; the night is falling down; the storm is rising. Be patient and steadfast.

(4.) He comes for blessing.—His Church is then to receive full blessing; Israel is then to be blessed; nay, and all earth is to be blessed. His coming is to be like the morning,—like rain upon the mown grass; and as the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruits of earth with patience, so are we. His coming is to bring with it both the early and the latter rain, nay, and the harvest too.

(5.) He comes for vengeance.—It is the day of vengeance. Then comes the iron rod, the 'glittering sword,' the earthquake, the lightning, the furious hail.

Vengeance on the ungodly, on these rich who have abused their riches; on all persecutors, all enemies of His Church. O enemy of Christ, what will then become of you? O hater of the Church, scoffer at religion, lover of the world, what will be your doom? 'Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?'

It was for a suffering time and an afflicted Church that this epistle was written. Thus the apostle speaks: 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptation' (or trial); 'Submit yourselves to God;' 'Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep;' 'Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord.'

To support and enforce these exhortations, he takes two instances from the Old Testament,—the one of simple suffering, viz, the prophets; the other of suffering issuing in deliverance, viz. Job. He bids us look at both.

I. The prophets.—They were not only men of like passions or feelings as we are, but subject to like sufferings, nay, greater. They were preeminently sufferers, endurers. They were 'examples of suffering affliction (maltreatment) and of patience' (long endurance or patience). Of them he speaks so specially in the next clause: 'We count these enduring ones blessed.'

(1.) They were prophets.—An honourable name; amongst the noblest of the noble in the sight of God; men full of the Spirit of God; peculiarly honoured of God.

(2.) They spoke in the name of the Lord.—It was 'the Spirit of the Lord (or of Christ) which was in them.' They spoke not their own words, but His; not by their own authority or power, but His; not concerning themselves, but Him. For this they were raised up.

(3.) They did the work of God.—For this end they were raised up and filled with the Spirit, that they might not only speak the words, but do the work of God, be His witnesses, lights in a dark world. They worked long, and well, and patiently, for Him who had so honoured them, by giving them His word to speak, and His work to do.

(4.) They were sore tried men (Hebrews 11:35, 38).—Very sore and various were their hardships, and sorrows, and persecutions. 'They were destitute,

afflicted, tormented.' Their character, their office, their work, their relation to God, and connection with His service, did not exempt them from suffering. They were like Paul, of whom it was said, 'I will show them bow great things they must suffer for My name's sake.' They were made to suffer the more, in some respects, at least, just because of what they were,—(1) that they might be disciplined in their own souls; (2) that they might be fitted for their work; (3) that they might speak experimentally, as men who had passed through human trials, and not been lifted out of them; (4) that they might not be exalted above measure, but kept low by the thorn in the flesh.

(5.) They were blessed men.—'We count them happy which endure;' 'Of them the world was not worthy.' They were sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; dying, yet living; persecuted, but not forsaken. God supplied all their need, and raised them above their sorrows. In their endurance there was blessedness. 'Blessed is the man that endureth trial,'—the man who is not only tried, but who bears up under it, or, perhaps, like the apostle, learns to 'glory in tribulations.'

Thus men in all ages and lands, who have been honoured to do much for God, have had to suffer for the honour. When setting out at first, perhaps they had no idea of this. It was God's work, and they thought it would all be pleasant. They did not then know what they had to pass through in order to keep them low, and to fit them for their work in the Church, or throughout the world. When we pray to be made useful, or holy, or successful, the issue will be all we have asked for; but the process may be sore and terrible to flesh and blood.

II. Job.—Let us mark here—

(1.) His character.—He was a good man, fearing God, shunning evil, upright in his ways. He was a prosperous, wealthy, good man, though with defects about him which it required the furnace to purge out.

(2.) His fame.—'Ye have heard' of him. Like 'the elders,' or worthies of the olden time, he had 'obtained a good report.' He was spoken of among men far and wide, not only as the greatest man of the East in his day, but as a suffering man.

(3.) His trial.—Take it for all in all, we shall see it to be one of the sorest and most terrible that ever fell on man. The first two chapters of the book of Job are

a brief record of unheard of and unequalled calamities of every kind, personal and domestic,—house, family, property, goods, health, all swept away.

(4.) His patience.—The word is more than 'patience;' it is patient endurance of heavy burdens and trials. He was a much-tried, much-enduring, and uncomplaining man. He calmly acquiesced in the dealing of God, disputing neither its wisdom nor its love. 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away;' 'Shall we receive good of the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?' 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.' In some we see the 'patient continuance in well doing;' in Job we have the patient endurance of sorrow.

(5.) His deliverance.—This was 'the end of the Lord,' or the issue which the Lord had in view from the beginning,—to deliver him out of all his troubles. In the case of many of the prophets of old, and the righteous men of subsequent times,—such as the martyrs,—there was no deliverance in this life: 'They loved not their lives to the death.' It was not light with them at evening time. Their sorrows ended only with their life. Not so with Job. God's purpose with him was different. It was to purge away his dross; to try him and bring him forth as gold; to lead him out of darkness into light; to make his latter days the most prosperous of his life.

(6.) His testimony to God.—The sum of that testimony was, that 'the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy.' This is the apostle's interpretation of Job's life. It was a testimony to the love of God. It showed that God afflicted not willingly; that He not only withdrew His hand as soon as the purpose of the trial was served, but poured out His love in blessing,—as if He would make up to His servant for his days of sorrow; as if He would recompense a hundred-fold of joy for all his sorrow. God's gracious character comes out very brightly from His treatment of Job. He saw he needed the furnace; He put him into the furnace, all the while watching over him in love till the refining process had done its work; and then there comes forth the overflowing outburst of His pitifulness and tender mercy. All is love; not anger, not indifference to the sorrow of His servant; but love, profound and paternal love,—love that passeth knowledge.

LXVII.

Human Despondency And Divine Encouragement

"Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are."—

James 5:17; 1 King 19:10-18.

Without dwelling on the words of the Apostle James regarding Elijah and the 'commonness of feeling' between us and him (ὁμοιοπαθής), we turn to one of those narratives out of which the statement of the apostle springs. Let us (though with reference to James 5:17) dwell at length on the narrative in First Kings regarding Elijah.

The place of the vision and conversation (recorded in the latter part of this 19th chapter) is Horeb.[10] We are carried back to Moses both by the scene and the utterances. As God and Moses met in this wild mountain face to face, so did God and Elijah. And we may notice in passing, that Moses and Elias are connected both with the mountain of the transfiguration and the mountain of the law. (Moses was buried and Elijah ascended from the same place.) And in the history of these two prophets we find the number forty curiously associated.

But it is with the interview between God and Elijah that we have at present to do. In the 14th verse we have the utterance of Elijah's feelings, and, in the 18th, the answer of God. In these we note the two following things:—

I. Human despondency.—All men have, more or less, their despondencies or depressions. 'I am desolate and afflicted,' said David. In like manner did Job and Jeremiah express themselves; and we can trace a similar feeling in several expressions of the Apostle Paul. But there is something peculiar in Elijah's case. Jonah and he are considerably alike, though there is much more that is noble and patriotic and unselfish in Elijah's feelings than in Jonah's. Elijah's despondency is not very unnatural, though it is without excuse. He did stand, and act, and speak very much alone, without any to lean on or sympathize with. He was fiercely opposed by kings and princes; the people did not side with him; his life was threatened; he was compelled to flee; his prophetic work seemed a failure,

in so far as bringing back Israel was concerned. He appeared to have accomplished nothing, and now he was flying for his life into the wilderness. His faith failed him; his equanimity gave way; he wished himself dead. Not that he doubted his sonship. With Bible saints a doubt as to that was impossible. It would have implied doubts as to the very being and word of Jehovah. But he had sunk down into the lowest spirits, and everything seemed dark around him. He had been most wonderfully owned of God; clothed with superhuman power and authority; enabled to do most amazing miracles. He had confronted kings, and captains, and priests. Yet now he sinks low. Jezebel's threats and her pursuit of him had unmanned and unnerved him, nay, had almost destroyed his faith. Ah, truly, he was a man subject to like passions as we are; and there is something almost peevish as well as profane in the way he seems to reproach God for not having done greater things by him: 'I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts. The children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away.' Elijah, the man of faith, and prayer, and power, had given way. Unbelief for the time triumphs, and has made everything look black. There is weakness, cowardice, despair, pride, self-esteem. He has become weak as the weakest of us. We are thankful for this. We see him at our side, down to our level, this lofty and unapproachable saint. This eagle of Gilead has fallen, maimed and broken, at our feet. An arrow from the evil one has pierced him. We do not triumph over him: we are stirred with profound sympathy; yet we are comforted. He is a man of like passions, like unbelief, subject to fits of depression like our selves. Let us be warned, however, and beware of such things as the following:—

(1) Of self-importance; (2) of impatience; (3) of exaggerating evils; (4) of looking only at the dark side of providences; (5) of ingratitude to God; (6) of misjudgment of others; (7) of unbelief; (8) of hasty views; (9) of writing bitter things either against ourselves or others. The root of all these evils is the unbelieving heart departing from God.

II. Divine encouragement.—God upbraideth not. No word of reproof for his dejection and unbelief. The Lord pities His servant too much to speak of these. He at once proceeds to deal with him on the same familiar and honourable footing as before. He indicates no want of confidence in His dejected and complaining prophet, but entrusts him at once with a new errand; and then utters

the cheering words of our text, 'Yet I have left seven thousand men in Israel.' Elijah's eye, dimmed and disturbed by unbelief, saw no worshipper of Jehovah but himself; he thought he was alone. God removed the dimness, drew aside 'the curtain, and showed him seven thousand! What a glorious revelation! What a rebuke to his despondency! It needed but the brushing away the clouds of unbelief and lo, there sparkled out seven thousand stars! Elijah was far wrong, though a prophet. He interpreted the age and the land by his own sad feelings, and he thought that God had forsaken Israel. And yet the day was a dark one, and the land given over to idolatry; for what was seven thousand to the whole nation? But oh the grace, the pity, the tenderness, the patience of Jehovah, in this dealing with His sorrowful servant! Yes, the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy. His thoughts are not ours, His ways are not ours. Oh, let us never wrong Him by an evil thought or dark suspicion; nor think, when we do go wrong, that He must punish before He restores.

Let us here learn such lessons as the following; for the words suit us well in these last days:—

(1.) God sees not as man sees.—Some things He sees worse than man does,—much worse; others He sees better. Man looks at the outward appearance whether for good or ill; the Lord looketh at the heart. He never wrongs, nor misjudges, nor misunderstands, nor makes a man worse than he is. God's judgments are not so harsh as man's. He hates evil, yet He deals graciously with the evil doer; He does not upbraid, nor cast off the backslider, or inconsistent saint. He is exceeding charitable, and thinketh no evil. He takes the most favorable view of every case that can be taken.

(2.) God finds Christians in unexpected places.—Man searches in vain. Even a prophet sees nothing. An Elijah traverses the whole land, and says there is not a believing man to be found. God says, I see seven thousand! A few in this village, a few in that. One in this hut among the mountains, another in the dreary desert. No light comes from them to you; but I see the hidden light, and I own it.

(3.) God is satisfied with even very little faith and knowledge.—'He has compassion on the ignorant.' As in Philadelphia He accepted the 'little strength,' so here. 'He that is not against us is for us.' These true Israelites could not have been very bright, else seven thousand would have made themselves seen. They

burned very dimly, yet God recognized them. He does not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. He hears the secret sigh, the low breathing, the upturned eye. 'I heard (no one else, perhaps) Ephraim bemoaning himself.' The feeblest cry of the helpless, or of the little child, He hears,—all the more for their feebleness, as it is the weak, low voice of his sick child that touches a father's heart.

God accepts the very least measure of faith and prayer. It does not need violence, nor loudness, nor length. The feeble groan will do. The simple desire will do. The low breathing will do. How often He seems to speak as if He would accept any who did not positively reject Him! For it is the blood on the mercy seat that gives efficacy to these low faint cries of the weak and needy, the whispers of the weary soul. As God loves to speak to us in His still small voice, so He loves to hear our still small voice. It is the fragrance of the priestly incense that makes the very poorest of these sighings so sweet to God, that He cannot turn away nor refuse.

(4.) God accepts very unlikely persons.—Not many wise, nor noble, nor great, but the poor, the obscure, the babes. And some of those characters recorded as so abundantly blessed by Him do not bear the features which would have attracted us,—such as Jacob, or Samson, or Gideon, or Rahab, or Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite. Rough saints these were of old. Yet, as believing men, God owns them as His, and deals with them as such. Who more repulsive than Jacob? yet who gets so many visions and revelations, and, in the end, so many blessings?

What a rebuke to censoriousness is all this! Let us beware of sitting in judgment on others, or pronouncing them no Christians, because not cast in our mold, nor able to pronounce our shibboleth. Let us be just to the age we live in, and the men among whom we live.

What encouragement to the weak! 'God is mighty, yet despiseth not any.' He is merciful and gracious; very pitiful and patient, listening for the faintest cry or moan that comes up to Him from earth. Let none be discouraged; let none distrust; let none think themselves overlooked by God. He is quick to hear and to recognize the cry of a sinner, however low and broken. He did chasten Jacob; but, instead of punishing before He restored and blessed him, He restored and blessed him before He punished.

These marvelous visions came immediately on the back of his sins. The publican said very little: 'Be merciful to me.' God heard and blessed. The thief said merely, 'Lord, remember me!' How simple, how easy, how suitable, how blessed! 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'

LXVIII.

The God And Father Of Our Lord Jesus Christ

"Blessed be the God and Father of our 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, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time."—

1 Peter 1:3-5.

Let us take up here, first, the praise, and, secondly, the grounds for it.

I. The praise.—To say that it is praise to God would be to say the truth; and yet it would only be a part of the truth embodied in the words of our text. It is a peculiar kind of praise, and it is addressed to God under a peculiar name.

(1.) It is peculiar praise.—Its peculiarity is brought out by the word 'blessed.' It signifies 'well spoken of.' Here we have a definition of praise. It is a speaking well of God; and this as the effect of what we see in God. But before we can speak well of Him, we must first think well of Him; and this no man by nature does. The evil that is in us shows itself specially in thinking ill of God, in misrepresenting Him, in not doing Him justice. These evil thoughts, this bad opinion of God, must be removed before we can speak well of Him. For he who speaks well of God, while in his heart he is thinking ill of Him, is uttering an insincerity, a hypocrisy. The remover of these evil thoughts is the Holy Ghost; for it takes almightiness to do the thing. He does it by revealing the Father in Christ; by revealing the cross of Christ; by showing us the love of God; by holding out a righteous pardon through the propitiation of the cross.

(2.) There is a peculiar name employed.—It is not God or Lord; it is not our God and Lord. It is something higher and more comprehensive than these. It is not these, and yet it includes them, along with much. It is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is this relationship that calls forth his adoration and praise. He sees Him as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; His Father and our Father, His God and our God. As with Paul (Ephesians 1:3), so here.

Has this relationship to Christ ever been the theme of our praise? It is not the theme of the world's praise. Men praise the God of nature, or the God of providence,— some great and invisible Being, they know not what. But they praise not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This aspect of His character never attracts their eye, nor elevates their thoughts, nor calls forth love or adoration.

There is large variety in the inspired utterances of praise: 'Praise ye Jehovah;' 'Glory to God;' 'Unto Him that loved us,' etc.; 'Blessing, honour, praise, to Him that sitteth on the throne.' But here there is something more, something peculiar,—something which takes in the cross; which sees the Father in the Son, and magnifies the Son in glorifying the Father. Thus faith's eye takes in the whole character of God as our redeeming God, and strikes the highest note of praise.

II. The grounds for this praise, or well-speaking.—These are contained in the words which follow. Let us take them thus:

(1.) The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.—This resurrection is the great repository of power and treasure house of blessing; or, taking it in another aspect, it was the throwing open the gates of divine power and blessing for the benefit of the sinner. In Christ's grave this fullness was deposited, and the resurrection brought it forth. In that event we have righteous power and righteous blessing for sinful men. Yes, the power of God is there,— power greater and more peculiar than creative,—the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead is purchased and engaged for us. It is with a risen Christ that we have to do,—a Christ in His full strength; for, though crucified through weakness, He liveth by the power of God. It is a risen Christ we preach. And if such virtue went forth from Him when on earth, before He died or rose, what must be the virtue going forth now from Him as the risen One!

(2.) The re-begetting.—This corresponds with our Lord's affirmation regarding the new, or second, or heavenly birth; also regarding our becoming sons of God, and being born not of man's will, but of God's; also to James' words, 'Of His own will begat He us;' and Peter's own words at the close of this chapter. It is this divine rebegetting that is the root of all privilege and blessing,—the one true beginning of all true religion. For the beginning of religion is deeper than most imagine. Not a few earnest thoughts, or good resolves, or tears, or prayers, or

terrors, far less the performance of ecclesiastical rites, but a being begotten again. What a condemnation of superficial religion! Was it thus, O man, that your religion began? And was this re-begetting in connection with Christ's resurrection?

(3.) The abundant mercy.—It is the 'mercy' of God that is the eternal source of all a sinner's blessing. And this mercy is 'abundant,' or, literally, 'much,'—a simple but mighty word; for all God's great things and words are simple. Mercy is pity, or goodwill, or love to the miserable, as grace is to the undeserving. It is to this much or large mercy that the apostle traces all that we receive. Every stream of blessing rises in this.

(4.) The lively (or living) hope.—Hope respects future blessing. It is founded on faith. It is a certainty, not a contingency or a possibility; it is sure and steadfast, and is the anchor of the soul, because it is so sure.

There are dead hopes, and there are vain hopes; but this is a living one; it is life giving. It speaks of life, and it communicates life; it quickens the soul. Other hopes do nothing for us, save casting on us a few gleams of broken sunshine; this quickens and animates. It is all life and no death; a living hope, full of immortality and glory.

LXIX.

The Graciousness Of The Lord Jesus

"If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious."—

1 Peter 2:3.

The word 'if so be' does not imply uncertainty as to this tasting, as if it were still a doubtful thing to a believing man whether he had tasted that the Lord was gracious, or, indeed, whether He were gracious at all. It means rather, 'since ye have tasted;' and assumes this as the beginning of their religious life, their Christian history.

The following points will bring out all this: (1) The Lord; (2) His graciousness; (3) our tasting of this graciousness; (4) the effects produced on us by this.

I. The Lord.—It is the Lord Jesus. This is the common name for Him throughout the epistles. It is a name of honour and glory. In heaven His name is the Lamb; for there is no danger of His being denied His honour there: on earth it is the Lord, to keep before us His dignity and power. He is the Lord as truly as the Saviour. His graciousness, which we taste, is the graciousness of the Lord,—the Lord of all,—Lord of lords.

II. His graciousness.—It is His love, His tender love, or tender mercies to the sinner, that are here spoken of. He is gracious, compassionate, loving, merciful, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. We know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We see His graciousness in His incarnation; in His words and deeds of grace; in His cross and grave. All that He did, spoke, suffered on earth, were declarations and proofs of His grace. He is full of grace and truth. This is His character. We do not need to touch the question, of whom this graciousness concerns; for it is of the gracious One and His character simply that the text speaks. What He is in Himself is the great question. He is the infinitely gracious One. This graciousness is free, infinite, unchangeable. This is the vessel of fullness out of which we drink. God is love; Christ is gracious; this is the core of the gospel.

III. Our tasting it.—The word 'tasting' is used in Scripture both as to the evil and the good, the bitter and the sweet. Death is said to be 'tasted,' and so is the word of God; and so here is the graciousness of Christ. It means our thorough entering into the nature and properties of an object, whatever that may be. 'Taste and see that the Lord is good.' We taste that the Lord is gracious when we relish and enjoy Him and His grace. This tasting is not something mysterious or unintelligible: it is the soul's appreciation of the love of Christ, in the reception of the record concerning Him. We feel our need, our poverty, our sin; and we feel in Christ something which precisely meets all these. We drink in the good news as the thirsty man drinks the water; we feed on them as the hungry man does on the bread; we relish them as the tongue the sweetness of the honeycomb. Christ is realized as precious, suitable, sufficient specially in His grace, His free love. This is dearer to us than gold, sweeter than honey or the honeycomb.

IV. The effects of this.—These are many, not one. This graciousness of the

Lord thus filling us, and enjoyed by us, produces wonderful results in the soul.

(1.) It is life to us.—Its quickening effects are marvelous. It rouses us from depression and death, infusing heavenly life. Every feature of Christ is in its measure and way quickening, but specially His grace; for this is, above all others, that which a dead soul needs. (2.) It is gladness to us.—No grace, no gladness; uncertain grace, uncertain gladness; scanty grace, scanty gladness. That there is such a thing as grace in God is of itself cheering; that it has come down to us here on earth is yet more so; that it has done so through such a channel as the Son of God,—that this Son of God is Himself infinitely gracious, — this is glad tidings to a sinner.

(3.) It is liberty to us.—No grace, no liberty; no knowledge of grace, no sense of liberty; uncertain grace, uncertain liberty. But this grace, so free, so sure, so boundless, is the breaking of all bonds. It sets the soul wholly and forever free. The sight of such grace as there is in this gracious One is deliverance from bondage and fear.

(4.) It is holiness.—It makes us holy men. We are not holy before we taste the grace, but become so by tasting it. It sanctifies, purifies, conforms us to the likeness of the gracious One. It leads us to lay aside all malice and all guile, and to desire the pure milk of the word. This is the result of the good news received, of the grace tasted. It transforms us into new men, according to the nature of that heavenly thing which we have tasted. The more and the longer we taste it, the more are we purified by it. It operates powerfully and gloriously. It is like sunrise chasing away the night; it is like the early and latter rain, fertilizing and refreshing the ground, making the wilderness and the solitary place to be glad, and the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose.

LXX.

The Precious Stone And Its Virtues

"Unto you which believe, He is precious."—

1 Peter 2:7.

It is of the 'stone laid in Zion' (verse 6) that the apostle is here speaking. It is the 'chief cornerstone,' it is 'elect,' it is 'precious,' although those who ought to have known best its qualities (the builders) rejected it, treating it not as precious, but as vile and useless. The testimony of the Holy Ghost to us, both by His prophet and His apostle, is that this stone is precious. Such is God's estimate of its value. And that one simple word 'precious,' used by Him who does not exaggerate or embellish, conveys more than a hundred epithets, or descriptions set forth in what man calls 'strong' language. God's words are simple, and therefore great; great, and therefore simple; often conveying less than is covered by them, never more. For how can the thoughts of God be fully uttered in the poor speech of man?

Perhaps our text might be better rendered, 'To you appertains this preciousness, —to you who believe.' This is the literal sense and order of the words; and their object is to show us how precious is this precious stone, and how it becomes ours.

I. Its preciousness.—The temple of old contained within it all manner of precious things; the new Jerusalem is described as composed of every precious thing in the universe. But this one precious stone contains in its composition infinitely more precious things than all of these together. The twelve precious stones of the heavenly city would not make up one single grain or atom in the composition of this precious stone. All that is divinely precious is here, and all that is humanly precious is here. Beauty, wealth, and life, are all contained in it, and represented by it. All divine excellency, and all human excellency is here. It is the choicest piece of God's workmanship that has been, that is, that shall be. This is God's estimate of its value, and utility, and beauty. It is precious in itself; it is precious in what it accomplishes. It is a living stone, and it possesses

quicken power. It is fair and glorious; and it possesses the power of communicating its glory, so as to cover all that is uncomely in those who take it. It has comeliness enough to absorb all the uncomeliness of those who identify themselves with it. It is the perfection of preciousness in God's sight; so that, on account of its surpassing excellence, God is willing to show favor to the unworthiest,—nay, to ascribe to them the excellency which belongs to the precious stone itself. There is nothing else in heaven above, or earth beneath, which possesses such an amount of value, such a superfluity of preciousness, as to be capable of enriching and beautifying the whole universe, without any diminution of its own luster, and without the possibility of any failure or drying up throughout eternity. This preciousness is (1) inherent; (2) infinite; (3) unchangeable; (4) communicative, i.e. capable of being imparted.

II. The way of possessing this preciousness.—By believing God's testimony concerning it. 'Yours is all this preciousness (God says to the sinner) as soon as you believe.' We do not buy it, or work for it, or pray for it, or earn it; we get it simply in believing what God says about it. For this believing is no dark or mysterious process, no peculiar or profound exercise of mind, which requires for its attainment either great intellect or prolonged effort. It is the simplest of all simple things; one of those acts of mind which can scarcely be called an act, on account of its perfect simplicity,—a simplicity which makes it as much within the reach of a child as of an adult; as much within the reach of the weakest as of the highest intellect. As a little child in Israel could see the bullock which his father offered upon the altar, and know that the offering of that bullock was enough; so a sinner, whether young or old, knowing that the great burnt-offering has been presented and accepted, rests in the knowledge of this fact; for it is the one great fact, not our way of knowing it, that brings salvation. How many perplex themselves here, and bewilder their minds with metaphysical intricacies as to the nature and component parts of faith, supposing that it is by the getting up of a peculiar kind of faith that they became connected with the great salvation, and not by the simple reception of the divine testimony to the Son of God,—thus extracting salvation not out of the thing believed, but out of their own faith!

But the preciousness of Christ needs no addition to make it available for the sinner; and our faith is not the completion of that preciousness, but its recognition. We acknowledge the preciousness, upon the authority of God, and

are thereby saved, however poor and defective our faith may be. No amount of sin in us can neutralize the value of this precious stone laid in Zion; and no imperfection in our faith can repel that preciousness, and hinder it from saving us. That preciousness stands forever; and it is upon it that God acts in dealing with us, and not upon the excellency of our way of apprehending it. We may be the chief of sinners; we may have hardened ourselves in sin for a lifetime; we may have gone back into sin again and again; our hearts may be cold and hard; our prayers may be very heartless; our faith may be miserably defective; our appreciation of Christ may be small indeed; but if we are still willing to be treated by God on the footing of the great preciousness of the precious stone, all is well. That preciousness avails for us. Nothing can alter its value, or its suitableness, or its availableness. It stands forever in its glorious excellency, undimmed and undiminished, still able as at the first to compensate for all want of preciousness in us, nay, to communicate its own divine preciousness to the most worthless of the sons of men. We know, perhaps, but little of its ineffable value in the eyes of God; its excellency we have but poorly appreciated, and this may hinder our enjoyment of that value and excellency; but not the less is that preciousness imputed to us by God, and not the less are we warranted in looking on ourselves as treated by God according to His estimate of that preciousness.

In giving credit to God's testimony to the person and work of His Son, we are saved. The crediting saves us, or rather, we should say, the thing credited; for, in believing, we do not rest on any act performed by us, but solely on the great object of all such acts. We are not saved by consciousness, or by feeling, or by experience, but by faith. We may not always have the sense of pardon, or the peace which flows from believing; but this does not alter the preciousness of that which saves us, and therefore does not make void our security, though we may not be sensible of how secure we are. To be saved, by believing is one thing, and to have peace in believing is another. They ought to go together, but they do not always do so. We often separate them, and think that because we have not the latter, we cannot have the former, instead of remembering that no want of peace can interfere with our safety; for the safety rests on the preciousness itself (which is unchangeable), and the peace comes from that which we consciously realize in it. The paschal blood secured Israel's safety,—a safety with which doubting, and trembling, and darkness, could not interfere. Their safety was one thing; their peace was another.

LXXI.

Apostolic Intercession

"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you."—

1 Peter 5:10.

What a prayer is this! How brief, yet full! He who gets the contents of this verse poured into him gets all he needs. Mark,—

I. The name of our God.—'The God of all grace.' Not only is He the gracious God, but emphatically He is the God of grace, nay, the God of all grace. Nothing that can come under the name of grace but is to be found in Him. Grace, manifold grace, riches of grace, exceeding riches of grace, all grace; such is the way in which grace or free love is connected with God,—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who loved the world, and gave His Son, is the God with whom we have to do,—the God of all grace. To such a God how welcome is the returning sinner! In such a God how calmly and simply His believing ones may rest!

II. Our calling.—His voice was first, not ours. He spoke to us ere we spoke to Him. He called us, as Jesus did His disciples at the Sea of Galilee, or Zaccheus on the sycamore tree. Yes, God began with us ere we began with God; so that, if any doubting spirit, crying to God, asks, Will God hear me? we can answer, What do you mean? Do you not know that God Himself stirred up that cry of yours; and will He reject a soul whom He has thus roused up to pray? He calls; and He calls with resistless, though unperceived power. He calls to glory, to His glory, to His eternal glory. Such is His calling; and His calling prevails. He calls, and we obey. Follow me to the cross, said the Master; Follow me also to the crown, said He once and again.

III. The channel.—By Christ Jesus. It is through Him that the calling comes, and is made effectual; through Him the way is prepared, the new and living way; through Him the glory is purchased; and through Him we are conducted to

the glory. Without Him glory was impossible, the kingdom inaccessible to the sinner. He opens the gate; He quenches the flaming sword; He rends the veil; He sprinkles the blood; He leads in the sinner, and places him in the holiest of all, beneath the brightness of the glory. With that glory the love and blood of Jesus are inseparably connected. To Him it is that we owe it all. Hence we sing, 'Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father.'

IV. The present discipline.—We are to 'suffer a while,' or more fully, 'a little while,' or perhaps simply, 'a little,' referring not to the time, but to the affliction, as Paul does when he speaks of 'our light affliction.' Yet though in one sense it is light and short, in another it is heavy and long. Nor can we fail to feel it so, though the prospect of the 'exceeding and eternal weight of glory' lightens it, and cheers us under it, as the prospect of home makes the way seem short and smooth to the returning exile. Yet, lighter or heavier, it is still 'discipline,' chastisement,' 'rebuke,' 'scourging.' Nor can it be spared. We could not do without it; and ere long we shall find this. Meanwhile let us try to understand the daily discipline, and use it faithfully and honestly; or, if we cannot fully interpret it, let us commend ourselves implicitly to the Chastener, assured that He will bring His own end out of it, whether we can see it or not. For this suffering, though hard for feeble flesh, is from the God of all grace, nay, from Him who hath called us to glory. Let us then connect the discipline with the 'grace,' and the 'calling,' and the 'glory.' The rod is perfect, the time the fittest, and the hand that administers is that of wisdom, and truth, and love. No chance stroke, no mistake, no fury, no angry haste. All is calmness, tenderness, patience, as profound and perfect as they are divine. Such has been God's dealing with His saints since the days of Abel. Such has been the Church's lot from the beginning. It is no strange thing that is happening to us in these last days. A suffering Church is that by which God is glorified. A suffering Church is that which affords such endless opportunities for the gracious interposition of the Comforter, half of whose love and fellowship would be unknown to us, were it not for our days and nights of sorrow. Suffering sanctifies and purifies; suffering molds the character; suffering makes the will pliant; suffering makes the closet a refuge, a sanctuary, and a home.

V. The results.—'Make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.' These results are all directly from the God of all grace. It is He Himself (αὐτός) who

does it all, from first to last. In His mighty power He works. By His irresistible touch He molds us. He entrusts our restoration and complete renewal to none but Himself. None but a divine sculptor could so model, and chisel, and polish the earthly marble, as to bring out of its roughness and discolored deformity a statue complete in every feature, after the image of the incarnate Word Himself. In the hands of such a Master there can be no possibility of failure. He uses strange and unlikely instruments, yet the result is divine and eternal perfection. These results he sums up under four heads:—

(1.) Make you perfect (καταρτίσαι).—The perfection here is the full restoration, the complete equipment, the removal of all defects. The result aimed at by God in all discipline is perfection,—nothing short of this. We hinder the process, and make it much slower than it would have been; but still it goes on and on, till God perfects that which concerns us; till we reach the measure of the stature of a perfect man in Christ, standing perfect and complete in all the will of God.

(2.) Stablish you (στηρίξαι).—The word means to fix firmly, set fast, make steadfast (Luke 22:32, 'Strengthen thy brethren;' Luke 9:51, 'He set His face steadfastly'). Trial gives us ballast and fixedness; it delivers us from changeableness and caprice, and love of novelty; it keeps us from being carried about with every wind of doctrine. The untried are generally unstable.

(3.) Strengthen you (σθενώσαι).—Internal invigoration and power are here indicated. That which seems at first to weaken ends in strengthening us; imparting energy and strength to mind, and will, and feeling; removing softness and feebleness; communicating that robustness to our spiritual constitution which makes us capable of enduring hardness and braving peril.

(4.) Settle you (θεελιώσαι).—The 'settling' refers to the foundationstone, and our firm fastening to it, making us thereby steadfast and immoveable, rooted and grounded in love (Ephesians 3:17), grounded in the faith (Colossians 1:23), and not carried about with every wind of doctrine.

Such are some of the results of the divine discipline. It sanctifies, ennobles, consolidates, and invigorates. It gives dignity, and weight, and influence to our Christian character. It makes our roots strike deeper, while it sends up our branches higher and wider, loading them with well-ripened and heavenly fruit.

LXXII.

The Abundant Entrance

"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."—

2 Peter 1:10, 11.

'Forward' is the Christian's battle-cry. Progress is to be his aim. His life is to be one of advancement and thorough earnestness. He is saved that he may work, and that he may win. The barrenness, the lack of graces, the blindness, the shortsightedness, the forgetting that he was purged from his old sins, to which the apostle refers, are totally unbecoming his profession and name. He was called to something very different,—not to go back or remain on his first level, but to rise higher and higher. Then, in the 10th and 11th verses we have such truths as these,—

I. The summons to earnestness.—'Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.' Every word here has meaning. 'Wherefore,'—that is, seeing such are your snares and dangers. 'The rather,'—that is, instead of going back or remaining barren, do the opposite; start right on in the onward and upward course. 'Give diligence,'—that is, rouse yourselves to earnestness and zeal. 'To make your calling and election sure,'—that is, to confirm what you already possess; not to strive after something unknown and uncertain, but to carry on to the end the certainty with which you have begun. Ye have been called. Confirm your calling by bringing forth its fruits. Ye have been chosen. Confirm your election by like fruits. See how the apostle sets 'calling' at the beginning of a saint's course,—1 Corinthians 1:26; Ephesians 1:18; 2 Timothy 1:9; and election as the great source of all,—Romans 11:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:4. Thus it is that the calling and the choosing are assumed as past and ascertained; and just because they are so we are exhorted to hold them firm. Our calling took place at our believing. Then we were 'apprehended of Christ;' and this calling was the result of our having been chosen of the Father. When we believed, these were brought out as truths or facts which our after life

was to make good. In verifying and exhibiting these we are to 'give diligence,'—that is, (1) to lose no time; (2) to spare no effort; (3.) to grudge no sacrifice. The thing itself is far too momentous, its issues too vast and infinite, to trifle with. No room for sloth or ease, or delay or heedlessness. In all this what a rebuke,—

(1.) To the hollow religion of the present day!—In how many cases do we find a mere externalism; all within hollow,—a shell without a kernel; a body without a soul; a temple without a worshipper or a living voice; all hollow,—mere air and emptiness, or, at best, heartless sounds and echoes; religious machinery kept going either by an uneasy conscience or by the desire of a good name!

But this hollow religion benefits no one; it fills no soul; it comforts and gladdens none.

(2.) To the easy-minded religion of the day!—Superficial, easy, often light and flippant, is the style of religious feeling and talk among many. Words, forms, bustle,—these make up religion with multitudes: a religion easily acquired and put on, easily carried out; without struggles and conflicts; without fire and fervor; without sacrifices and self-denial; a religion of ease, levity, selfishness, compromise; a religion of velvet, not of sackcloth; little prayer; no strong crying and tears; no 'O wretched man that I am!' no selfconsecration, and no solemnity; poor and second-rate; without decision, or daring, or influence.

(3.) To the uncertain religion of the day!—For how much of religion amongst us is only a groping after the light, not a walking in it! and, being so, its possessors are heartless and feeble-minded, not knowing whose they are and whom they serve.

II. The promise of steadfastness.—'If ye do these things (verse 5 and 6), ye shall never fall.' Our pressing forward will prevent our falling. Progress alone can keep us erect. If we try to stand still, we fall. Press forward, and we shall stand. God will, no doubt, keep His chosen ones secure; none shall pluck them out of His hand. Yet not on that account are they the less exposed to subtle snares and fierce assaults. God's secret purpose is not their rule, nor is it to enter into their calculation as a reason for exposing themselves to peril. God will keep us, but He does so by keeping us advancing. We shall often be on the point of falling; we shall meet with many things tending to overthrow us; but 'if we do

these things, we shall never fall.' The word is more properly 'stumble' (Romans 11:2; James 2:10, 3:2). Learn, then, (1) God's desire and purpose concerning us, viz, that we should never fall; (2) God's means for this, viz, pressing on in holiness and good works; (3) God's warning to us, viz. 'If ye do not do these things, ye shall fall.' Our danger of stumbling or falling is great. Our course is that of a wheel set in motion,—nothing but rapidity and continuousness of motion can keep it from falling. The moment we begin to say, 'I am rich,' we are on the point of stumbling. Let us forget the things behind, and press on to what lies before.

III. The glorious recompense.—'So the entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' Here we are kept from falling; hereafter we shall inherit the kingdom. Let us consider, then, these eternal results,—the rewards to the victor, to him who reaches the goal. For the promises are all 'to him that overcometh.'

(1.) The kingdom.—It is not merely pardon and deliverance, it is a kingdom and an inheritance that are set before us. We are kings and priests now; the actual reigning will come ere long. It is on Christ's throne that we are to sit; it is Christ's crown that we are to wear. We are heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. The kingdom is everlasting; it cannot be moved. Unlike the vanishing monarchies of earth, it stands forever.

(2.) The entrance.—The right of entrance is secured to us now, on believing God's testimony to Christ; the actual entrance is when Christ returns. Our right of entrance connects itself with Christ's first coming, our actual entrance with His second. He comes with His many crowns to share them with his Church.

(3.) The abundant entrance.—It is not bare admission; it is not the being 'saved so as by fire.' It is beyond all these. It is like a vessel entering the harbor full sail and with all its colors flying, not broken, torn, and half a wreck. It is like a king coming in royal array, with his splendid retinue; not a stranger, unknown, suspected, and only admitted after examination of his passport.

(4.) The ministration of the entrance.—The word minister is the same as in the 5th verse: 'As ye add (or minister) grace to grace, so shall the Lord add (or minister) to you the entrance into the kingdom.' It is God Himself who ministers

the entrance, who throws wide open the gates, who gives the full and blessed welcome, the exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The entrance depends on our being found in Christ; the abundance of it, on our progress and fruit here. Barrenness and unfruitfulness will mar the entrance; it will not keep us out, but it will diminish the weight and glory of our crown.

Let us aim high. Let us press forward. It is for a kingdom. Let us not sleep, nor loiter, nor be barren, nor be useless Christians. Let us mount up, add grace to grace, that, when the Lord comes, we may have an abundant entrance.

LXXIII.

The Majesty Of The Christ Of God

"Eye-witnesses of His majesty."—

2 Peter 1:16.

'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' We do not see the things that Peter saw in the way in which he saw them,—yet we see them. We do not hear what Peter heard in the way in which Peter heard,—yet we do hear. We see through Peter's eyes; we hear through Peter's ears; we touch with Peter's hands. And though this is not all that we shall one day realize, yet let us remember that 'blessed is he that hath not seen, and yet hath believed;' and that there is such a thing as 'seeing Him who is invisible,'—for a Christian is one who, according to Peter, 'sees afar off' (2 Peter 1:9). He sees what eye hath not seen.

Peter was the eye witness of His majesty; and not on the transfiguration mount alone, but in many a place, for many a day. He could say with John, 'We beheld His glory.' He was one of those who 'were glad when they saw the Lord.' Let us then look through Peter's eyes, and see what is to be seen in Jesus, of majesty, or glorious excellency. It is the majesty of love and grace, as well as of grandeur and of power.

I. The majesty of the Word made flesh.—It is the majesty both of the divine and the human, the united majesty of the two perfect natures,— perfect Godhead, perfect manhood; the majesty of the person of the God-man, in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell. Christ's person contains in it more of majesty than the whole universe together, visible or invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers. There is nothing like it for glory and for beauty, for perfection and for excellency, for dignity, and nobleness, and royal splendor. He is the chief among ten thousand. And it is this glorious beauty of which the Psalmist speaks when 'inditing the good matter,' and when he says, 'Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O most Mighty, with Thy glory and Thy majesty, and in Thy majesty ride prosperously.' It is His majesty

that Daniel describes, when he saw Him 'girded with the fine gold of Uphaz; His body like the beryl, His face as lightning, His eyes as lamps of fire, and the voice of His words as the voice of a multitude' (Daniel 10:5 also Revelation 1:14, 15). It is the majesty both of glory and of love. Blessed are they whose eyes thus see the King in His beauty!

II. The majesty of the Father's Servant.—He came 'not to be ministered unto, but to minister.' As 'the Servant' He went about on earth, doing the Father's will; serving the Father and serving us. 'I am among you as He that serveth.' In doing, in speaking, in suffering, He was the servant still; and in all His varied acts of service there was majesty as well as love. His was wondrous service,—the service of the holy to the unholy. Never before had the Father been so served; nor man so served. What majesty in His daily walk; in His words of grace; in His miracles of love; in His washing His disciples' feet; in His intercourse with publicans and sinners! Never had there been service so humble, so lowly, so loving, so gentle; yet never any so full of majesty. He stooped, yet it was the stooping of majesty. He opened eyes, He cleansed lepers, He fed the hungry, He raised the dead, He forgave sin, He took the little ones in His arms, all in majesty,—majesty which, while it repelled none, yet allowed no freedom, no irreverence; altogether affable, yet full of divine dignity. It was the majesty of one who was far above men and angels, yet had come down and taken the lowest place, that He might serve all and bless all, and win all to Himself. Love shines throughout, the love of Him who came to seek and save the lost.

III. The majesty of the crucified Christ.—On the cross His majesty shines forth in circumstances of weakness and shame. The cross seemed no place for majesty, yet it burst forth there; it was no throne of glory, yet glory was there; and the spectacle was one of the most glorious ever seen. Never before had sorrow been so clothed with majesty, nor death so compassed about with greatness. His seven cries upon the cross were the utterances of majesty. The nails, the spear, the thorns, the purple robe; the agony, the thirst, the blood,—all proclaimed His majesty. It was seeming weakness, but real strength; seeming shame, but real glory; seeming defeat, yet real victory. He hung there as the Sinbearer; and in that sin-bearing, in that sacrifice, in that offering up of Himself to purge our sins, what majesty! At His table we commemorate His great work of expiation; and in the very simplicity of the elements the majesty shines forth. The bread and wine are common things, small and contemptible to man; yet to

the eye that sees through them and comprehends their mighty import, their wondrous sacramental symbolism, what majesty! Yet is it still the majesty of love,—the love of Him who gave His flesh for the life of the world.

IV. The majesty of the risen Son of God.—By the resurrection He was declared to be the Son of God with power (Romans 1:4). He was crucified through weakness, but He 'lived,' or rose again, by the power of God. In the cross and tomb weakness was intermingled with strength; but in the resurrection it is all strength, all glory, all majesty, without any intermingling element of weakness, or shame, or meanness. In resurrection He was reclothing Himself with the brightness and power which had been in abeyance during the days of His flesh. From that first day of the week when He rose from the dead, there was a continual ascent up to the glory which He had with the Father before the foundation of the world, and on to the triumphant splendor of His second coming. Now He is clothed with majesty, He is girded with strength, He has put on glory. Resurrection has been to Him transfiguration. His humiliation is at an end. His ineffable greatness, His divine grandeur, may no more be hidden. He comes forth from the grave like the new risen sun: night, and shade, and veil all left behind. He is risen! This is our message; and it proclaims not only majesty, but love,—the love of Him who died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord of the dead and of the living.

V. The majesty of the ascended and interceding High Priest.—In love He descended, veiling His glory; in love He ascends, revealing that glory. The attitude of blessing in which He parted from His disciple was the attitude of majesty; His reception into the cloud, or 'shekinah-glory,' proclaimed the majesty. His entrance into heaven, leading captivity captive, exhibited it yet more. His intercession, which followed upon that ascension, is the present great exhibition of majesty. We see Jesus, the great High Priest, as the Advocate and Intercessor; and in His discharge of that office we have the revelation of His heavenly majesty. And it is still the majesty of love. It is an intercession as gracious as it is glorious and divine,— the intercession of Him of whom it is written, 'If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.'

VI. The majesty of the coming King.—The full display of His majesty has not yet come. Now we see not yet all things put under Him. He wears the crown

of heaven, but He has not yet put on the crown of earth. When He returns, then shall His full glory be revealed, and His royal majesty appear. We shall see Him face to face; we shall see Him as He is, and be like Him. Then we shall not know Him simply upon the report of another, but for ourselves. We shall not see Him with another's eyes, or hear with another's ears; we shall be 'eye-witnesses of His majesty.' When that which is perfect is come, that which is imperfect shall be done away; 'for now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now we know in part, but then shall we know even as also we are known.' Even now we know that we have not followed cunningly devised fables; but then sight shall be added to faith, and we shall see the King in His beauty, with no intervention of distance, or shadow, or symbol. That shall be the perfection of our joy.

Meanwhile it is a true report which is brought to us concerning the Christ of God, the King of glory. It is a true report which we hear of His grace and truth, of the love which passeth knowledge, of the tenderness and pity of this glorious One. There is no love like His, so lowly, yet so lofty; so full of gentleness, yet so pervaded with majesty. In all this wondrous love He presents Himself to us, and bids us share its fullness. It is the fullness of joy; it is the fullness of rest and peace.

LXXIV.

The Sincerity Of The Divine Long Suffering

"The Lord is long suffering to us ward not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."—

2 Peter 3:9.

Holy Scripture, once and again, makes statements which man calls contradictory to each other; nor does it seem to take any pains to reconcile them,—moving on in consciousness of integrity, knowing that the things are quite reconcilable, and that the day is coming when they will reconcile and vindicate themselves. Let us imitate Scripture in this procedure, and not be too anxious about the clearing up of difficulties, lest we involve ourselves in yet greater difficulties. Let us leave the solution in God's hands against the great day, assuring ourselves that all truth, at least all revealed truth, is twofold, and has two sides, and that one of the marks of its inspiration is this very two-sidedness to which these apparent contradictions may be traced.

We find in Scripture God's eternal purpose, His infinite supremacy or sovereignty, His electing grace, the substitution of Christ for His Church; and we also find the largest utterances of sincere and earnest compassion to the sons of men. 'As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked;' 'How shall I give thee up?' 'Whosoever will;' 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.' And we have Christ weeping over Jerusalem in her impenitency; and Paul's words, 'Who will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth;' and Peter's words, 'Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.' Let us take all these words on both sides as we find them. Our chance of error lies not in taking the words simply and literally, but in trying to dilute or explain away either one set or the other.

Let us hear, then, what the apostle has to tell us of God. He has tasted that the Lord is gracious; that His tender mercies are over all His works; that His mercy endureth forever; and he speaks of Him as one whose pardoning love he knew. The long delay of judgment was not weakness, nor vacillation, nor forgetfulness; it was compassion,— profound and unutterable compassion to

this sad world of lost humanity. It was 'longsuffering,'—longsuffering to an extent which we can neither comprehend nor measure; longsuffering that has outlived provocation, and hatred, and dishonour, and contempt, showing itself daily by words and deeds which have but one meaning,—deep concern for the welfare of our unhappy race,—the concern of one 'not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.' We may take the words under these two heads: (1) The longsuffering; (2) The longing.

I. The longsuffering.—This divine longsuffering beareth all things, hopeth all things, never faileth. There is no amount of provocation that it does not patiently endure: the provocation of years, in the case of individuals; the provocation of ages and nations, in the case of our world. It bears with human guilt to the uttermost; human crime in all its variety and enormity; human rebellion, in all its stout-heartedness and deliberate rejection of Christ; it bears with all this, and with infinitely more than we can conceive or describe. It is not wearied out with so many sins and so many sinners; but calmly sits, in its unruffled and unwearied tenderness, unprovoked and unmoved, yearning, or, it may be, weeping, over a world of sinners. This longsuffering, or tender pity to the lost, is not forgetfulness, or slackness in promise, or indifference to sin, or weakness, or relaxation of law, or good-natured connivance at evil.

It remembers alike threatenings and promises, it does not trifle with sin; yet it is compassion of the truest and tenderest kind. It sees the unworthiness of the object, yet loves in spite of all. It spares instead of smiting; it entreats instead of denouncing; it allows not any amount of transgression to damp its interest in the poor, sad object of its pity. Oh, what a depth of tender, gracious meaning is there in that word 'longsuffering!' And what sinner is there on this earth that, in the day of his despair and wretchedness, may not betake himself to it, and, like the prodigal, throw himself into his Father's arms?

Let us note some of the reasons for this longsuffering on the part of God. Apart from His own infinitely gracious nature, there are such considerations as the following:—

(1.) The preciousness of the soul.—He made it, and He made it precious, the most precious of His handiworks. It is priceless.

(2.) The capacity of the soul for joy and sorrow.—It is a vessel of vast

dimensions, and it must be filled. It must be either sorrowful or joyful.

(3.) The eternity of the soul.—It must live for ever. It cannot be extinguished or annihilated. Eternity is its portion. It cannot die. In joy or in sorrow it must live forever.

(4.) The glory of heaven.—It is His own heaven, His own kingdom; and He knows its blessedness, and perfection, and joy. He knows what it will be to lose such a heaven, and to lose it forever. Therefore He is longsuffering,—He would fain not shut us out of such glory.

(5.) The woe of hell.—He knows the sorrow, the endless, hopeless sorrow of the lost; He can realize it to the full and He knows what it must be to be the endurer of such a weight of woe for ever. Therefore He is longsuffering,—He postpones the judgment as long as possible.

All these things God takes fully into account in dealing with the wretched sinner. Therefore He bears long with him. Oh the days, and months, and years of longsuffering towards our world on the part of the loving God! He is in earnest with this sad world of ours.

II. The longing.—He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Let no one say, 'Why, then, does He not save, seeing He is almighty?' Who art thou that repliest against God? Whether we can reconcile the apparent contradiction or not, it is true that He has no pleasure in the sinner's death, nay, longs for his return. This longing is sincere and deep. No parent's yearnings over a prodigal child were ever more honest and true. 'How shall I give thee up?' is one of the sincerest as well as the most touching of divine utterances. God means what He says, and He speaks only what He feels. Christ's tears over Jerusalem were as true as they were tender; and His heart still yearns with the same unutterable compassion over our sad and impenitent world. He stretches out His hands to the sinner; He beseeches him to turn and live; He pleads with him to accept His pardon and His love.

LXXV.

The Last Time

"Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time."—

1 John 2:18.

These words, and those that precede them, are very solemn. They are like two trumpet-blasts or thunder-peals. They are a warning against worldliness, and a testimony against this present evil world. They sound like Noah's voice, 'condemning the world' of his day (Hebrews 2:7), and come well from the lips of him whose name was Boanerges, a son of thunder. They sound like a trumpet at midnight, startling men from their sleep. 'Love not the world.' Why? For two special reasons: (1) It is not of the Father; (2) It passeth away; and he only is imperishable who is linked with God and His will: 'He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

Then, as if with yet a louder note of warning, the trumpet sounds again. It utters the voice of warning in words not to be mistaken: 'Little children, it is the last time.' But why such a loud note of warning? Because the danger is great. What danger? The danger from antichrist and the danger from many antichrists. We are to take heed lest we be led away with the error of the wicked one, and the delusions of antichrist in any form.

I. It is the last time.—'It is the last hour' is the more exact rendering. This is not man's conjecture, dictated by terror or despair, or vain calculations; it is the declaration of the Spirit of God. All along the ages has this voice been sounding in the world's ears, 'It is the last time.' It sounds more loudly in our days. Once and again in past centuries the Church took it up, and, alarmed at the wickedness of their times, and at the judgments of God, proclaimed that Christ was coming. He did not come in their day. They died, and were not caught up alive to meet their Lord in the air. But does that silence or deaden the solemn voice? Does that falsify the words of our text? Shall we say, 'My Lord delayeth His coming?' or, 'Where is the promise of His coming?' Shall we conclude, 'Ah,

He is not coining in our day; perhaps not for centuries; perhaps not at all?' No; but let us watch. These voices in the Church have risen and died down again and again. They have risen in our day; they will sooner or later be found true. Shall this be in our day? The signs are multiplying,—signs of good, signs of evil; ever-spreading infidelity, yet the gospel preached to all nations. Shall we not take up the apostolic watchword, 'Little children, it is the last time?' How near Christ may be, we know not. Let us be ready! Men say, Oh, these days of ours are the beginning, not the end of days; science is widening itself; civilization is spreading; superstitions are falling to pieces; war is impossible; the world is improving; a few years more, and we shall be all right. Is it so? In one sense this is the beginning of days, as the night is the beginning of the morning; but that is all. For it is night,—the night of sin; the night of unbelief; the night of human pride and self-will; the night of apostasy. Yes, it is night, whatever may be man's boast of progress. It is neither dawn nor day. The apostle meant what he said when writing these solemn words, 'It is the last time;' so did Peter when he said, 'The end of all things is at hand.'

II. Antichrist shall come.—The Jews had gathered from their Scriptures much concerning antichrist; so that the Lord and His apostles could appeal to an idea already rooted in the Jewish mind. They spoke much of antichrist. They warned the Church against his delusions. Antichrist means two things: (1) One who opposes Christ; (2) One who puts himself in the room of Christ. In both of these senses the Church was taught to expect 'antichrist.' This adversary and rival of Christ is to embody in himself, directly or indirectly, all human errors and delusions, everything that attracts the natural man, and leads him away from 'the Christ.' He is to present himself as the substitute for 'the Christ,' claiming the confidence and homage of the race. All evil is to be concentrated in him; yet evil so adorned and beautified that men will be won by it, and drawn to him in whom it is exhibited. Through him they will learn to call evil good, and good evil. He will be Satan's representative; the idol or god of the natural man; the fullness of all natural wisdom, natural goodness, natural excellence,—it may be, natural religion, set up by Satan to steal away men's hearts from the Christ of God. Oh, solemn truth! Antichrist shall come! And when he comes, the world will receive him in preference to the Son of God, even as when they cried, 'Not this man, but Barabbas.'

III. Even now are there many antichrists.—Antichristian delusion had begun

in the apostle's days. Men were arising to deny Christ; to set up another Christ of their own,—a Christ of the intellect, a Christ of the sense, a Christ of the imagination. Long ere the first century closed there were many antichrists,—pretended Christs,— substitutes for the Son of God. Every age has produced its antichrists, all of them earnest of, and preparations for, the greater antichrist of the very last days, when perilous times shall come. In and by all these antichrists Satan is working, not only to exalt himself, but to dishonour Christ,—working even by means of men who laugh at the existence of an evil spirit. He is working by means of error,—pure error; also by error in connection with truth, and truth in connection with error; exalting the natural at the expense of the supernatural; raising science above Scripture; denying human evil, upholding human goodness; setting creaturehood in opposition to Godhead, intellect against revelation, selfimprovement against regeneration by the Holy Ghost, worldly refinement against the example of Christ. Everything in the shape of human 'progress' is welcomed, without considering what it is or whence it comes. But the progress of the natural man is, after all, an illusion. So long as humanity remains unregenerate, there can be no progress which God can recognize. The one true progress is that begun and consummated by the Holy Ghost,—a progress quite distinct from all that man calls by that name.

LXXVI.

The Heavenly Anointing

"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 11:27.

Satan as the angel of light, the prophet of all natural knowledge, was abroad among the early churches. He was a lying spirit in some of the primitive teachers, sending them forth to seduce the saints. To Galatia, Ephesus, Corinth, —everywhere,—he sent them on their errand of seduction.

For this there was but one remedy, one antidote,—not a larger amount of human wisdom, or 'refined culture,' or 'liberal thought,' but a fresh infusion of 'that wisdom which cometh from above.' There was only One who could meet this spirit of evil knowledge and counteract his wiles,—the Holy Ghost, here spoken of as 'the unction' or anointing.

I. The anointing.—Our Master's name is Messiah, Christ, the Anointed; and we are, like Him, anointed ones, Christians.' The oil is the Holy Ghost, and from Him directly we have the anointing. It is His office to anoint. 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me.' It is His office to make Christians, and to keep them such. He is both the Anointer and the unction; and it is through Him that we are made what we are. He comes on us; He comes into us. This anointing is the Church's birthright: as the sun is the birthright of humanity, so is the Spirit the birthright of the Church.

II. The source of the anointing.—It is not from ourselves, but from another. It is 'received.' It is not from beneath, but from above; it is from the Holy One. Is this Christ, or the Holy Spirit? It is true of both. We get the Holy Spirit from Christ; and from the Spirit we get the gifts and graces. Thus in both of these senses we have an unction from the Holy One. All is of God; and yet as free and accessible as if at our side.

III. Its permanence.—It abideth in us. It is no passing touch, no drop which falls on us today, and disappears tomorrow. It abides; it abides in us; it has taken up its permanent dwelling in us. It is not liable to our fluctuations; it is constant, ever remaining, ever operating. Christ abideth in us; the Spirit abideth in us. All is everlasting,—increasing, not decreasing.

IV. Its rendering us independent of human teaching.—It not only fits us for overcoming the evil one; not only enables us to resist those that seduce us; but it makes us independent of man. He may or he may not teach us: it does not matter; we are not dependent on him. We need him not. This is not self-dependence, nor absolute independence; it is simply independence of man because of dependence upon God. For, having God's teaching, we need not that any man teach us. We have a Teacher wiser, better, truer, more patient, more loving than man. Let us welcome this, let us prize it, let us daily employ it.

We shall need it more and more in these last days, when the prevalence of false teaching will fling us from man altogether, and throw us upon God alone.

V. Its character.—(1) It teacheth us. The object of the anointing is specially teaching; and the reference here is to the anointing of prophets for their work (as Elisha, 1 Kings 19:16), and to Messiah's anointing for preaching the gospel (Isaiah 61:1). The expression, 'Anoint thine eyes with eye-salve,' is of the same import. The Holy Spirit is our teacher. (2) It teacheth all things. Its circle of instruction is wide, extending to all truth on the one hand, and to every part of our being on the other. There is nothing which we need that this anointing does not comprehend. It embraces all that 'Christians' can require. (3) It is truth. For He is the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of Him who is the truth; He guides into all truth. The certain, the authentic, is with Him. (4) It is no lie. It contains nothing that is untrue or uncertain. It is not the false spirit who speaketh lies; no lie is in Him or His anointing.

VI. Its object.—That we should remain in Christ. Christ Himself said, 'Abide in Me;' and He connected this with His 'words abiding' in us. The object of the anointing, the work of the Holy Spirit, is to produce and maintain this abiding. Connection with Christ, connection of the most intimate kind, connection as the result of the anointing,—this is what we need.

What a needful text is this in our day! The world's wisdom is estimated so highly; spiritual truth is at a discount; dependence on supernatural teaching is reckoned weakness; reliance on intellect is the chief thing recommended; speculation, unbounded and unchecked speculation, is counted a noble thing; the risk of embracing a lie is sneered at; error is not deemed sin; truth, as the very health of the soul, is not deemed indispensable, provided there be earnestness; the word of God is not treated as infallible and its information certain, but rather as a cabinet of playthings for the intellect.

In opposition to all this, our text comes in with the assertion of a divine Teacher and an infallible teaching; a teaching not narrow and straitened, but wide and all embracing; a teaching of truth, in opposition to every lie of man or Satan, of the Church or the world, of priest or philosopher. Ah, this is the real thing that the vexed soul needeth! This is rest for the weary intellect, satisfaction for the empty soul.

LXXVII.

The Taker Away Of Sin

"And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins, mid in Him is no sin."—

1 John 3:5.

This is one of the apostle's many arguments in this epistle against sin, and in favor of holiness,—the great reason by which we are urged to purify ourselves, to be holy and without blame. 'Be holy, for Christ came to take away sin; be holy, for Christ was holy.'— This is the meaning of the passage.

How different this from the use which many have made of Christ's work, and of the grace of God! They have said (some in practice, some even in words), Christ has come, we need not be so careful about shunning sin. Let us continue in sin, seeing grace is so abundant. The apostle presents to us Christ's coming and work as the death-stroke to sin; as the consummating reason for hating it and longing to be holy.

Consider, then, the following points here: (1) The manifested One; (2) the manifestation; (3) the purpose of the manifestation; (4) the knowledge of it by us.

I. The manifested One.—His name is 'the Word,' the Son of God, the Only-begotten of the Father, the Wisdom of God, the Life, the Light, the Truth. But the special character in which He is here presented to us is that of sinlessness. He is the Holy One,—'in Him sin is not;' He is the Holy One,—'that holy thing;' holy, harmless, undefiled. It is specially as the Holy One that He has been manifested. Nothing of sin was found in Him. He was the Righteous One; He who was made sin was He who knew no sin.

II. The manifestation.—He who was invisible became visible; the far-off became nigh; the divine became human; the Word was made flesh; the Life was manifested; He who was rich, for our sakes became poor. It was a manifestation

of God: 'No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.' When it was said to Him, 'Show us the Father,' the answer was, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' His person was a manifestation of God; His life, His words, His doings, His death, were all manifestations of God. This manifestation was something very palpable: there was something to be seen, touched, heard, and handled. It was no phantom nor idea,—all was real and true. In it there was no mistake; it was a plain revelation, such as men could at once apprehend as well as see,—'God manifest in flesh.'

III. The purpose of the manifestation.—'To take away our sins.' It was a manifestation connected with the evil, the sin of our world, springing out of the introduction of evil and the fall of the race. It was not the like drawing to the like, but the like and the unlike coming together. It was not God coming down to our world (as shall yet be) because it is so good; it is God coming down to it because it is so evil.

The expression, 'to take away our sins,' has a twofold meaning; as the word means either to bear sin or to take it away, though more generally the latter. In the present case both senses are included.

(1.) He was manifested to bear sin.—He came as the sin-bearer, the sacrifice, the substitute; He was made sin for us; the Lord laid our iniquities upon Him. For this the Father sent Him into the world; for this He lived, died, rose again. It was as the sin-bearer that He was seen on earth. He did not come merely to display the wisdom, or power, or love of Godhead,—to be the model of a noble and self-sacrificing life. He came to bear sin; and now the sinbearing work is done.

(2.) He was manifested to take away sin.—This is the complete sense of the word. Only in this does the sin bearing find its consummation; without this it is of no avail,—it has failed in its design. He bore sin that He might bear it away from us; and this in two ways or senses First, He takes away its guilt; secondly, He takes away its defilement and power. In both of these senses He is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. He takes it away from each one who believes on Him, pardoning and purifying.

He takes it away from the Church; delivering, and purifying, and perfecting it, making it without spot. He will yet take it away from our earth, making all things new.

He offers to take it away this hour from each one of you. Through this man is preached the forgiveness of sins; through Him also is preached deliverance from sin, and restoration to the image as well as the favor of God.

IV. The knowledge of this manifestation by us.—We know that He was manifested; and in knowing this, we have life and holiness; in knowing this, we know that which cleanses from all sin. 'By His knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.' The object of the manifestation is a great and blessed one; the means of effecting it in us personally is very simple,—the knowledge of what He has done. This knowledge is life, light, pardon, holiness; this knowledge lets in peace and joy, nay, all heaven; 'for this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God.' The truths and facts that go to make up this knowledge are so gladdening, that in knowing them we rejoice; and our joy comes not from the excellency of our act of knowing, but from the preciousness of the things known. Know the Lord, and all is well; know His Christ, and all His fullness is poured into you.

LXXVIII.

The Manifested Love

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." —

1 John 4:9.

It is of love that the apostle writes: first, human love, the love of man to man (verse 7); and then of the love of God. Love has a heavenly origin; its birthplace is the bosom of God. And every one who knows love knows something that is truly divine: 'Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.' The absence of love from a heart is one of the worst and darkest signs. A heart that has shut out love is a heart that has shut out God. 'He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love.' O profound and wondrous truth, God is love! Is not this simple statement like light from the heaven of heavens? What more fitted to gladden, to soothe, to cure, and to sustain the heart of humanity, than such a revelation of God? What more fitted to scatter earth's shadows, and to brighten its whole wide compass into the sunshine of a true and joyous day?

I. The love of God.—Of this love the Bible is the great witness. Paganism knew nothing of it. A God of love and a religion of love were strange things to a heathen. 'God is love' was a new idea to them,—one too high for them,—almost incomprehensible in its vastness and glory. God loves; God loves man the sinner; God loves man with a true and holy love; God loves the unlovable; God loves on and on, through years of resistance and hatred;—nay, God is love. These are truths which contain in them light for the human heart,—a heart hardened and contracted by selfishness and hatred. The dimensions of this love are beyond measure; and it is as free as it is large. It is love for the hateful; love whose patience, tenderness, and gentleness are inexhaustible; love beyond that of father and mother, brother or sister, yet combining in itself all these kinds of love; for the infinite heart out of which it flows is not only the fountainhead of these, but the model according to which they are fashioned. Are we fathers or mothers?—He much more. Have we the deep, tender feelings of father or mother?—He much more. No parent's heart ever beat like His. No parent's affection was ever more than a mere drop of the ocean when compared with His.

Let us learn the love of God,—pure and spontaneous; not waiting for our love, but gushing out with a fullness of which we can form no conception. The love of God is like Himself, boundless,—stretching out its all-embracing arms and allbeseeching hands to the sons of men. O love of God! O love of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,—how great and true, how precious and peace giving to the weary soul art thou! There is no joy like thine. There is no strength, no health, no liberty like that which thou infusest when thou art shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. 'We have known and believed the love which God hath to us;' this is our rejoicing. We have no good thing to say for ourselves; no boast to make; no goodness; no worth. All we can say is that 'we have known and believed the love which God hath to us.' This is the only account which we can give of ourselves or of our wondrous change.

II. The manifestation of God's love.—This love of God has not been silent. It has spoken out. God is not dumb concerning Himself. This love of God has not been hidden under a bushel or set on some inaccessible mountain. It is visible to all, near to all, within the reach of all. It is not wrapped in clouds, nor darkly and dimly made known, nor whispered or muttered; it is announced with a clearness and loudness that make all earth and heaven to ring again. The manifestation of the love was the sending of His onlybegotten Son into the world; for God so loved the world, that He gave His Son! It is not, then, of hidden but of manifested love that the Bible speaks love so fully disclosed, so unambiguously expressed, so solemnly pledged, that disbelief of it seems an impossibility. 'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us.' Greater love could not be. A fuller revelation of it could not be. He gave His unspeakable gift: He spared not His Son, but delivered Him up for us all. This marvelous manifestation meets all our difficulties, and silences all our doubts. Shall any sinner upon earth, the vilest; say, 'That love does not suit my case; there is not enough of it for me;' or, 'What security have I for its perpetuity?' God gave His Son to show His love to us; God laid our sins upon His Son to show His love; God made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, to show His love; God delivered Him to die and be buried for us, to show His love. Was not this manifested love? Was not this love which could not be mistaken? It was not love created by the expiation of the cross. The love produced the expiation, not the expiation the love. The cross is the display of divine love in its fullness. It is the cross that preaches preeminently to us the grace of God, and proclaims in all its largeness and sufficiency the love of God. God's answer to

every doubt or suspicion of the sinner or the saint is, 'Have I not given my Son?' If men will not read love in this gift, they will read it in nothing else. Here, if anywhere, we hear the message, 'God is love;' for here we learn that 'the Father sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.'

III. The purpose of this manifested love.—'That we might live through Him.' Without Him death was our portion. Even this great love of God could not reach us without the death of His Son. The love sought life for us, but could only obtain it for us by sacrificing the Son. He has come, and lived, and loved, and died! All that fastened us to death has been unloosed. All that made life impossible has been taken out of the way. There is life to us through Him who died. God's love has found a way for itself to us; it is now free to bless; it can go forth unhindered to the sons of men; for it is love which magnifies righteousness. It has triumphed over human guilt, and brought pardon to the worst of sinners. He who receives God's testimony to the cross gets forthwith all the pardon and all the love which the cross reveals.

LXXIX.

The Confession And The Indwelling

"Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God."—

1 John 4:15.

It is something very glorious that is spoken of here; it is by something amazingly simple that this is to be obtained; and the obtaining of this something is open to all.

I. The great thing promised.—God dwelling in us and we in God. It is not easy to bring out all the meaning of this figure, nay, impossible. It would be easier to describe heaven, the new Jerusalem, than to tell what is meant by God dwelling in us and we in God. It means so much, so very much, that we can only speak of it very generally, as man's poor language can convey almost nothing of the infinite fullness of the promise. It is a promise like that of John 14:23, 'We will come unto him and make our abode with him;' and very like that of Revelation 3, 'I will come in unto him and sup with him.' The three persons of the Godhead are thus spoken of. Our text speaks of the Father; the Apostle Paul speaks of 'Christ in us,' and we in Christ; and others speak of the Holy Spirit in us, and we in Him,—as if we were God's habitation or temple, and He ours; He coming down here and entering our dwelling, our heart; we going up to Him and entering into His dwelling, His bosom, where is His only-begotten Son. This dwelling or abiding is twofold,—with us and in us; with Him and in Him. It is not a visit, but an abiding; not a pitching of His tent beside ours, but making His dwelling with and in us.

Consider what all this implies:—

(1.) Great love.—It is love on both sides, but specially on His. No common love must that be which such a figure implies,—love going out in quest of a resting place, and finding one in the worthless and unlovable.

(2.) Great intimacy.—It is far more than friendship. That can bear distance, and

intercourse by correspondence; but this is union,— union of the most intimate kind that can be conceived; mutual indwelling. This is the intimacy of intimacies,—the intimacy of an endearment and affection which nothing can equal.

(3.) Great satisfaction in each other.—Each seems necessary to the other, more than even parent to child, or husband to wife. Each fills up the other: God is our fullness, and the Church is the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. What boundless satisfaction is this! We were made to be filled, not to be empty; and this is the filling up of the soul.

(4.) Great blessedness.—The state which our text describes is the perfection of blessedness,—God in us and we in God. All sorrow shut out,—all pain, all weakness, all mortality. Nothing but perfection; and with perfection, joy unspeakable; joy in God and with God. All that divine love, fellowship, intimacy, nearness can do for us shall be done. God in us, and we in God. What blessedness!

(5.) Great glory.—For we are thus placed in the very seat and center of glory: that seat and center are in us. God comes in to us, and with Him all His glory. We go in to Him, and dwell in His glory. Glory within us and around us,—the very glory of Him who is the fountainhead of glory. Not a part or fragment of glory, but the whole; for He who is the God of glory dwells in us, and we in Him. See John 14:16, 15:4,7; 1 John 2:6, 24, 26,

3:24.

II. The simple way of obtaining it.—By confessing that Jesus is the Son of God. This, of course, implies believing. It is founded on believing; it is the utterance of faith. Not by the comprehension of some great truths, but the simplest of all, that Jesus is the Son of God; that in Jesus is fulfilled all that was written of old concerning the Christ of God. How full of meaning, full of grace and truth, is that expression, 'Jesus is the Son of God!' If Jesus is the Son of God, then, (1) God has had pity upon man, and taken his side against his enemies, according to the first promise. (2) Heaven and earth have come together; there is reconciliation and peace. (3) The sinner may go to God at once,—to God as represented by a man like ourselves: through Him we have

access to the Father. (4) There is now forgiveness and life. Jesus of Nazareth went about bestowing these. To receive Him is to receive all His fullness; and we receive Him by owning Him as the Son of God. To own Him as such is to become at once partaker of His fullness. This may seem a very simple truth; but it is one so great and so glorious that it cannot be believed without opening the way for the entrance of Godhead into the soul. In confessing Jesus as the Son of God, I let in every blessing, nay, I let in God Himself. The gate is thrown open, and all Godhead takes up His abode with me and in me.

III. The freeness to all.—'Whosoever.' Wider than the widest range of human sin, deeper than the lowest depths of earthly pollution, is God's great message of grace. That Jesus is the Son of God is the great truth presented to the sons of men to be believed. No one need say, May I believe it? If it is true, how can you do otherwise? It is a truth as open as it is simple, and as efficacious as it is open. God has testified of Jesus that He is the Son of God; He gave the evidence of this by His resurrection. And this is what He calls on every man to believe, that in believing it he may receive God Himself.

LXXX.

God's Great Love To The Sinner

"And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us, God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."—

1 John 4:16.

There are many differences between man and man, but here is one of the most explicit, yet most simple. Some believe the love of God, and some believe it not. All others are subordinate to this. It is this that draws the line, on the one side of which is heaven, on the other hell. Two things let us notice, (1) God's love; (2) our knowledge of it.

I. God's love.—There are two kinds of love, the love of compassion and the love of complacency or delight. Both may perhaps be included here, but specially the former; for the apostle is referring to that by which he and his brethren became what they were, children of God. God's free love or grace must go first; it is the foundation, the alphabet of the gospel. It is free love to the sinner, as a sinner,—not as elect, or as penitent, or as converted, but as a sinner.

'God so loved the world, that He gave His Son.' 'God commended His love.' 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us.' The object, then, of this free love is simply man, the sinner; and the extent of this love is the widest circle of human unworthiness. The question of more or fewer objects is of no moment. Its range is to the uttermost,—to each sinner on this side of hell. It compasses the wide earth; it goes up to the very gates of the prison. It came down on the crucifiers of the Son of God; and on whom, then, will it not fall? It has plucked millions of brands from the burning, and can pluck millions more. The gift of the beloved Son is the expression, the manifestation of this love: 'Hereby perceive we the love of God, that He laid down His life for us.' How infinite the fountain, to pour forth such a stream! And in the love of Christ we read the love of the Father. It was reflected in Him. In every word and deed, he who saw and heard Him saw and heard the Father. No man who came into contact with Jesus could doubt His love. The law of love was in His heart and on His lips; He came from the bosom of the Father to show what was there. And this is God's answer to any one who doubts His love, 'I have given my Son.' You say, I am the chief of sinners; still His answer is the same, 'I have given my Son.' This is His message of love to the chief of sinners.

II. Our knowledge of this love.—The record is given, yet it is not every one that knows it; it is true, yet it is not every one that believes it. They who know and believe it are few. But there are some who do so, and it is in their name that the apostle speaks. The love is free, sure, fully published. It is not to be bought, or deserved, or waited for; it is simply to be known and believed. For the things contained in this gospel of the free love, are such that they flow into us immediately in knowing and believing. There are cases in which good news may merely point to blessing, and tell of the possibility of obtaining it by exertion or purchase. Not so here. The good news are such that the simple knowledge of them is itself the blessing. That there are blessings after, or following upon this knowledge, is true; but the primary blessing is in knowing and believing. 'Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound.' It is out of this free love that we extract the peace which we need, our strength, our health. This love is everything to the soul; and he who has it shall abide satisfied. To know it is life.

This is the history of a Christian man. It is all that he can tell about himself: he has known and believed the love. He has nothing good to say for himself.

This is the line of separation' between him and the world. They know not this love; he knows it. A small difference, a slender line, some would think; yet real, and deep, and broad. All on one side of it, darkness; all on the other, light.

This is the ground of his hope. He has known the love, and rests on it. It is shed abroad in his heart, and gives him the hope which maketh not ashamed.

This is the secret of his sanctification, the knowledge of God's love. For it is holy love as well as free; and he who knows it knows what is best fitted to make him a holy man.

This is our defense against adversaries, and our consolation under the world's hatred. Let who will hate, revile, persecute, we are in possession of a love which is more than a compensation for all.

LXXXI.

Eternal Life In The Belief Of God's Testimony

"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in His Son."—

1 John 5:11.

The word 'witness' in the previous verse means not a person, but a statement or declaration, a 'testimony,'—the statement of one who tells us what he has seen, and heard, and known. The apostle speaks of two kinds of testimony, one human, the other divine. He points out the relative value and trustworthiness of these two, the divine so much excelling the human; and hence the much greater credit which we should attach to the words of Him who cannot lie, who is infinitely removed from falsehood, than to the words of men who lie a thousand times a day, whose very nature is deceit and untruthfulness.

He next tells us that the sum and burden of the divine testimony is the Son of God,—the testimony of (concerning) Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, nay, of the whole Bible. He that has believed on the Son has taken in, or admitted this testimony to a place within himself; so that it is not now outside but inside,—a testimony which has not merely found an echo within, but has come in and speaks from within.

He that hath not believed on the Son 'hath not believed God;' has not only not taken in His testimony, but has denied it, nay, has made God a liar. And how has he done this awful deed of inconceivable guilt? By not receiving the testimony (or record) which God has given concerning His Son. And what is this testimony? It is mainly concerning His Son, but it relates also to us sinners; and thus far it is a double testimony, having a twofold aspect. It is a testimony, the first part of which an angel or a devil might believe, and do believe, but in the second part of which they have no share; only men, only sinners, only the lost sons of Adam.

God has given us eternal life; this life is in His Son. Such is the testimony; and it

is God Himself, who testifies concerning His own gift,— for He is both the giver and the testifier: 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son.' Properly speaking, then, there are two gifts,—His Son, and life in Him. These are God's gifts to sinners; to 'mankind-sinners,' as our forefathers used to speak; to 'the world;' to the 'whosoever;' to the 'every one that thirsteth;' to the labouring and heavy laden; to the poor and needy.

But let us mark the order of these gifts. First Christ, and then life; not first life, and then Christ. As this is the order in which God gives, so it is the order in which we are to take. They are inseparable, and yet we must not overlook the order. It is first the physician, and then the medicine; first the life boat, and then the rescue from the waves. No doubt the awakened sinner first asks for life and salvation; but then God tells him, You can only get these by getting Christ. They are in His hands, deposited in Him for those who need them. So take Christ, and you get all. 'He that hath the Son hath life.' Thus, then,—

I. There is eternal life for us.—'This is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life,'—'eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.' Life; life for the dead; life that shall never end; the reversal of all death; the possession of all that constitutes true life for soul and body. Not life for a day, or for a thousand years, but for evermore; life, without the possibility of dying again.

II. This life is God's gift.—Yes, 'the gift of God is eternal life.' Not wages, not purchase, not desert, but a pure gift, absolute and unconditional; a gift from the great Giver; a gift like Himself, corresponding to His greatness and love, as well as to our need. It is altogether free, unclogged by condition, but presented by His infinite generosity as the expression of His boundless love.

III. This gift is for those that need life.—And who is there amongst us that is not needy? It is not life for the half-dead, but for the totally dead. This gift of life is laid down at the door of each dead sinner. It is not in heaven; it is brought down to earth. It is not placed in some far-off, inaccessible region; it is brought to each. It is not in Palestine or Jerusalem; it is here, in every land, city, village, nay, laid at every door; and He who laid it there knocks while He does, and cries aloud, O man, here is a gift for thee!

IV. This gift is contained in the Son of God.—He is the great gift; but here is another, in Him and through Him, the one inseparable from the other. It is this twofold gift, this double blessing, that God has presented to our world. A king's gift is much, how much more God's! What gifts are these! Is it possible that He can mean all that is implied? Yes, He does; for He exaggerates nothing.

V. These gifts reach us by means of a testimony.—In that testimony God speaks to us as a witness of what He knows. His apostles spoke in this way, 'That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.' God is a witness, Christ is a witness, the Spirit is a witness; and thus there are three that bear record. But the apostles are witnesses also. They tell us of the Word made flesh, of a dead and risen Christ; and in so doing they announce God's great gifts, and we listen, believe, and are saved. In believing the testimony to Christ on the authority of God, we get Him, and in getting Him we get everything; for He that hath the Son hath life. This is our testimony still. Do you credit it? Is it all true? If not, then deny it, and go in quest of a truer and a better. If it is true, then receive it; and, in receiving it, receive eternal life.

LXXXII.

Eternal Life In Believing

"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."—

1 John 5:13.

It is the beloved disciple who here writes to us, expressing his own mind and that of the Holy Ghost; he who of all the disciples had been nearest to the Master, and known both the love and the life that were in Him; he who said, 'In Him was life, and the life was the light of men,'—it is he who writes to us these words of grace. Let us listen to him. We shall find in what he says little about himself, but much about the Master. With Him Christ is all and in all.

I. To whom he writes.—'To them that believe on the name of the Son of God.' This is their special mark or character; that by which the Holy Spirit distinguishes them, and by which He would have them know themselves. They are not singled out as better or worthier than others; they were part of that world which lieth in wickedness. But they believed in the name of the Son of God, and this made them what they became. They have nothing to say for themselves but this, 'We believed in the name of the Son of God;' or, as John puts it elsewhere, 'We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.' God's description of a Christian is just 'He is one who believes on the name of His Son.' How simple and comforting! How this brushes aside the metaphysical and unbelieving perplexities with which many souls surround themselves; dwelling on marks and evidences innumerable, instead of at once taking themselves the comfort of knowing that a Christian is one who believes in the name of the Son of God! Let us mark each word. (1) 'The Son of God:' the only-begotten of the Father; the Word; the Christ; God manifest in the flesh; the Son of God. (2) The name: that revealed display of this Son of God which has been given us by the testimony of the Father to the Son; not simply the words or names, but the name; the divine revelation or interpretation of the character, the person, the work of His Son. (3) 'Believe:' receive the Father's testimony as such; not man's word, but God's. Our reception of the Father's testimony to the true character of the Son;—this it is that makes us Christians. This is the divine definition or designation of a

Christian man,—he believes on name of the Son of God.

II. What he writes.—'These things have I written you.' This refers not to the preceding verses to the whole epistle. Let us note some things which embody the substance of what John writes.

(1.) The life was manifested.—It came out, and it came down to us. It was not hidden or mysterious.

(2.) The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sins.—Both in his gospel and in his epistle he bears witness of the blood,—the cleansing blood.

(3.) Confession and forgiveness.—The sinner says, 'I have sinned;' God says, 'I freely pardon.'

(4.) The love of God.—He laid down His life for us. Herein is love! Love in coming and in dying. God is love.

(5.) Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.— The message is that Jesus is the Christ; and that he who believeth it becomes a son.

(6.) This is the record, that God hath, given to us eternal life.—A record or testimony from God is proclaimed to us. It is a testimony concerning life, and concerning Him in whom it is.

These are some of the things concerning which John here speaks. They are all of them most good and true. They suit us, and they are meant for us. They are the fountainhead of blessing, the wells of living water, at which we stand and drink. They carry us back to the closing chapters of John's gospel, and specially to that verse, 'These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name' (John 20:31).

III. Why he writes.—His purpose in writing is thus stated: 'That ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.' It is a twofold object that he has in view in writing.

(1.) That they might know that they had eternal life.—To have a thing, and to know that we have it, are not always the same thing. I may have a thing, and yet

I may be unconscious or incredulous of possessing it. John writes these blessed words of truth that we may know that we have life in believing on the name of the Son of God. He thus rebukes and condemns those who say, I believe on the name of the Son of God, yet I don't know whether I have life. He tells us that they who believe have the life, and ought to be satisfied of this, and not to remain uncertain. It is as if he were speaking to some and saying, 'You do not know your privileges: you say you believe, yet you are still hesitating as to whether any consequences flow to you from that believing; you are still as uncertain as to your being in possession of eternal life as if you had never believed at all.' He writes to remove all doubt and darkness and distrust. The things which he writes are such, that, as soon as believed, they ought to assure us that we are heirs of life eternal.

(2.) That they might believe on the name of the Son of God.—That is, that they might go on in this their faith, continuing as they had begun; not resting on a past faith, but increasing more and more in this belief. Often in the gospels we read that 'His disciples believed on Him,' though they had believed already. What Jesus did or spoke increased and strengthened faith. So is it here. John's object in what he writes is to give us a new impulse in believing; for, just as we need continual breathing and feeding, so we need continual believing. The air we breathe and the food we eat must be pure and wholesome, so must the doctrine be on which our faith is nourished. Do we seek continuance of faith, increase of faith? Read and re-read what John has written. Thus faith comes; and thus it waxes stronger and stronger.

LXXXIII.

Confidence In A Loving God

"And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us. And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him."—

1 John 5:14,15.

The form of expression, 'This is the confidence,' is very frequent in John. 'This is the message' (:5); 'This is the promise' (2:25); 'This is the love of God' (v. 3); 'This is the victory' (v. 4); 'This is the record' (v. 2). It is like the Master's: 'This is the condemnation' (John 3:19); 'This is life eternal' (John 17:3). It indicates something very specific. It is vivid and realizing. It seems to point with the finger to the very object. We are made to see the very thing with our eyes, and to handle it with our hands.

I. Confidence.—The word here is that which is frequently rendered 'boldness.' Hebrews 4:16, 'Let us come boldly;' 10:19, 'Having boldness to enter into the holiest.' It is bold and assured confidence,—confidence which knows that it will not be disappointed or confounded. Such is to be the state of our hearts toward God. From first to last there is to be confidence. Our religion begins with confidence: this is the only right, true, and acceptable state of our hearts. Less than confidence is sin and unbelief, by which God is dishonoured, and His gospel depreciated, as unable to produce this right state, of heart, this childlike confidence. It is confidence like that of Isaac toward Abraham, or Samuel to Eli; confidence of which that of Christ toward the Father is the model; confidence which cries Abba, Father. It is of this confidence that the Lord so often speaks: 'Thy faith hath saved thee.' Of this the old prophets and Psalmist spoke: 'Trust ye in the Lord for ever.' It is, confidence arising out of what we know of God in Christ Jesus His Son. This is what Paul refers to when he speaks of the beginning of our confidence. It is confidence which leans on the character of God as the God of all grace, and sustains itself by the blood of the cross as the reconciliation of grace and righteousness. It is the Holy Spirit coming into us as the Spirit of adoption that produces and maintains this

confidence. It is for the end of its production that we preach the gospel of the grace of God.

II. Confidence in prayer.—This confidence embraces everything; every part of God's character and dealings; every position in which we can be placed. But the apostle here singles out prayer as an illustration of the true nature of confidence, of the way in which it unfolds itself: 'If we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.' As trusters in the living God, we feel that we can ask, that we can ask anything; that the only limitation is that it be according to His revealed will. In this statement the apostle takes us back to the Lord's own words, these two especially: 'Ask, and ye shall receive;' 'All things whatsoever ye desire, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.' And thus Paul exhorts us: 'Let us come boldly to the throne of grace;' 'Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.' To pray without confidence is to dishonour God and to deny the Mediator. That which gives us warrant to pray at all, gives equal warrant to pray with confidence.

III. Confidence for special things, and for everything.—'If (or since) we know that He heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions (or requests) that we desire of Him.' This confidence in prayer is not to be vague or general, merely a trustful frame of mind when drawing near to God. It is to be special and minute. We are to believe in answers to prayer,—in an answer to every prayer,—either the very thing or something better; and to consider a non-obtaining of the very thing quite an exception. The words evidently include past as well as present petitions,—every request made from the time that you came to God as a trusting man. You have laid thousands, perhaps millions, on the mercyseat; you have not, perhaps, seen the express answers to all of these; nevertheless you are to trust God for the answer to each petition in time past regarding any proper thing, great or small. We may not see the answer yet; years, perhaps, have elapsed; it seems as if He answered you never a word; yet you are so to exercise confidence in prayer, as to be sure that an answer either has come, or is coming. For God is not a man that He should lie or break His promise. His memory does not fail, nor does His mind change, nor does His bounty fail. Each minute request, each sigh, each groan, each tear, He has treasured up, and will not forget. The answer is sure, and it is on its way to us.

Are not our prayers grievously deficient in this thing? We pray, but we often

neither expect nor trust. Is not this to make God a liar, somewhat, though not so directly, as does the sinner when he refuses to believe God's record concerning His Son?

Let us do justice to God's love and faithfulness; so shall we fare far better. How rich we might be if we but trusted God! The fabled enchantments of Eastern enchanters, who pretended with a word to turn dust into gold and gems, are not half so enriching. Why should we not get all that we ask? And if we did, would it not make us rich indeed? Yet we might get much more than even this; for He to whom we go is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.

LXXXIV.

The Certainty Of Certainties

"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lath in wickedness. 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 5:19, 20.

In the early Church there was nothing of the uncertainty which we find among Christians now. They knew what they were, and it was on the authenticated facts concerning Christ that they rested this certainty. No one then thought of saying, 'I believe, but I am not sure whether I am born of God;' for they took for granted that 'whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.' They did not analyze their own faith to ascertain how far it was of the right quantity and quality. They never thought of themselves at all, but only of Him who, though rich, for their sakes had become poor. All the epistles take for granted that they knew that they were Christians; nor is anything written there to encourage them to suspect themselves, or to teach them the art of doubting. Nothing is there addressed to them to lead them to make much of their doubts, or to believe in their own faith as the true way of deliverance from doubting. 'We know,' was the apostle's language; 'We know,' was the response which that language met with from all to whom he wrote.

The frequent use of this expression in the epistles leads us to make inquiry as to its actual import, and its bearings on ourselves. It is undoubtedly the language of certainty; and, as such, let us see in what connections it is used.

Is it used respecting things past, things present, and things future, all of which are represented as being absolutely certain to the person knowing.

(1.) The past.—1 John 5:20, 'We know that the Son of God is come;' 3:14, 'We know that we have passed from death unto life.' These two things, one relating to the Son of God, and the other to the Christian, are spoken of as equally past, and as equally certain objects of sure knowledge.

(2.) The present.—1 John 2:18, 'We know that it is the last time;' 2:18, 'We know that we know Him;' 2:3, 'We know that we are in Him;' 3:14, 'We know that we have passed from death unto life;' 3:15, 'We know that we are of the truth;' 3:24, 'We know that He abideth in us;' 5:19, 'We know that we are of God.' All these things are represented as ascertained and conscious certainties, regarding which there could be no doubt whatever. This was the true state of the early Church universally. We do not read of anything short of this,—anything corresponding to the state of doubt, and gloom, and uncertainty, in which we find so many Christians now.

(3.) The future.—1 John 3:2, 'We know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him.' In this we find the same certainty expressed as to Christ's appearing and our appearing with Him. The early Christians counted the one as sure as the other. Their future was not darkened with the clouds of uncertainty: clouds of tribulation might envelope them, but their future was glorious.

We find the expression 'I know' used in a similar way in other parts of Scripture. 2 Timothy 1:12, 'I know whom I have believed.' We find also the words 'Ye know' thus used: 1 Peter 1:18, 'Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things.'

All these passages show us what the condition of personal certainty was which the early Church enjoyed, and of which we ought to be in possession. A Christian is not one who 'thinks,' or 'hopes,' or 'trusts' that he is forgiven and accepted, but who knows it, and knows it as certainly as he knows the facts regarding Jesus, His death and resurrection.

How did they come by this certainty?

They got it out of the promise which the gospel embodies. That gospel consists of two parts or testimonies, or rather a testimony and a promise. The testimony relates to the Christ of God, His person and His work; and the promise is, that whosoever believes the testimony is not only entitled, but commanded to draw the conclusion that he has eternal life. A testimony without a promise would not have done; it would have merely brought us into the position of men who see that their salvation is a possibility. They could not, from the testimony alone,

draw the conclusion, 'I have eternal life;' but the promise annexed to the testimony, declaring that every one who receives the testimony is saved, enables them at once to draw the personal conclusion. Thus we see that, while personal assurance is not the first thing in faith, it ought to follow immediately, and will do so where the gospel is rightly understood.

It is out of this annexed promise that our assurance comes, and not out of subsequent acts, or feelings, or experiences of our own. He who has not this assurance must not be believing the very gospel, but either more than it, or less than it. He who takes the whole gospel, both testimony and promise, knows that he has eternal life.

But, let us inquire a little further into this apostolic and primitive certainty. Both John and Paul use this word 'We know,' frequently. They use it not merely as apostles, but in the name of all believers. They do not merely say I but we (1 John 3:54; 2 Timothy 1:12). It is the language of certainty, not of opinion or conjecture. Let us ask, (1) What is the certainty? (2) how they got it? (3) how they kept it? (4) how they used it?

I. What is the certainty?—We know that we are of God,—that is, that we belong to God, that we are His children. This is,—

(1.) Very definite.—There is no mistaking what it means. We have passed from death to life; no longer condemned children of wrath, but God's property,—God's sons, God's heirs. Not generally 'we are Christians,' but 'we are of God.'

(2.) Very decided.—It is not 'We hope we are' of God, We think we are, We trust we are, We are inclined to believe we are, but 'We are.' There is no want of decision here, no vagueness, no ambiguity, no hesitation, no 'if', no 'perhaps,' but 'we know.'

(3.) Very personal.—It was something regarding themselves individually, not merely as classed with a certain body generally, but a personal thing, of which they were as cognizant as of the family, or city, or nation to which they belonged. Paul knew, and John knew, and all the early Christians knew that they were of God.

Yes, this was the apostolic watchword: 'We know that we are of God.' It was the

Reformation watchword; it must be ours.

II. How they got it.—In believing. It was not that they first believed themselves to be of God, and so were of God. They believed what God had told them concerning His Son, that Jesus was the Christ. They believed the record, the true record, concerning the eternal life which was in Him. In believing that record they became sons of God, and they knew this. The assurance of their own sonship was the necessary and inseparable consequence of believing the record, the gospel, the report. They got this certainty at once,—not after passing through a long and mysterious process; not after summing up all their own goodnesses, and being satisfied with the quality and the quantity of their faith; not as the result of a tedious metaphysical investigation into their spiritual state,— but as the simple and inevitable inference from their believing the gospel.

III. How they kept it.—They held the beginning of their confidence steadfast to the end. They continued to believe all that they did at first, and just in the same simple way. That which gave them peace and assurance at first, continued to do so to the last. Not as if it were a light matter whether they became holy or not. Far from this. That gospel which they believed taught them that they were to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. The peace they got was a holy peace, and could not exist in conjunction with an unholy life. The love of God out of which that peace had come to them was a holy love, and the indulgence of sin was incompatible with the belief of it. That sin in a true saint does not alter his standing as a pardoned man in the sight of God, is true; but it comes between him and God, and shuts God out. It may not tell upon God's feeling towards men; but it must tell upon man's feelings towards God, and also upon his knowledge of God's feelings towards him. The assurance does not come out of our holiness; yet it cannot be maintained save in connection with a holy life.

IV. How they used it.—Not for pride, self-seeking, or vain-glory. It did not destroy humility and meekness in them, nor did it lead to careless living. It brought with it no contempt of others, and no ostentation in their religious profession. They used it in none of these ways, nor for such purposes. It was to them,—

(1.) A humbling truth.—That God should have given them sonship was humbling; that He should have given them the assurance of it was more humbling still; for it brought out more fully all their own unworthiness, in

contrast with the boundless love of God. Compassed about with such love, so free and great, how could they be proud? Where is presumption? It is excluded. By what law? Of faith and certainty.

(2.) A quickening truth.—It had true life in it, true power. It stirred, it roused, it animated, it nerved. Uncertainty as to our relationship to God is one of the most enfeebling and dispiriting of things. It makes a man heartless. It takes the pith out of him. He cannot fight; he cannot run. He is easily dismayed, and gives way. He can do nothing for God. But when we know that we are of God, we are vigorous, brave, invincible. There is no more quickening truth than this of assurance.

(3.) A gladdening truth.—This needs no long proof or illustration. What gladness is contained in these simple words, 'We know that we are of God!' Until we can say this, where is joy? When we can say this, where is sorrow? It has fled away. What can cast us down?

(4) A sanctifying truth.—Yes, it sanctified the early Christians; and this in two ways: (1) separating them from a world that knew nothing of this love; (2) making them inwardly holy, like Him to whom they knew that they belonged. 'Now are we the sons of God...He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself.'

Are you sure? Can you say, I am of God? Has your gospel brought you certainty? or has it left you in non-assurance, a prey to doubt? Then what has it really done for you?

The Bible is the book of certainties. It gives no uncertain sound anywhere. It does not speak the language of doubt, or speculation, or conjecture, or opinion, but of certainty. Its object is to place us on the same footing of certainty, absolute certainty; enabling us to say not merely I think, or I judge, but I know; enabling us to say without faltering, yet without boasting, I possess the true, the real, the certain, the authentic. Our certainty from such a source is as sure as demonstration, because it rests on the authority of the God only wise.

This epistle is written (as we have seen) in the language of certainty. 'We know' is its motto, its burden from first to last. 'Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things' (2:20). 'We know that we have passed from death to life'

(3:14). 'We know that we are of God' (v. 19). 'We know that the Son of God is come.'

In our text there are three clauses or statements, each of them connected with 'we know.' Thus we have three certainties here: to each of them let us look.

I. We know that the Son of God is come.—This is the central point of earth's history, the most real, and certain, and productive of all its facts and events. On it everything turns, whether men see it or not.

(1.) There is such a being as the Son of God.—He is not merely a son, but the Son, the eternal Son, the only begotten Son, the wellbeloved Son; one with the Father.

(2.) He has come.—Not merely He is, but He has come down to us in very deed. The word implies remaining as well as coming. It is not, He has visited us, He has come and gone; but, He has come to us, and is with us. He has arrived, not to depart, but to remain.

(3.) He is Jesus of Nazareth.—A very man is He. Born at Bethlehem, brought up at Nazareth, the son of Mary, Jesus, who went out and in amongst us. The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.

(4.) We know this.—It is the most certain of all certainties; an event beyond the shadow of a doubt; the surest of all sure facts in earthly history. We know it on God's authority and on man's. Divine and human testimony unite here. Word and deed make us sure of this.

Ah, this is knowledge! The like of it is not to be found elsewhere. This is the knowledge that satisfies, gladdens, and gives us a foundation to rest on,—the Son of God has come.

II. We know that He has given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true.—For the meaning of 'understanding' we refer to Ephesians 1:18: 'The eyes of your understanding being enlightened;' and Ephesians 4:18, 'Having the understanding darkened.' Christ is the giver of the new, mind, whereby we discern the truth. He is, (1) Renewer; (2) Teacher; (3) the wisdom itself. He is the knowledge, and He gives the power of knowing. 'Who teacheth like Him?' He is the opener of the eye and ear. He that is true is evidently the

true One, or true God. 'This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God.' The Son of God has come to reveal to us the true God, to give us a mind capable of knowing and comprehending this true God. It is not a God that we need to know, but the God, the one living and true God. There is no knowledge of God out of Christ, apart from Christ, or without Christ. Where the knowledge of Christ is not, there is utter ignorance of God,—the worship of a false or an unknown god. False worship is a serious thing, a fearful sin, a hideous blasphemy. Falsehood touching God is infinite dishonour. Misapprehension of God is the root of all idolatry; and worship under such misapprehension is idolatry or superstition. It is the true God that is to be worshipped, none else. He will not give His glory to another. Nor will the knowledge of any false god fill or pacify the soul. It is only that God whom Jesus of Nazareth revealed that will suffice for the human spirit.

III. We know that we are in Him that is true.—To be in Him is to be out of the world, and out of self. We are to be in Him as the flower is in the garden, as the star is in the sky, as the graft is in the olivetree. We are to be rooted and built up in Him. Here it is not near Him, nor on Him, but in Him. We dwell in Him, and He in us. We are in Him as the true God; as such He is our God, our habitation. Thus we are compassed about with Him as the earth is by the air; He compasses us about. It is not merely that in Him we live, and move, and have our being; but much more than this, something of another kind; something that involves spiritual life, fellowship, love, and everlasting blessedness. But it is added, 'in His Son Jesus Christ.' We are not only in the Father, but in the Son, as we read (1 Thessalonians 1:1), 'The Church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ.' It is this inbeing, this indwelling, this participation or fellowship, that is our true standing and privilege.

(1.) This knowledge saves.—There is no salvation without it. It is saving knowledge. In knowing the true God we are saved.

(2.) This knowledge, gladdens.—False knowledge of God, or the knowledge of a false god, imparts no joy; this does. It is joy to know the true One.

(3.) This knowledge purifies.—Error or falsehood cannot deliver from sin, cannot purify the soul. All error is impurity, unholiness. All truth is good, and all truth respecting God sanctifies, expands, elevates.

(4.) This knowledge makes us useful.—It is like a light or fire within us that cannot be hidden. It is like a power within us which cannot but work. It is irrepressible.

Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee. He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, His Son. Blessed the man that knows Him. Unhappy he that knows Him not. Better that he had been a beast; better that he had never been born.

LXXXV.

Preservation And Presentation

"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."—

Jude 24, 25.

Jude, 'the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, speaks to us in the tone of an ancient prophet. His voice is that of Elijah or John the Baptist.

It is 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness.'

He speaks to the declining churches of his day. He speaks to the Church of the last days. It is against the evils within the Church that he specially warns; and what a picture does he draw of error, licentiousness, worldliness, spiritual decay, and ecclesiastical apostasy! Who could recognize the image of the primitive Church in the description he gives of prevailing iniquity? The world had absorbed the Church, and the Church was content that it should be so. The earth had helped the woman, and the woman had become earthly by reason of this help.

It is a picture for the Church in our day to study; for we are rapidly becoming part of the world, and falling into the snares of 'the god of this world.' Nay, and we glory in this as 'progress,' and 'culture,' and 'enlightenment;' as freedom from the bigotry of other centuries, and the narrowness of our half-enlightened ancestors, who did not know how to reconcile contraries, and to join what God has put asunder; how to believe everything alike; how to combine earth's pleasures and gaieties with the joy of God; how both to pray and to dance; how to revel and to weep for sin; how to wear both the 'white raiment' and the jeweled ball-dress; how to maintain friendship both with God and with His enemies; how both to pamper and to starve the flesh; how to lay up treasure both on earth and heaven; how to drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; how to be partaker of the Lord's table and the table of devils.

The names which he applies to these inconsistent brethren will seem to some hard and strange. 'Spots in their feasts of charity;' 'clouds without water;' 'trees whose fruit withereth;' 'twice dead, plucked up by the roots;' 'raging waves of the sea;' 'wandering stars;' yet naming the name of Christ, and numbered among His disciples! O darkness of the human heart! O subtlety of the flesh! O deceitfulness of sin! What is there that a man will not profess when it suits his purpose? What contradictions of life, and creed, and conscience will he scruple at, when ambitious of position, or fame, or wealth? O Church of the living God on earth, how art thou disfigured and defiled by those on whom thy name is written! How many are in thee who are not of thee, nay, who hate thee in their hearts while wearing thy livery; for whom the revellings and banquetings of earth have charms far beyond thy simple bread and wine; who are at home in the gay lighted hail of midnight mirth, but out of place in the upper chamber of thy Lord and Master; for whom the fair faces of earth have an attraction which thy holiness and beauty inspire not; for whom the luxuries of the social feast have a relish which they cannot find in that which is to thee better than angels' food, that 'flesh which is meat indeed, and that blood which is drink indeed!'

In this day of half-discipleship, of double service, of religious worldliness, and worldly religiousness, how needful it is that the awful words of the apostle be studied by the Church of God! We need them now; and ere long we shall need them more. Every day do we see, or read, or hear of things and scenes in connection with professing churches of Christ which make us ask, 'The Church or the world, which is it?' Are we not often constrained to say to ourselves, 'Are Christ's words no longer true? Have the broad and the narrow ways become one? Is there now no Church, or is there now no world?'

Not as if all this were strange and new, either in our days or in the apostle's. The germs of this apostasy were seen before the flood. It was of such men that Enoch prophesied when he proclaimed a coming judgment and a coming Lord (verse 14). 'Ungodly deeds,' 'hard speeches,' 'great swelling words,'—these were in Enoch's day; and they were swept off by the avenging flood of water. They are now again coming up in the last days, in wider and more awful development, waiting to be consumed by the flood of the devouring fire, with which the Lord when He comes is to purge this polluted earth, that He may bring out of it the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Greater, indeed, and more hateful, must be the wickedness of the last days; for, while it is written of antediluvian

days, 'It repented the Lord that He had made man upon the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart,' it is written of the last times, 'He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak to them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure' (Psalm 2:4, 5). The way of Cain, the error of Balaam, the gainsaying of Korah, will be all combined and repeated in the wickedness of the last days; for then the human heart shall, unchecked, be permitted to overflow. And do we not see the beginnings of this overflow in our own times? Nor are these beginnings the less evil because men deceive themselves and delude others, by calling evil good and good evil, by putting light for darkness and darkness for light.

Then, turning round to the few names who in the evil day had not defiled their garments, the apostle says, 'But ye; beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God' (verse 20). In verse 22 and 23 he tells these beloved ones how to treat these erring ones. They are of two classes: some not so far gone, with whom they might associate for good ('of some have compassion,' ἐλεείτε; go among them, 'doing deeds of mercy'); others so far gone, that they must stand aloof from them, lest they be polluted or burned. They must treat them as one does some article or person that has fallen into the fire, snatch it hastily out, 'hating even the garment spotted with the flesh.' Then lifting up his eyes to heaven, he closes with the magnificent doxology, 'Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling.'

Let us mark here the preservation, the presentation, and the praise.

I. The preservation.—The word 'keep' (Φυλάξαι) refers to watching and guarding; indicating not merely the fact of the keeping, but the mode,—vigilance, protection, and deliverance, in spite of dangers and enemies.

(1.) We need to be kept from falling.—We are not yet in the paradise of God, where no foot shall stumble, no enemy assail us, no snare be laid for us, no weakness overtake us. We are in the desert, in the land of danger, and darkness, and hostility, and rugged paths. We need perpetual keeping. We are ever falling, yet ever kept; cast down, but not destroyed; troubled, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken.

(2.) We cannot keep ourselves.—Self-help and self-reliance will do nothing for

us in such a 'keeping.' We have no strength, no skill, no wisdom. Yet not the less are we commanded to watch, and strengthen the things that remain, and fight and press onward; for in so doing the true help comes in. It is to them that have no might that God 'increaseth strength.'

(3.) It takes divine strength to keep us.—It is by 'the power of God' that we are kept (1 Peter 1:5; here the word 'kept' is (Φρουροῦμένους), garrisoned). Nothing short of this will do for us, considering the strength of sin, the weakness that is in us, the power of creature will for evil, the malice of our enemies. Only a divine arm can hold us up, and a divine shield protect us. No man, no angel, no Church, can keep us. Friends, ministers, teachers, can do much for us; but they cannot 'keep' us. He who is God our Saviour only can.

(4.) God is willing as well as able to keep us.—'The only wise God our Saviour' is He who keeps us (verse 1, preserved in Christ, (|Σ||}||}). His wisdom, His love, His power, His salvation, are all engaged in our behalf. He who saved us keeps us,—keeps us wisely, keeps us powerfully, keeps us every moment, keeps us to the end. He who keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. He kills, yet He makes alive; He bringeth down to the grave, yet bringeth up; He maketh poor, and then maketh rich; He bringeth low, and then lifteth up; He keepeth the feet of His saints (1 Samuel 2:6-9; Psalm 41:2). 'Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation,' is the story of each Christian's life. The glory for which we are kept is to be revealed when He who is our life shall appear.

II. The presentation.—The word 'present' means 'set,' or 'place,' as when one, having finished some great work or piece of art, sets it in some conspicuous place to be seen of all; as we read, 'that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church' (Ephesians 5:27); or as we read again, 'I will set him on high, because he hath known my name' (Psalm 41:14).

(1.) Of whom.—Of those who have been 'kept,'—kept for this end, that they might be presented. They were once sinners, perhaps amongst the worst; perhaps those who were pulled out of the fire; reclaimed backsliders as well as consistent saints, with nothing in their original history or character to give them any claim to the keeping or the presentation; obscure on earth, perhaps; of small esteem; 'dying,' 'chastened,' 'unknown,' 'sorrowful' (2 Corinthians 6:9); men of afflictions, necessities, distresses, perhaps of stripes and imprisonments (2

Corinthians 6:4), much in labours, and watchings, and fastings; men delivered unto death for Jesus' sake (2 Corinthians 4:2); 'coming out of great tribulation;' men often 'in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness;' men with 'thorns in the flesh,' and buffeted by 'Satan's messengers' (2 Corinthians 12:7, 10);—yet 'kept' in the midst of all these, nay, 'presented' at last without spot or wrinkle, or any trace of their earthly tribulation and shame, God wiping away all tears from their eyes. It is 'the kept' who are presented. The night of discipline breaks into the day of glory.

(2.) By whom.—They are presented by Him who kept them,—by 'the only wise God and our Saviour.' Jesus keeps, Jesus presents; it is with Him that we have to do from first to last, if, indeed, we can speak of 'last' in reference to a glory that is for ever. He leads us in at the strait gate; He leads us along the narrow way; He leads us into the paradise of God; He leads us up to the throne, there to exhibit us as the trophies of His wisdom, and power, and love.

(3.) Where.—They are presented before the presence of His glory. The glory dwelt in the innermost shrine; and into the presence of that glory the Redeemer carries those whom He has kept. No outer court will do for such a presentation. Jewels such as these, thus 'made up' (Malachi 3:17), are fit for the royal palace; no meaner place will do; no place less holy, less heavenly, will suffice. Their sparkling luster must be laid beside the gold of the mercy seat, above which the glory dwelleth,—the gems, and the gold, and the glory, helping each to bring out the other's splendor. It is His glory before which we are to be set,—the glory of the Only-begotten of the Father; the glory of the holy of holies,—a glory which shall shed down its eternal radiance upon those who are thus kept and thus presented, changing them into the same image from glory to glory, in that realm where all is glory, and from which every trace of imperfection shall have vanished, leaving nothing behind but what is divinely fair and 'perfect.' Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. The 'tree of life' and the 'crown of life' are theirs (Revelations 2:7,10); the hidden manna, the 'white stone,' the 'new name,' and the new song, are theirs (Revelations 2:17); the 'morning star' is theirs (Revelations 2:28); the 'white raiment' is theirs; a home in the heavenly temple is theirs; Christ's throne is theirs (Revelations 3:5, 12:21); the holy city, with its jasper wall, and golden pavement, and jeweled foundations, and crystal river, and unsetting sun, is theirs (Revelations 21:18,

22:1-5). Nothing less than this is implied in this presentation before the presence of His glory. They behold His face in righteousness, and are satisfied when they awake with His likeness (Psalm 17:15).

4. How.—In two respects: 'faultless,' and 'with exceeding joy.' And are not these the two perfections of eternity?

(a) Faultless.—It is \int here, internally pure and unblemished; not simply $\{\Sigma\circ\}l\ |\ \int$, unchallengeable in law (1 Corinthians 1:8). This is the perfection of holiness in store for those whose name from the first has been 'saints of God.' Without any inward stain or blemish; without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. 'Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee' (Song 4:7 Ephesians 5:27). Legally and judicially this faultlessness becomes ours when we believe; but internally and morally it is reserved for a more perfect day. Yet let us keep in mind that it is written, 'Be ye holy, for I am holy.' The day of spotlessness and perfection is at hand; and how will the light of that day display the utter vanity of those ideas of present perfection and holiness in which many boast themselves? Ye who think that ye have lived months and years without sin, how will ye stand the test of that all searching day?

(b) With exceeding joy.—The word is a strong one, like those of the Old Testament, 'leaping for joy.' This is the fullness of the 'joy unspeakable and full of glory.' This is what David sang of: 'In Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand are pleasures for evermore' (Psalm 16:2). The days of the mourning of these saints are ended. This is the day of resurrection, and therefore they are glad. It is the day of the Master's long looked for appearing, and therefore they are glad. It is the day of reunion with the dear and lost, and therefore they are glad. It is the day of the Lamb's marriage, and the Bridegroom's coronation, and therefore they are glad. Then that shall come to pass which is written, 'The King's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions shall be brought unto thee. with gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter the King's palace' (Psalm 95:12-15). They 'shall return and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away' (Isaiah 35:10).

III. The praise.—This is comprised in four well-known words, 'glory and

majesty,' 'dominion and power.'[11] All excellency, personal and official, regal and priestly, is here ascribed to 'the only wise God our Saviour;' for He whose name is Saviour is 'the God only wise' (Romans 16:27; 1 Timothy 1:17). On these words of praise, which make up this divine anthem, we do not dwell. Each of them contains something special, which it is difficult exactly to define or fully to unfold; and all of them taken together make up a doxology, to whose vast compass no voice nor instrument can give full effect, even in the heaven of heavens. Similar doxologies we find in the Psalms (Psalm 145:3-13); and in the Revelation (ch. 4:9-11, v. 12, 14, 7, 12). These various words of praise, scattered throughout Scripture, are but so many precious gems, of which, with our dim eyes, we can see here little beyond the outside sparkle. The full inner beauty and sublimity are in reserve for the day when, with purged vision, we shall look upon His surpassing excellence, and with loosened tongue celebrate His glory in the everlasting kingdom, amid the sound of the many waters, and the mighty thunderings, and the voice of harpers harping with their harps (Revelation 14:2).

The whole of this epistle is full of solemn thought for us. It is very similar in tone to the apocalyptic epistles to the seven churches, and seems almost like a preface to them. Its warnings against declension from truth and holiness, against worldliness and luxury, against inflated self-sufficiency and boastfulness, against profligacy and carnality, against a fruitless religion and an empty name, are very appalling, and sound like a prelude to the last trumpet,—a voice from heaven so loud and penetrating, that it would seem as if even the dead would awake under its terrible thunder. What sins it exposes in the Church of God! what departures from first love! what debasement in evil! It takes up and echoes the apostolic warnings of earlier days. Here we find the summary of the sins and apostasies of Christendom. The 'strong delusion,' which believes the lie, is here (2 Thessalonians 2:2). The fatal friendship between God and the world is here (James 4:4). The often denounced fellowship between the clean and the unclean is here (1 Corinthians 10:21). Here is represented to us the last great lapse to the Christian Churches, and with it the ending of the times of the Gentiles; the commixture of religion and irreligion, of error and truth, of fleshly lusts and a confident profession, of antinomian laxity and a high profession, the alliance (political, or philosophical, or scientific, or ecclesiastical) between Egypt and Israel, between Babylon and Jerusalem (2 Timothy 3:1-7). Here we see the Church absorbed in the world, and the world in the Church, each delighted with the other; the sons of Belial sitting at the 'feast of charity' and at the supper of

the Lord; error the companion of truth, and truth the ally of error; the fine arts (music, painting, sculpture) all made to minister, not to religion, but to the production of religious sensations, which make men believe that they are religious, when they are mere admirers of the beautiful and solemn in sight and sound.[12]

Thus does Jude warn us, as Paul did, against the perilous times of the last days.

The Church of our age may not be chargeable with such declension as in the days of Jude. The fine gold may have become dim, but is not altogether dross. Yet modern Christianity has in it but little of the miracle or magnificence of early times. It is not so holy, so prayerful, so joyful; nor yet so high, so noble, so splendid. The grandeur of apostolic saintship has disappeared. How poor is much of the religion we see around us! How hollow and superficial! Sullen in some, flippant in others, showy in others, bustling and talkative in others, worldly and political in others, sensational and sentimental in others,—in all, second-rate, even when sincere and true.

One of the most sorrowful things amongst us is the going back of many who 'did run well;' who were once zealous and sound in the faith, but have been swept into the torrent of 'progress.' They boast of keeping abreast of the age, and mistake the snares of Satan as 'an angel of light' for the 'leadings of providence' and teachings of the Holy Ghost; leaving their first faith and love; taking one of earth's meteors for the heavenly pole-star. Politics, pleasure, gaiety, business, philosophy, science, have come between them and the glory, if not between them and the cross. Leanness of soul, lowness of spirituality, lukewarmness in everything but outward religious bustle, describe their present condition. They do not thrive, nor bear fruit. They have come to be once more in love with this present evil world, from which they had been delivered; they have become stagnant in the routine of external service and conventional talk; they have thrown themselves into the spirit of the age in its full breadth,—a breadth too narrow to include the glory of earth's coming King and the power of the Holy Spirit, but broad enough to contain in it the dark subtleties of anti Christian error, at least in their germ or idea, which in its full development will not only deify humanity, and worship creature intellect and power, but will enthrone force, and numbers, and money, and commerce, and art, with all that is called 'nature' and 'natural laws,' as the true regalities of earth, the true elevators of the race, and accomplishers of the destinies of man!

That any of Christ's sheep shall perish, we do not believe. God's eternal purpose secures them forever.

But we see strange things in our time. Men believe one thing today, another tomorrow, and a third the next, and they call it progress! The voice of the age is reckoned the voice of God! Truth has become flexible, and principle as pliant as wax. Men who looked as like Christians as any could look, turn back into error or worldliness. They did run well, but they have been 'hindered that they should not obey the truth' (Galatians 5: 7); they have been 'bewitched' (fascinated, $\text{R}\langle [|\langle \{]$, Galatians 3:1), so as no longer to obey the truth; they began in the Spirit, and they are trying to perfect themselves by the flesh. Some who once preached the gladness of the glad news have plunged into the gloom of Popery or ritualism. Others, who seemed to live in prayer, and were absorbed in the study of the one blessed book, now think prayer needless, because of God's universal Fatherhood, and the Bible, though the best of books, only one of an ascending series, all of them inspired; who look on novels and newspapers, depicting what they call 'life and character,' as our true text-books for daily study; who are persuaded that this world is not so evil as some narrow Christians think it, and that its feasts, and luxuries, and gaieties are good things, which a Christian ought not to abjure but to enjoy.[13]

When we see these things, we stand in awe, perplexed as to what next may happen, asking, 'Are there few that be saved?' and alarmed at finding how closely an unbeliever may resemble a believer, and how far down a Christian may be permitted to sink without totally falling away.

Let us not be deceived by the vain show in which men are walking. In spite of all fancied progress, that word is still true, 'We are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.' No amount of 'culture' can change the natural man. 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh,' and the 'progress' of the flesh, however goodly it seems, must be ever downward.

When that which is perfect is come, and that which is in part has been done away; when the kingdom which cannot be moved has been set up, then the world's true progress begins, and the divine 'culture' will take the place of the human. Then, as we look back, we shall be astonished at the shallow thing

which men call progress now, and see in it man's last proud effort to enter heaven without being born from above; to be a god to himself, and by his own intellect and energy to rectify the world which he has ruined,—a world which can only be restored by the power of the Holy Ghost, and the enthronization of its long absent King.

[8] Does the following sentence not read as if Bunyan and not Shakespeare had written it? 'I am for the house with the narrow gate; which I take to be too little for pomp to enter: some that humble themselves may; but the many will be too chill and tender; and they'll be for the flowery way that leads to the broad gate and the great fire.'

[9] The whole passage should be noted. There is Sinai burning with fire, verse 18. There is the blood of sprinkling, verse 24. And then there is the service and worship; the kingdom that cannot be moved rising out of the shakings of the things that can be shaken; and then the exhortation, 'Let us hold fast the grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire,'—i.e., though gracious, yet to be revered and feared.

[10] Horeb is the name of the mountain range, Sinai of the one mountain.

[11] 'Glory,' the personal and intrinsic excellence; 'majesty,' the outshining splendor and greatness ($\Sigma \textcircled{[] \{ | \}$); 'dominion,' or rather strength, personal strength ($\{ | \} \}$); 'power,' or rather authority ($(\{ \{ \langle)$), legal or official authority to exercise that strength. [12] It is said, that in the last days of the old Roman empire, when its 'decline' was passing into its 'fall,' everything was paralyzed by luxury save music, which was cultivated to utter intoxication. Old Rome died music mad.

[13] Fathers and mothers, watch over your children. Keep them from the world; train them up for the world to come. Draw out their young hearts in admiration of the coming glory, so that earth's vanities shall fade from their eye. Be careful as to what books or magazines they read. Discriminate between the useful and the useless, between the wholesome and the poisonous. Lead them not into temptation. As the world goes on in its apostasy from God and its deification of humanity, its snares will become more subtle, and its falsehoods more beautiful, especially for the young heart and eye. Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life. No amount of 'progress' or 'culture' or 'liberality' can make that gate wider or that way broader, either for yourselves or your children.