

AN EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

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Hebrews 12:3 - Hebrews 13

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Hebrews 12:3, 4

Chapter 85 - A Call to Steadfastness

At first sight it is not easy to trace the thread which unites the passage that was last before us and the verses which are now to engage our attention: there appears to be no direct connection between the opening verses of Hebrews 12 and those which follow. But a closer examination of them shows they are intimately related: in verses 3, 4 the apostle completes the exhortation with which the chapter opens. In verse 1 the apostle borrowed a figure from the Grecian Games, namely, the marathon race, and now in verse 4 he refers to another part of those games—the contest between the gladiators in the arena. Second, he had specified the principal grace required for the Christian race, namely, "Patience" or perseverance; so now in verse 3 he is urging them against faintness of mind or impatience. Third, he had enforced his exhortation by bidding the saints to "look unto Jesus" their great Exemplar; so here he calls on them to "consider Him" and emulate His steadfastness.

Yet, the verses which are now before us are not a mere repetition of those immediately preceding: rather do they present another, though closely related aspect of the Christian life or "race." In verse 1 the racers are bidden to "lay aside every weight," and in verse 3 it is the "contradiction of sinners" which has to be endured: the former, are hindrances which proceed more from within; the latter, are obstacles which are encountered from without. In the former case, it is the evil solicitations of the flesh which would have to be resisted; in the other, it is the persecutions of the world which have to be endured. In verse 1 it is "the sin which doth so easily beset" or "encircle us"—inward depravity—which must be "laid aside"; in verse 4 it is martyrdom which must be prepared for, lest we yield to the "sin" of apostasy.

Now the secret of success, the way to victory, is the same in either case. To enable us to "lay aside" all that hinders from within, there has to be a trustful "looking unto Jesus," and to enable us to "endure" the oppositions encountered from without and to "strive"

against inconstancy and wavering in our profession, we must thoughtfully "consider Him" who was hounded and persecuted as none other ever was. As the incentive to self-denial we are to be occupied with our great Leader, and remember how much He "laid aside" for us—He who was rich for our sakes became poor; He who was "in the form of God" divested Himself of His robes of glory and took upon Him "the form of a servant." We are not called on to do something which He did not He vacated the throne and took up His cross! Likewise, the chief source of comfort and encouragement when we are called upon to suffer for His sake, is to call to mind the infinitely greater sufferings which He endured for our sakes.

The more we endeavor to emulate the example which the Lord Jesus has left us, the more shall we be opposed from without; the more closely we follow Him, the greater will be the enmity of our fellow-men against us. Our lives will condemn theirs, our ways will be a perpetual rebuke to them, and they will do all they can to discourage and hinder, provoke and oppose. And the tendency of such persecution is to dishearten us, to tempt us to compromise, to ask "What is the use?" Because of this, the blessed Spirit bids us, "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Let the experiences through which Christ passed be the subject of daily contemplation. The record of His unparalleled temptations and trials, His endurance, and His victory, is to be the grand source of our instruction, comfort and encouragement. If we have grown "faint and weary" in our minds, it is because we have failed to properly and profitably "consider Him."

Supremely important is a knowledge of the Scriptures concerning the Lord Jesus: there can be no experimental holiness, no growth in grace apart from the same. Vital godliness consists in a practical conformity to the image of God's Son: it is to follow the example which He has left us, to take His yoke upon us and learn of Him. For this, there must needs be an intimate knowledge of His ways, a prayerful and believing study of the record of His life, a daily reading of and meditating thereon. That is why the four Gospels are placed at the beginning of the N.T.—they are of first importance. What we have in the Epistles is principally an interpretation and application of the four Gospels to the details of our walk. O that we may say with ever-deepening purpose of heart,

"I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8). O that we may "follow on to know the Lord" (Hos. 6:3)

"For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin" (Heb. 12:3, 4). The whole of this is a dehortation or caution against an evil, which if yielded to will prevent our discharge of the duty inculcated in verses 1, 2. That which is dehorted against is "be not wearied"—give not up the race, abandon not your Christian profession. The way whereby we may fall into that evil is by becoming "faint" in our minds. The means to prevent this is the diligent contemplation of our great Exemplar.

In verses 1, 2 the apostle had exhorted unto a patient or persevering pressing forward in the path of faith and obedience. In verses 3-11 he presents a number of considerations or motives to hearten us in our course, seeking particularly to counteract the enervating influence which difficulties are apt to exert upon the minds of God's tried people. The tendency of strong and lasting opposition and persecution is to discourage, which if yielded unto leads to despair. To strengthen the hearts of those tried Hebrews, the apostle bade them consider the case of Christ Himself: He encountered far worse sufferings than we do, yet He patiently "endured" them (verse 3). Then they were reminded that their case was by no means desperate and extreme—they had not yet been called to suffer a death of martyrdom. Finally, their very difficulties were the loving chastisement of their Father, designed for their profit (verses 5-11). By what a variety of means does the blessed Spirit strengthen, stablish, and comfort tried believers!

Are you, dear reader, disheartened by the hard usage you are receiving from men, yea, from the religious world; are you fearful as you anticipate the persecutions which may yet attend your Christian profession; or, are you too ready to show resentment against those who oppose you? Then "consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself." The connecting "For" has the force here of "moreover:" in addition to "looking unto Jesus" as your Leader and Perfecter, consider Him in His steadfastness under relentless persecution. Faith has many actings or forms of exercise: it is to reflect, contemplate, call to mind—God's past ways with us,

His dealings with His people of old, and particularly the recorded history of His beloved and incarnate Son. We are greatly the losers if we fail to cultivate the habit of devout consideration and holy meditation. The Greek word for "consider" is not the same as the one used in Hebrews 3:1 and Hebrews 10:24; in fact it is a term which occurs, in this form, nowhere else in the N.T.

The Greek word for "consider" in our text is derived from the one rendered "proportion" in Romans 12:6. It is a mathematical term, signifying to compute by comparing things together in their due proportions. It means: form a just and accurate estimate. "For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself:" draw an analogy between His sufferings and yours, and what proportion is there between them! Weigh well who He was, the place He took, the infinite perfection of His character and deeds; and then the base ingratitude, the gross injustice, the cruel persecution He met with. Calculate and estimate the constancy of the opposition He encountered, the type of men who maligned Him, the variety and intensity of His sore trials, and the spirit of meekness and patience with which He bore them. And what are our trifling trials when compared with His agonies, or even to our deserts! O my soul blush with shame because of thy murmurings.

"Consider Him" in the ineffable excellency of His person. He was none other than the Lord of glory, the Beloved of the Father, the second person in the sacred Trinity, the Creator of heaven and earth. Now, since He suffered here on earth, why should you, having enlisted under His banner, think it strange that you should be called on to endure a little hardness in His service! Consider his relationship to you: He is your Redeemer and Proprietor: is it not sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master, the servant as his Lord? If the Head was spared not trial and shame, shall the members of His body complain if they be called on to have some fellowship with Him in this? When you are tempted to throw down your colors and capitulate to the Enemy, or even to murmur at your hard lot, "Consider Him" who when here "had not where to lay His head."

The particular sufferings of Christ which are here singled out for our consideration are, the "contradiction of sinners" which He encountered. He was opposed constantly, by word and action; He was opposed by His own people according to the flesh; He was opposed by the very ones to whom He ministered in infinite grace

and loving-kindness. That opposition began at His birth, when there was no room in the inn—He was not wanted. It was seen again in His infancy, when Herod sought to slay Him, and His parents were forced to flee with Him into Egypt. Little else is told us in the N.T., about His early years, but there is a Messianic prophecy in Psalm 88:15 where we hear Him pathetically saying, "I am afflicted and ready to die from My youth up!" As soon as His public ministry commenced, and during the whole of its three years' course, He endured one unbroken, relentless, "contradiction of sinners against Himself."

The Lord Jesus was derided as the Prophet, mocked as the King, and treated with the utmost contempt as the Priest and Savior. He was accused of deceiving (John 7:12) and perverting the people (Luke 23:14). His teaching was opposed, and His person was insulted. Because He conversed with and befriended publicans and sinners, He was "murmured" at (Luke 15:2). Because He performed works of mercy on the sabbath day, He was charged with breaking the law (Mark 3:2). The gracious miracles which He wrought upon the sick and demon-possessed, were attributed to His being in league with the Devil (Matthew 12:24). He was regarded as a low-born fanatic. He was branded as a "glutton and winebibber." He was accused of speaking against Caesar (John 19:12), whereas He had expressly bidden men to render unto Caesar what rightly belonged to him (Matthew 22:21). Though He was the Holy One of God, there was scarcely anything about Him that was not opposed.

"For consider Him who endured such contradiction" Here is emphasized the greatness of Christ's sufferings: "such contradiction"—so bitter, so severe, so malicious, so protracted; everything which the evil wits of men and Satan could invent. That word "such" is also added to awaken our wonderment and worship. Though the incarnate Son of God, He was spat upon, contemptuously arrayed in a purple robe and His enemies bowed the knee before Him in mockery. They buffeted Him and smote Him on the face. They tore His back with scourgings, as was foretold by the Psalmist (Ps. 129:3). They condemned Him to a criminal's death, and nailed Him to the Cross, and that, between two thieves, to add to His shame. And this, at the hands of men who, though they made a great show of sanctity, were "sinners."

Christ felt keenly that "contradiction," for He was the Man of

sorrows and acquainted with grief. At the end, He exclaimed "reproach hath broken My heart" (Ps. 69:20). Nevertheless, He turned not aside from the path of duty, still less did He abandon His mission. He fled not from His enemies, and fainted not under their merciless persecution: instead, He "endured" it. As we pointed out in our exposition of the previous verse, that word is used of Christ in its highest and noblest sense. He bore patiently every ignominy that was heaped upon Him. He never retaliated or reviled His traducers. He remained steadfast unto the end, and finished the work which had been given Him to do. When the supreme crises arrived, He faltered not, but "set His face as a flint to go up to Jerusalem" (Isa. 50:7, Luke 9:51).

Do you, tried reader, feel that your cup of opposition is a little fuller than that of some of your fellow Christians? Then look away to the cup which Christ drank! Here is the Divine antidote against weariness: Christ meekly and triumphantly "endured" far, far worse than anything you are called on to suffer for His sake; yet He fainted not. When you are weary in your mind because of trials and injuries from the enemies of God, "consider" Christ, and this will quieten and suppress thy corrupt propensities to murmuring and impatience. Set Him before thy heart as the grand example and encouragement—example in patience, encouragement in the blessed issue: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12). Faith's consideration of Him will work a conformity unto Him in our souls which will preserve from fainting.

"Lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." There is no connecting "and" in the Greek: two distinct thoughts are presented: "lest ye be wearied," that is, so discouraged as to quit; "faint in your mind," states the cause thereof. The word for "weary" here is a strong one: it signifies exhausted, being so despondent as to break one's resolution. In its ultimate meaning, it refers to such a state of despondency as an utter sinking of spirit, through the difficulties, trials, opposition and persecution encountered as to "look back" (Luke 9:62), and either partially or wholly abandon one's profession of the Gospel. In other words, it is another warning against apostasy. What we are cautioned against here is the opposite of that which the Lord commended in the Ephesian Church, "And for My name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted" (Rev. 2:3)—here there is perseverance in the Christian profession despite all opposition.

At different periods of history God has permitted fierce opposition to break out against His people, to test the reality and strength of their attachment to Christ. This was the case with those to whom our Epistle was first addressed: they were being exposed to great trials and sufferings, temptations and privations; hence the timeliness of this exhortation, and its accompanying warning. Reproaches, losses, imprisonments, scourgings, being threatened with death, have a strong tendency to produce dejection and despair; they present a powerful temptation to give up the fight. And naught but the vigorous activity of faith will fortify the mind under religious persecution. Only as the heart is encouragingly occupied with Christ's endurance of the "contradiction of sinners against Himself," will our resolution be strong to endure unto the end: "In the world ye shall have tribulations: but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

"Faint in your minds." This it is which, if not resisted and corrected, leads to the "weariness" or utter exhaustion of the previous clause. This faintness of mind is the reverse of vigor and cheerfulness. If, under the strong opposition and fierce persecution, we are to "endure unto the end," then we must watch diligently against the allowance of such faintness of mind. There is a spiritual vigor required in order to perseverance in the Christian profession during times of persecution. Hence it is that we are exhorted, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind" (1 Pet. 4:1); "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in the heavenlies. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand" (Eph. 6:12, 13); "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13).

Any degree of faintness of mind in the Christian results from and consists in a remitting of the cheerful actions of faith in the various duties which God has called us to discharge. Nothing but the regular exercise of faith keeps the soul calm and restful, patient and prayerful. If faith ceases to be operative, and our mind be left to cope with difficulties and trials in our own natural strength, then we shall soon grow weary of a persecuted Christian profession. Herein lies the beginning of all spiritual declension—a lack of the due

exercise of faith, and that in turn, is the result of the heart growing cold toward Christ! If faith be in healthy exercise, we shall say, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18), realizing that "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17); ah, but that consciousness is only "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (verse 18).

"Consider Him:" there is the remedy against faintness of mind; there is the preservative from such "weariness" of dejection of spirits that we are ready to throw down our weapons and throw up our hands in utter despair. It is the diligent consideration of the person of Christ, the Object of faith, the Food of faith, the Supporter of faith. It is by drawing an analogy between His infinitely sorer sufferings and our present hardships. It is by making application unto ourselves of what is to be found in Him suitable to our own case. Are we called on to suffer a little for Him, then let our eye be turned on Him who went before us in the same path of trial. Make a comparison between what He "endured" and what you are called to struggle with, and surely you will be ashamed to complain! "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). Admire and imitate His meekness—weeping over His enemies, and praying for His murderers!

"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin" (verse 4). The persons here immediately addressed—the "ye"—were the Hebrews themselves. Because of their profession of Christianity, because of their loyalty to Christ, they had suffered severely in various ways. Plain reference to something of what they had already been called on to endure is made in 10:32-34, "But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods." Thus, the Hebrew saints had been sorely oppressed by their unbelieving brethren among the Jews; it is that which gave such point to the exhortation and warning in the previous verse.

"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

Here is the second consideration which the apostle pressed upon his afflicted brethren: not only to ponder the far greater opposition which their Savior encountered, but also to bear in mind that their own sufferings were not so severe as they might have been, or as possibly they would yet be. It is an argument made by reasoning from the greater to the less, and from comparing their present state with that which might await them: what could be expected to sustain their hearts and deliver from apostasy when under the supreme test of death by violence, if they fainted beneath lesser afflictions? We, too, should honestly face the same alternative: if unkind words and sneers make us waver now, how would we acquit ourselves if called on to face a martyr's death!

The present state of the oppressed Hebrews is here expressed negatively: "ye have not yet resisted unto blood." True, they had already met with various forms of suffering, but not yet had they been called upon to lay down their lives. As Hebrews 10:32-34 clearly intimates, they had well acquitted themselves during the first stages of their trials, but their warfare was not yet ended. They had need to bear in mind that word of Christ, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1); and that exhortation of the Holy Spirit, "let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9).

"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood." The apostle here hinted to the Hebrews what might yet have to be endured by them, namely a bloody and violent death—by stoning, or the sword, or fire. That is the utmost which fiendish persecutors can afflict. Men may kill the body, but when they have done that, they can do no more. God has set bounds to their rage: none will hound or harm His people in the next world! Those who engage in the Christian profession, who serve under the banner of Christ, have no guarantee that they may not be called unto the utmost suffering of blood on account of their allegiance to him; for that is what His adversaries have always desired. Hence, Christ bids us to "sit down and count the cost" (Luke 14:28), of being His disciples. God has decreed that many, in different ages should be martyred for His own praise, the glory of Christ and the honor of the Gospel.

"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." "Sin" is here personified, regarded as a combatant which has to be overcome. The various persecutions, hardships, afflictions,

difficulties of the way, in consequence of our attachment to Christ, become so many occasions and means which sin seeks to employ in order to hinder and oppose us. The Christian is called to a contest with sin. The apostle continues his allusion to the Grecian Games, changing from the racer to the combatant. The great contest is in the believer's heart between grace and sin, the flesh and the spirit (Gal. 5:17). Sin seeks to quench faith and kill obedience: therefore sin is to be "striven against" for our very souls are at stake. There is no place for sloth in this deadly contest; no furloughs are granted!

"Striving against sin." That which the Hebrews were striving against was apostasy, going to the full lengths of sin—abandoning their Christian profession. Persecution was the means which indwelling depravity sought to use, to employ in slaying faith and fidelity to Christ. That terrible wickedness was to be steadfastly resisted, by fighting against weariness in the conflict. O to say with the apostle, "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13): but in order to reach that state of soul, there has to be a close walking with Him day by day, and a patient bearing of the minor trials. "If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" (Jer. 12:5).

Hebrews 12:5

Chapter 86 - Divine Chastisement

The grand truth of Divine Chastisement is inexpressibly blessed, and one which we can neglect only to our great loss. It is of deep importance, for when Scripturally apprehended it preserves from some serious errors by which Satan has succeeded (as "an angel of light") in deceiving and destroying not a few. For example, it sounds the death-knell to that wide-spread delusion of "sinless perfectionism." The passage which is to be before us unmistakably exposes the wild fanaticism of those who imagine that, as the result of some "second work of grace," the carnal nature has been eradicated from their beings, so that, while perhaps not so wise, they are as pure as the angels which never sinned, and lead lives which are blameless in the sight of the thrice holy God. Poor blinded souls: such have not even experienced a first "work of Divine grace" in their souls: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

"My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him; for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb. 12:5, 6). How plain and emphatic is that! God does find something to "rebuke" in us, and uses the rod upon every one of His children. Chastisement for sin is a family mark, a sign of sonship, a proof of God's love, a token of His Fatherly kindness and care; it is an inestimable mercy, a choice new-covenant blessing. Woe to the man whom God chastens not, whom He suffers to go recklessly on in the boastful and presumptuous security which so many now mistake for faith. There is a reckoning to come of which he little dreams. Were he a son, he would be chastened for his sin; he would be brought to repentance and godly sorrow, he would with grief of heart confess his backslidings, and then be blest with pardon and peace.

The truth of Divine chastisement corrects another serious error, which has become quite common in certain quarters, namely, that God views His people so completely in Christ that He sees no

sin in them. It is true, blessedly true, that of His elect it is stated, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel" (Num. 23:21) and that Christ declares of His spouse "Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee" (Song 4:7). The testimony of Scripture is most express that in regard to the justification or acceptance of the persons of the elect, they are "complete in Him"—Christ (Col. 2:10); "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6)—washed in Christ's blood, clothed with His righteousness. In that sense, God sees no sin in them; none to punish. But we must not use that precious truth to set aside another, revealed with equal clearness, and thus fall into serious error.

God does see sin in His children and chastises them for it. Even though the non-imputation of sin to the believer (Rom. 4:8) and the chastisement of sin in believers (1 Cor. 11:30-32) were irreconcilable to human reason, we are bound to receive both on the authority of Holy Writ. Let us beware lest we fall under the solemn charge of Malachi 2:9, "Ye have not kept My ways, but have been partial in the law." What could be plainer than this, "I will make Him my Firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for Him for evermore, and My covenant shall stand fast with Him. His seed also will I make to endure forever and His throne as the days of heaven. If His children forsake My law, and walk not in My judgments; if they break My statutes, and keep not My commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My loving kindness will I not utterly take from Him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail" (Ps. 89:27-33). Five things are clearly revealed there. First Christ Himself is addressed under the name of "David." Second, His children break God's statutes. Third, in them there is "iniquity" and "transgression." Fourth, God will "visit" their transgression "with the rod!" Fifth, yet will He not cast them off.

What could express more clearly the fact that God does see sin in believers, and that He does chastise them for it? For, be it noted, the whole of the above passage speaks of believers. It is the language, not of the Law, but of the Gospel. Blessed promises are there made to believers in Christ: the unchanging loving-kindness of God, His covenant-faithfulness toward them, His spiritual blessing of them. But "stripes" and the "rod" are there promised too! Then let us not dare to separate what God has joined together. How do we

know anything concerning the acceptance of the elect in Christ? The answer must be, Only on the testimony of Holy Writ. Very well; from the same unerring Testimony we also know that God chastises His people for their sins. It is at our imminent peril that we reject either of these complementary truths.

The same fact is plainly presented again in Hebrews 12:7-10, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily, for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness." The apostle there draws an analogy from the natural relationship of father and child. Why do earthly parents chastise their children? Is it not for their faults? Can we justify a parent for chastening a child where there was no fault, nothing in him which called for the rod? In that case, it would be positive tyranny, actual cruelty. If the same be not true spiritually, then the comparison must fall to the ground. Hebrews 12 proves conclusively that, if God does not chastise me then I am an unbeliever, and I sign my own condemnation as a bastard.

Yet it is very necessary for us to point out, at this stage, that all the sufferings of believers in this world are not Divine rebukes for personal transgressions. Here too we need to be on our guard against lopsidedness. After we have apprehended the fact that God does take notice of the iniquities of His people and use the rod upon them, it is so easy to jump to the conclusion that when we see an afflicted Christian, God must be visiting His displeasure upon him. That is a sad and serious error. Some of the very choicest of God's saints have been called on to endure the most painful and protracted sufferings; some of the most faithful and eminent servants of Christ have encountered the most relentless and extreme persecution. Not only is this a fact of observation, but it is plainly revealed in Holy Writ.

As we turn to God's Word for light on the subject of suffering among the saints, we find it affirmed, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all" (Ps. 34:19). Those "afflictions" are sent by God upon different

ones for various reasons. Sometimes for the prevention of sin: the experience of the beloved apostle was a case in point, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure" (2 Cor. 12:7). Sometimes sore trials are sent for the testing and strengthening of our graces: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience" (James 1:2, 3). Sometimes God's servants and people are called on to endure fierce persecution for a confirmatory testimony to the Truth "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41).

Yet here again we need to be much on our guard, for the flesh is ever ready to pervert even the holy things of God, and make an evil use of that which is good. When God is chastising a Christian for his sins, it is so easy for him to suppose such is not the case, and falsely comfort himself with the thought that God is only developing his graces, or permitting him to have closer fellowship with the sufferings of Christ. Where we are visited with afflictions personally, it is always the safest policy to assume that God has a controversy with us; humble ourselves beneath His mighty hand, and say with Job, "Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me" (10:2); and when He has convicted me of my fault, to penitently confess and forsake it. But where others are concerned, it is not for us to judge—though sometimes God reveals the cause to His servants (Amos 3:7).

In the passage which is to be before us, the apostle presents a third consideration why heed should be given unto the exhortation at the beginning of Hebrews 12, which calls to patient perseverance in the path of faith and obedience, notwithstanding all the obstacles, difficulties, and dangers which may be encountered therein. He now draws a motive from the nature of those sufferings considered in the light of God's end in them: all the trials and persecutions which He may call on His people to endure are necessary, not only as testimonies to the truth, to the reality of His grace in them, but also as chastisements which are required by us, wherein God has a blessed design toward us. This argument is enforced by several considerations to the end of verse 13. How we should admire and

adore the consummate wisdom of God which has so marvelously ordered all, that the very things which manifest the hatred of men against us, are evidences of His love toward us! How the realization of this should strengthen patience!

O how many of God's dear children have found, in every age, that the afflictions which have come upon them from a hostile world, were soul-purging medicines from the Lord. By them they have been bestirred, revived, and mortified to things down here; and made partakers of God's holiness, to their own unspeakable advantage and comfort. Truly wondrous are the ways of our great God. Hereby doth He defeat the counsels and expectations of the wicked, having a design to accomplish by their agency something which they know not of. These very reproaches, imprisonments, stripes, with the loss of goods and danger of their lives, with which the world opposed them for their ruin; God makes use of for their refining, consolation and joy. Truly He "maketh the wrath of man to praise Him" (Ps. 76:10). O that our hearts and minds may be duly impressed with the wisdom, power and grace of Him who bringeth a clean thing out of an unclean.

"In all these things is the wisdom and goodness of God, in contriving and effecting these things, to the glory of His grace, and the salvation of His Church, to be admired" (John Owen). But herein we may see, once more, the imperative need for faith—a God-given, God-sustained, spiritual, supernatural FAITH. Carnal reason can see no more in our persecutions than the malice and rage of evil men. Our senses perceive nothing beyond material losses and painful physical discomforts. But faith discovers the Father's hand directing all things: faith is assured that all proceeds from His boundless love: faith realizes that He has in view the good of our souls. The more this is apprehended by the exercise of faith, not only the better for our peace of mind, but the readier shall we be to diligently apply ourselves in seeking to learn God's lessons for us in every chastisement He lays upon us.

The opening "And" of verse 5 shows the apostle is continuing to present motives to stir unto a perseverance in the faith, notwithstanding sufferings for the same. The first motive was taken from the example of the O.T. worthies (verse 1). The second, from the illustrious pattern of Jesus (verses 2-4). This is the third: the Author of these sufferings—our Father—and His loving design in

them. There is also a more immediate connection with 5:4 pointed by the "And:" it presents a tacit rebuke for being ready to faint under the lesser trials, wherewith they were exercised. Here He gives a reason how and why it was they were thus making that reason the means of introducing a new argument. The reason why they were ready to faint was their inattention to the direction and encouragement which God has supplied for them—our failure to appropriate God's gracious provisions for us is the rise of all our spiritual miscarriages.

The Hebrew Christians to whom this epistle was first addressed were passing through a great fight of afflictions, and miserably were they acquitting themselves. They were the little remnant out of the Jewish nation who had believed on their Messiah during the days of His public ministry, plus those Jews who had been converted under the preaching of the apostles. It is highly probable that they had expected the Messianic kingdom would at once be set up on earth, and that they would be allotted the chief places of honor in it. But the millennium had not begun, and their own lot became increasingly bitter. They were not only hated by the Gentiles, but ostracized by their unbelieving brethren, and it became a hard matter for them to make even a bare living. Providence held a frowning face. Many who had made a profession of Christianity had gone back to Judaism and were prospering temporally. As the afflictions of the believing Jews increased they too were sorely tempted to turn their back upon the new Faith. Had they been wrong in embracing Christianity? Was high heaven displeased because they had identified themselves with Jesus of Nazareth? Did not their sufferings go to show that God no longer regarded them with favor?

Now it is most blessed and instructive to see how the apostle met the unbelieving reasoning of their hearts. He appealed to their own scriptures, reminding them of an exhortation found in Proverbs 3:11, 12: "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastenings of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him" (Heb. 12:5). As we pointed out so often in our exposition of the earlier chapters of this Epistle, at every critical point in his argument the apostle's appeal was to the written Word of God—an example which is binding on every servant of Christ to follow. That Word is the final court of appeal for every controversial matter, and the more its

authority is respected, the more is its Author honored. Not only so, but the more God's children are brought to turn to its instruction, the more will they be built up and established in the true faith. Moreover, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4): it is to them alone we must turn for solid comfort. Great will be our loss if we fail to do so.

"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you." Note well the words we have placed in italics. The exhortation to which the apostle referred was uttered over a thousand years previously, under the Mosaic dispensation; nevertheless the apostle insists that it was addressed equally unto the New T. saints! How this exposes the cardinal error of modern "dispensationalists," who seek to rob Christians of the greater part of God's precious Word. Under the pretense of "rightly dividing" the Word, they would filch from them all that God gave to His people prior to the beginning of the present era. Such a devilish device is to be steadfastly resisted by us. All that is found in the book of Proverbs is as much God the Father's instruction to us as are the contents of the Pauline epistles! Throughout that book God addresses us individually as "My son:" see Hebrews 1:8, 3:1, 4:1, 5:1, etc. Surely that is quite sufficient for every spiritual mind—no labored argument is needed.

The appositeness of Proverbs 3:11, 12 to the case of the afflicted Hebrews gave great force to the apostle's citing of it here. That passage would enable them to perceive that their case was by no means unprecedented or peculiar, that it was in fact no otherwise with them than it had been with others of God's children in former ages and that long before the Lord had graciously laid in provision for their encouragement: "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of His correction: For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a Father the son in whom He delighteth" (Prov. 3:11, 12). It has ever been God's way to correct those in whom He delights, to chastise His children; but so far from that salutary discipline causing us to faint, it should strengthen and comfort our hearts, being assured that such chastening proceeds from His love, and that the exhortation to perseverance in the path of duty is issued by Him. It is the height of pride and ingratitude not to comply with His tender entreaties.

But the apostle had to say to the suffering Hebrews, "Ye have

forgotten the exhortation." To forget God's gracious instruction is at least an infirmity, and with it they are here taxed. To forget the encouragements which the Father has given us is a serious fault: it is expressly forbidden: "Beware lest thou forget the Lord" (Deut. 6:12). It was taxed upon the Jews of old, "They soon forgat His works... They forgat God their Savior, which had done great things in Egypt" (Ps. 106:13, 21). Forgetfulness is a part of that corruption which has seized man by his fall: all the faculties of his soul have been seriously injured—the memory, which was placed in man to be a treasury, in which to lay up the directions and consolations of God's Word, has not escaped the universal wreckage. But that by no means excuses us: it is a fault, to be striven and prayed against. As ministers see occasion, they are to stir up God's people to use means for the strengthening of the memory—especially by the formation of the habit of holy meditation in Divine things.

Thus it was with the Hebrews, in some measure at least: they had "forgotten" that which should have stood in good stead in the hour of their need. Under their trials and persecution, they ought, in an especial manner, to have called to mind that Divine exhortation of Proverbs 3:11, 12 for their encouragement: had they believingly appropriated it, they had been kept from fainting. Alas, how often we are like them! "The want of a diligent consideration of the provision that God hath made in the Scripture for our encouragement to duty and comfort under difficulties, is a sinful forgetfulness, and is of dangerous consequence to our souls" (John Owen).

"Which speaketh unto you as unto children." It is very striking indeed to observe the tense of the verb here: the apostle was quoting a sentence of Scripture which had been written a thousand years previously, yet he does not say "which hath spoken," but "which speaketh unto you!" The same may be seen again in that sevenfold exhortation of Revelation 2 and 3, "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith (not "said") unto the churches." The Holy Scriptures are a living Word, in which God speaks to men in every generation. Holy Writ is not a dumb or dead letter: it has a voice in it, ever speaking of God Himself. "The Holy Spirit is always present in the Word, and speaks in it equally and alike to the church in all ages. He doth in it speak as immediately to us, as if we were the first and only persons to whom He spake. And this should

teach us, with what reverence we ought to attend to the Scriptures, namely, as to the way and means whereby God Himself speaks directly to us" (John Owen.)

"Which speaketh unto you as unto children." The apostle emphasizes the fact that God addresses an exhortation in Proverbs 3:11 to "My son," which shows plainly that His relation to the O.T. saints was that of a Father to His children. This at once refutes a glaring error made by some who pose as being ultra-orthodox, more deeply taught in the Word than others. They have insisted that the Fatherhood of God was never revealed until the Son became incarnate; but every verse in the Proverbs where God says "My son" reveals their mistake. That the O.T. saints were instructed in this blessed relationship is clear from other passages: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him" (Ps. 103:13). This relation unto God is by virtue of their (and our) union with Christ: He is "the Son," and being one with Him, members of His body, they were "sons" too.

This precious relationship is the ground of the soul's confidence in God. "If God speaks to them as to children, they have good ground to fly to God as to a Father. and in all time of need to ask and seek of Him all needful blessings (Matthew 7:11), yea, and in faith to depend on Him for the same (Matthew 6:31, 32). What useful things shall they want? What hurtful thing need such to fear? If God deal with us as with children, He will provide for them every good thing, He will protect them from every hurtful thing, He will hear their prayers, He will accept their services, He will bear with their infirmities, He will support them under all their burdens, and assist them against all their assaults; though through their own weakness, or the violence of some temptation, they should be drawn from Him, yet will He be ready to meet them in the mid-way, turning to Him—instance the mind of the father of the prodigal towards him" (W. Gouge).

Hebrews 12:5

Chapter 87 - Divine Chastisement

It is of first importance that we learn to draw a sharp distinction between Divine punishment and Divine chastisement—important for maintaining the honor and glory of God, and for the peace of mind of the Christian. The distinction is very simple, yet is it often lost sight of. God's people can never by any possibility be punished for their sins, for God has already punished them at the Cross. The Lord Jesus, our blessed Substitute, suffered the full penalty of all our guilt, hence it is written, "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin"

(1 John 1:7). Neither the justice nor the love of God will permit Him to again exact payment of what Christ discharged to the full. The difference between punishment and chastisement lies not in the nature of the sufferings of the afflicted: it is most important to bear this in mind. There is a threefold distinction between the two.

First, the character in which God acts. In the former God acts as Judge, in the latter as Father. Sentence of punishment is the act of a judge, a penal sentence passed on those who are charged with guilt. Punishment can never fall upon a child of God in this judicial sense, because his guilt was all transferred to Christ: "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree." But while the believer's sins cannot be punished, while the Christian cannot be condemned (Rom. 8:33), yet he may be chastised. The Christian occupies an entirely different position from the non-Christian: he is a member of the family of God. The relationship which now exists between him and God is that of Parent and child; and as a son he must be disciplined for wrong-doing. Folly is bound up in the hearts of all God's children, and the rod is necessary to rebuke, to subdue, to humble.

The second distinction between Divine punishment and Divine chastisement lies in the recipients of each. The objects of the former are His enemies; the subjects of the latter, His children. As the Judge of all the earth God will yet take vengeance on all His

foes; as the Father of His family God maintains discipline over all His children. The one is judicial, the other parental. A third distinction is seen in the design of each: the one is retributive, the other remedial. The one flows from His anger, the other from His love. Divine punishment is never sent for the good of sinners, but for the honoring of God's law and the maintenance of His government. Divine chastisement is sent for the well-being of His children: "We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness" (Heb. 12:9, 10).

The above distinctions should at once rebuke the thoughts which are so generally entertained among Christians. When the believer is smarting under the rod, let him not say, God is now punishing me for my sins. That can never be; that is most dishonoring to the blood of Christ. God is correcting thee in love, not smiting in wrath. Nor should the Christian regard the chastening of the Lord as a sort of necessary evil to which he must bow as submissively as possible. No, it proceeds from God's goodness and faithfulness and is one of the greatest blessings for which we have to thank Him. Chastisement evidences our Divine sonship; the father of a family does not concern himself with those on the outside: but those within he guides and disciplines to make them conform to his will. Chastisement is designed for our good, to promote our highest interests. Look beyond the rod to the All-wise hand that wields it!

Unhappily there is no word in the English language which is capable of doing justice to the Greek term here. "Paideia" which is rendered "chastening" is only another form of "paidion" which signifies "young children, being the tender word that was employed by the Savior in John 21:5 and Hebrews 2:13. One can see at a glance the direct connection which exists between the words "disciple" and "discipline:" equally close in the Greek is the relation between "children" and "chastening"—son training would be better. It has reference to God's education, nurture and discipline of His children. It is the Father's wise and loving correction which is in view.

It is true that much chastisement is the rod in the hand of the Father correcting His erring child, but it is a serious mistake to

confine our thoughts to this one aspect of the subject. Chastisement is by no means always God's scourging of His refractory sons. Some of the saintliest of God's people, some of the most obedient of His children, have been and are the greatest sufferers. Oft times God's chastenings instead of being retributive are corrective. They are sent to empty us of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness; they are given to discover to us hidden transgressions, to teach us the plague of our own hearts. Or again; chastisements are sent to strengthen our faith, to raise us to higher levels of experience, to bring us into a condition of greater usefulness. Still again; Divine chastisement is sent as a preventative, to keep under pride, to save us from being unduly elated over success in God's service. Let us consider, briefly, four entirely different examples.

David. In his case the rod was laid upon him for grievous sins, for open wickedness. His fall was occasioned by self-confidence and self-righteousness. If the reader will diligently compare the two songs of David recorded in 2 Samuel 22 and 23, the one written near the beginning of his life, the other near the end, he will be struck by the great difference of spirit manifested by the writer in each. Read 2 Samuel 22:22-25, and you will not be surprised that God suffered him to have a fall. Then turn to chapter 23, and mark the blessed change. At the beginning of 5:5 there is a heart-broken confession of failure. In verses 10-12, there is a God-glorifying profession, attributing victory unto the Lord. The severe scourging of David was not in vain.

Job. Probably he tasted of every kind of suffering which falls to man's lot: family bereavements, loss of property, grievous bodily afflictions, came fast, one on top of another. But God's end in them all was that Job should benefit therefrom and be a greater partaker of His holiness. There was not a little of self-satisfaction and self-righteousness in Job at the beginning; but at the end, when he was brought face to face with the thrice Holy One, he "abhorred himself" (Heb. 42:6). In David's case the chastisement was retributive; in Job's corrective.

Abraham. In him we see an illustration of an entirely different aspect of chastening. Most of the trials to which he was subject were neither because of open sins nor for the correction of inward faults. Rather were they sent for the development of spiritual graces. Abraham was sorely tried in various ways, but it was in

order that faith might be strengthened, and that patience might have its perfect work in him. Abraham was weaned from the things of this world, that he might enjoy closer fellowship with Jehovah and become "the friend" of God.

Paul. "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure" (2 Cor. 12:7). This "thorn" was sent not because of failure and sin, but as a preventative against pride. Note the "lest" both at the beginning and end of the verse. The result of this "thorn" was that the beloved apostle was made more conscious of his weakness. Thus chastisement has for one of its main objects the breaking down of self-sufficiency, the bringing us to the end of ourselves.

Now in view of these widely different aspects—chastisements which are retributive, corrective, educative, and preventative—how incompetent are we to diagnose, and how great is the folly of pronouncing a judgment concerning others! Let us not conclude when we see a fellow-Christian under the rod of God that he is necessarily being taken to task for his sins. Let us now consider the spirit in which Divine chastisements are to be received. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him" (verse 5).

Not all chastisement is sanctified to the recipient of it. Some are hardened thereby; others are crushed beneath it. Much depends on the spirit in which afflictions are received. There is no virtue in trials and troubles in themselves: it is only as they are blest by God that the Christian is profited thereby. As Hebrews 12:11 informs us, it is those who are "exercised" under God's rod that bring forth "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." A sensitive conscience and a tender heart are the needed adjuncts.

In our text the Christian is warned against two entirely different dangers: despise not, despair not. These are two extremes against which it is ever necessary to keep a sharp look-out. Just as every truth of Scripture has its balancing counterpart, so has every evil its opposite. On the one hand there is a haughty spirit which laughs at the rod, a stubborn will which refuses to be humbled thereby. On the other hand there is a fainting which utterly sinks beneath it and gives way to despondency. Spurgeon said, "The way

of righteousness is a difficult pass between two mountains of error, and the great secret of the Christian's life is to wend his way along the narrow valley." Let us then ponder separately the two things which the Christian is here warned against: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou are rebuked of Him."

"The Greek word for 'despise' is nowhere used in the Scripture, but in this place. It signifies to 'set lightly by,' to have little esteem of, not to value any thing according to its worth and use. The Hebrew word means 'to reprobate, to reject, to despise.' We render the apostle's word by 'despise,' which yet doth not intend a despising that is so formally, but only interpretatively. Directly to despise and condemn or reject the chastisements of the Lord is a sin that perhaps none of His sons or children do fall into. But not to esteem of them as we ought, not to improve them unto their proper end, not to comply with the will of God in them, is interpretatively to despise them" (John Owen). As the point now before us is one which is of great practical importance to afflicted Christians, we will describe a number of ways in which God's chastisement may be "despised."

First, by callousness. There is a general lack of regard unto God's admonitions and instructions when troubles and sufferings come upon Christians. Too often they view them as the common and inevitable ills which man is heir unto, and perceive not that their Father hath any special hand or design in them. Hence they are stoically accepted in a fatalistic attitude. To be stoical under adversity is the policy of carnal wisdom: make the best of a bad job is the sum of its philosophy. The man of the world knows no better than to grit his teeth and brave things out: having no Divine Comforter, Counselor, or Physician, he has to fall back upon his own poor resources. But it is inexpressibly sad when we find the child of God conducting himself as does a child of the Devil.

This is what is dehorted against in our present text: "despise not thou the chastening of the Lord." Observe well the personal emphasis—"thou:" no matter how thy fellow-creatures act when the clouds of providence frown upon them, see well to it that thou comportest thyself as becometh a son of God. Take to heart the caution here given. Stout-heartedness and stiff-neckedness is to be expected from a rebel, but one who has found grace in the eyes of

the Lord should humble himself beneath His mighty hand the moment He gives any intimation of His displeasure. Scorn not the least trials: each has instruction wrapped up in it. Many a child would be spared the rod if he heeded the parent's frown! So it is spiritually. Instead of hardening ourselves to endure stoically, there should be a melting of heart.

Second, by complaining. This is what the Hebrews did in the wilderness; and there are still many murmurers in Israel's camp today. A little sickness, and we become so cross that our friends are afraid to come near us. A few days in bed, and we fret and fume like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. We peevisly ask, Why this affliction? what have I done to deserve it? We look around with envious eyes, and are discontented because others are carrying a lighter load. Beware, my reader: it goes hard with murmurers. God always chastises twice if we are not humbled by the first. Remind yourself of how much dross there yet is among the gold. View the corruptions of your own heart, and marvel that God has not smitten you far more severely.

This is what is dehorted against here: "despise not thou the chastening of the Lord." Instead of complaining, there should be a holy submitting unto the good will of God. There is a dreadful amount of complaining among Christians today, due to failure to nip this evil weed in the bud. Grumbling at the weather, being cross when things are lost or mislaid, murmuring because some one has failed to show us the respect which we consider ourselves entitled unto. God's hand in these things—for nothing happens by chance under His government: everything has a meaning and message if our hearts are open to receive it—is lost sight of. That is to "despise" His rod when it is laid but gently upon us, and this it is which necessitates heavier blows. Form the habit of heeding His taps, and you will be less likely to receive His raps.

Third, by criticisms. How often we question the usefulness of chastisement. As Christians we seem to have little more spiritual good sense than we had natural wisdom as children. As boys we thought that the rod was the least necessary thing in the home. It is so with the children of God. When things go as we like them, when some unexpected temporal blessing is bestowed, we have no difficulty in ascribing all to a kind Providence; but when our plans are thwarted, when losses are ours, it is very different. Yet, is it not

written, "I form the light and create darkness, I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things" (Isa. 45:7).

How often is the thing formed ready to complain "Why hast Thou made me thus?" We say, I cannot see how this can possibly profit my soul: if I had better health, I could attend the house of prayer more frequently; if I had been spared those losses in business, I would have more money for the Lord's work! What good can possibly come out of this calamity? Like Jacob we exclaim, "All these things are against me." What is this but to "despise" the rod? Shall thy ignorance challenge God's wisdom? Shall thy shortsightedness arraign omniscience? O for grace to be as a "weaned child" (Ps. 131:2).

Fourth, by carelessness. So many fail to mend their ways. The exhortation of our text is much needed by all of us. There are many who have "despised" the rod, and in consequence they have not profited thereby. Many a Christian has been corrected by God, but in vain. Sickness, reverses, bereavements have come, but they have not been sanctified by prayerful self-examination. O brethren and sisters, take heed. If God be chastening "consider your ways" (Hag. 1:5), "ponder the path of thy feet" (Prov. 4:26). Be assured that there is some reason for the chastening. Many a Christian would not have been chastised half so severely had he diligently inquired as to the cause of it.

"Cause me to understand wherein I have erred" (Job 6:24); "show me wherefore Thou contendest with me" (Heb. 10:2), expresses the attitude we should take whenever God's hand is laid upon us. We are bidden "hear ye the rod" (Mic. 6:9), that is, to pay a due regard to God's voice in our trials and afflictions, and to correct that in our lives with which He is displeased. In chastisement God is to be viewed not only as a Father but also as a Teacher: valuable lessons are to be learned therefrom if we cultivate a teachable spirit. Not so to do, failure to improve them unto their proper design and to comply with the will of God in them, is to "despise" His loving reproofs. But we must turn now to the second half of our verse.

"Nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him." This word presupposes that we have not "despised" God's chastening, but have heeded it—inquired as to the cause and reason of it, and have discovered He is evidencing that He is displeased with us. The learned tell us that the word for "rebuked," both in the Hebrew and

in the Greek, signifies "a reproof by rational conviction:" the conscience has been pricked, and God has discovered unto the heart that there is something in our ways—which before we took no notice of—which has convinced us of the needs-be for our present afflictions. He makes us to understand what it is that is wrong in our lives: we are "rebuked" in our conscience. Our response should be to humble ourselves before Him, confess the fault, and seek grace to right it; and in order to this we are cautioned against "fainting" in our minds. Let us mention several forms of this particular evil of "fainting."

First, when we give up all exertion. This is done when we sink down in despondency. The smitten one concludes that it is more than he can possibly endure. His heart fails him; darkness swallows him up; the sun of hope is eclipsed, and the voice of thanksgiving is silent. To "faint" means rendering ourselves unfit for the discharge of our duties. When a person faints, he is rendered motionless. How many Christians are ready to completely give up the fight when adversity enters their lives. How many are rendered quite inert when trouble comes their way. How many by their attitude say, God's hand is heavy upon me: I can do nothing. Ah, beloved, "sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13). "Faint not when thou art rebuked of Him:" go to the Lord about it; recognize His hand in it. Remember thine afflictions are among the "all things" which work together for good.

Second, when we question our sonship. There are not a few Christians who, when the rod descends upon them, conclude that they are not sons of God after all. They forget that it is written "Many are the afflictions of the righteous (Ps. 34:19), and that we must "through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). One says, "But if I were His child, I should not be in this poverty, misery, shame." Listen to verse 8. "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons." Learn, then, to look upon trials as proofs of God's love—purging, pruning, purifying thee. The father of a family does not concern himself much about those on the outside of his household: it is they who are within whom he guards and guides, nurtures and conforms to his will. So it is with God.

Third, when we give way to unbelief. This is occasioned by our failure to seek God's support under trials, and lay hold of His

promises—"weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. 30:5). Sure are we to "faint" if we lose sight of the Lord, and cherish not His words of consolation. David was encouraging himself against unbelief when he took himself to task and said, "Why art thou cast down O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance" (Ps. 42:5): if only that attitude be maintained by us, we shall be preserved from sinking when troubles come upon us.

Fourth, when we despair. When unbelief dominates the heart, despondency soon becomes our portion. Some indulge the gloomy fancy that they will never again get from under the rod in this life; ah, it is a long lane that has no turning! Perhaps a reader says, "But I have prayed and prayed, and yet the dark clouds have not lifted." Then comfort yourself with the reflection: it is always the darkest hour which precedes the dawn. Perhaps another says, "I have pleaded His promises, but things are no better with me: I thought God delivered those who called upon Him; I have called, but He has not delivered, and I fear He never will." What! child of God, speak of thy Father thus? You say, He will never leave off smiting because He has smitten so long; rather conclude, He has now smitten so long, I must soon be delivered. Fight hard, my brother, against this attitude of despair, lest your complaining cause others to stumble. Despise not; faint not. May Divine Mace preserve both writer and reader from either of these sinful extremes.

N.B. For several of the leading thoughts in the above article, we are indebted to a sermon by the late C.H. Spurgeon.

Hebrews 12:6

Chapter 88 - Divine Chastisement

The problem of suffering is a very real one in this world, and to not a few of our readers a personal and acute one. While some of us are freely supplied with comforts, others are constantly exercised over procuring the bare necessities of life. While some of us have long been favored with good health, others know not what it is to go through a day without sickness and pain. While some homes have not been visited by death for many years, others are called upon again and again to pass through the deep waters of family bereavement. Yes, dear friend; the problem of suffering, the encountering of severe trials, is a very personal thing for not a few of the members of the household of faith. Nor is it the external afflictions which occasion the most anguish: it is the questionings they raise, the doubts they stimulate, the dark clouds of unbelief which they so often bring over the heart.

Very often it is in seasons of trial and trouble that Satan is most successful in getting in his evil work. When he perceives the uselessness of attempting to bring believers under the bondage in which he keeps unbelievers, he bides his time for the shooting at them of other arrows which he has in his quiver. Though he is unable to drag them down to the commission of the grosser outward forms of sin, he waits his opportunity for tempting them to be guilty of inward sins. Though he cannot infect them with the poison of evolutionism and higher criticism, he despairs not of seducing them with questions of God's goodness. It is when adversity comes the Christian's way, when sore trials multiply, when the soul is oppressed and the mind distressed, that the Devil seeks to instill and strengthen doubtings of God's love, and to call into question the faithfulness of His promises.

Moreover, there come seasons in the lives of many saints when to sight and sense it seems as though God Himself had ceased to care for His needy and afflicted child. Earnest prayer is made for the mitigation of the sufferings, but relief is not granted. Grace is

sought to meekly bear the burden which has been laid upon the suffering one; yet, so far from any sensible answer being received, self-will, impatience, unbelief, are more active than ever. Instead of the peace of God ruling the heart, unrest and enmity occupy its throne. Instead of quietness within, there is turmoil and resentment. Instead of "giving thanks always for all things unto God" (Eph. 5:20), the soul is filled with unkind thoughts and feelings against Him. This is cause for anguish unto the renewed heart; yet, at times, struggle against the evil as the Christian may, he is overcome by it.

Then it is that the afflicted one cries out, "Why standest Thou afar off, O Lord, why hidest Thou Thyself in times of trouble?" (Ps. 10:1). To the distressed saint, the Lord seems to stand still, as if He coldly looked on from a distance, and did not sympathize with the afflicted one. Nay, worse, the Lord appears to be afar off, and no longer "a very present help in trouble," but rather an inaccessible mountain, which it is impossible to reach. The felt presence of the Lord is the stay, the strength, the consolation of the believer; the lifting up of the light of His countenance upon us, is what sustains and cheers us in this dark world. But when that is withheld, when we no longer have the joy of His presence with us, drab indeed is the prospect, sad the heart. It is the hiding of our Father's face which cuts to the quick. When trouble and desertion come together, it is unbearable.

Then it is that the word comes to us, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him" (Heb. 12:5). Ah, it is easy for us to perceive the meetness of such an admonition as this while things are going smoothly and pleasantly for us. While our lot is congenial, or at least bearable, we have little difficulty in discerning what a sin it is for any Christian to either "despise" God's chastenings or to "faint" beneath them. But when tribulation comes upon us, when distress and anguish fill our hearts, it is quite another matter. Not only do we become guilty of one of the very evils here dehorted from, but we are very apt to excuse and extenuate our peevishness or faintness. There is a tendency in all of us to pity ourselves, to take sides with ourselves against God, and even to justify the uprisings of our hearts against Him.

Have we never, in self-vindication, said, "Well, after all we are human; it is natural that we should chafe against the rod or give

way to despondency when we are afflicted. It is all very well to tell us that we should not, but how can we help ourselves? we cannot change our natures; we are frail men and women, and not angels." And what has been the issue from the fruit of this self-pity and self-vindication? Review the past, dear friend, and recall how you felt and acted inwardly when God was tearing up your cozy nest, overturning your cherished plans, dashing to pieces your fondest hopes, afflicting you painfully in your affairs, your body, or your family circle. Did it not issue in calling into question the wisdom of God's ways, the justice of His dealings with you, His kindness towards you? Did it not result in your having still stronger doubts of His very goodness?

In Hebrews 12:5 the Christian is cautioned against either despising the Lord's chastenings or fainting beneath them. Yet, notwithstanding this plain warning, there remains a tendency in all of us not only to disregard the same, but to act contrary thereto. The apostle anticipates this evil, and points out the remedy. The mind of the Christian must be fortified against it. But how? By calling to remembrance the source from which all his testings, trials, tribulations and troubles proceed, namely, the blessed, wondrous, unchanging love of God. "My son, despise not thou the chastenings of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him. FOR whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth." Here a reason is advanced why we should not despise God's chastening nor faint beneath it—all proceeds from His love. Yes, even the bitter disappointments, the sore trials, the things which occasion an aching heart, are not only appointed by unerring wisdom, but are sent by infinite Love! It is the apprehension and appropriation of this glorious fact, and that alone, which will preserve us from both the evils forbidden in 5:5.

The way to victory over suffering is to keep sorrow from filling the soul: "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1). So long as the waves wash only the deck of the ship, there is no danger of its foundering; but when the tempest breaks through the hatches and submerges the hold, then disaster is nigh. No matter what floods of tribulation break over us, it is our duty and our privilege to have peace within: "keep thy heart with all diligence" (Prov. 4:23): suffer no doubtings of God's wisdom, faithfulness, goodness, to take root there. But how am I to prevent their so doing? "Keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 21), is the inspired answer, the sure remedy,

the way to victory. There, in one word, we have made known to us the secret of how to overcome all questionings of God's providential ways, all murmurings against His dealings with us.

"Keep yourselves in the love of God." It is as though a parent said to his child, "Keep yourself in the sunshine:" the sun shines whether he enjoys it or not, but he is responsible not to walk in the shade and thus lose its genial glow. So God's love for His people abides unchanging, but how few of them keep themselves in the warmth of it. The saint is to be "rooted and grounded in love" (Eph. 3:17); "rooted" like a tree in rich and fertile soil; "grounded" like a house built upon a rock. Observe that both of these figures speak of hidden processes: the root-life of a tree is concealed from human eyes, and the foundations of a house are laid deep in the ground. Thus it should be with each child of God: the heart is to be fixed, nourished by the love of God.

It is one thing to believe intellectually that "God is love" and that He loves His people, but it is quite another to enjoy and live in that love in the soul. To be "rooted and grounded in love" means to have a settled assurance of God's love for us, such an assurance as nothing can shake. This is the deep need of every Christian, and no pains are to be spared in the obtaining thereof. Those passages in Scripture which speak of the wondrous love of God, should be read frequently and meditated upon daily. There should be a diligent striving to apprehend God's love more fully and richly. Dwell upon the many unmistakable proofs which God has made of His love to you: the gift of His Word, the gift of His Son, the gift of His Spirit. What greater, what clearer proofs do we require! Steadfastly resist every temptation to question His love: "keep yourselves in the love of God." Let that be the realm in which you live, the atmosphere you breathe, the warmth in which you thrive.

This life is but a schooling. In saying this we are uttering a platitude, yet it is a truth of which all Christians need to be constantly reminded. This is the period of our childhood and minority. Now in childhood everything has, or should have, the character of education and discipline. Dear parents and teachers are constantly directing, warning, rebuking; the whole of the child-life is under rule, restraint and guidance. But the only object is the child him-self—his good, his character, his future; and the only motive is love. Now as childhood is to the rest of our life, so is the whole of

our earthly sojourn to our future and heavenly life. Therefore let us seek to cultivate the spirit of childhood. Let us regard it as natural that we should be daily rebuked and corrected. Let us behave with the docility and meekness of children, with their trustful and sweet assurance that love is behind all our chastenings, that we are in the tender hands of our Father.

But if this attitude is to be maintained, faith must be kept in steady exercise: only thus shall we judge aright of afflictions. Sense is ever ready to slander and belie the Divine perfections. Sense beclouds the understanding and causes us to wrongly interpret God's dispensations with us. Why so? Because sense estimates things from their outside and by their present feeling. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous" (Heb. 12:11), and therefore if when under the rod we judge of God's love and care for us by our sense of His present dealings, we are likely to conclude that He has but little regard for us. Herein lies the urgent need for the putting forth of faith, for "faith is the evidence of things not seen." Faith is the only remedy for this double evil. Faith interprets things not according to the outside or visible, but according to the promise. Faith looks upon providences not as a present disconnected piece, but in its entirety to the end of things.

Sense perceives in our trials naught but expressions of God's disregard or anger, but faith can discern Divine wisdom and love in the sorest troubles. Faith is able to unfold the fiddles and solve the mysteries of providence. Faith can extract honey and sweetness out of gall and wormwood. Faith discerns that God's heart is filled with love toward us, even when His hand is heavy and smarts upon us. The bucket goes down into the well the deeper, that it may come up the fuller. Faith perceives God's design in the chastening is our good. It is through faith "that He would show thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is" (Job 11:6). By the "secrets of wisdom" is meant the hidden ways of God's providence. Divine providence has two faces: the one of rigor, the other of clemency; sense looks upon the former only, faith enjoys the latter.

Faith not only looks beneath the surface of things and sees the sweet orange beneath the bitter rind, but it looks beyond the present and anticipates the blessed sequel. Of the Psalmist it is recorded, "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Thine eyes" (Ps. 31:22). The fumes of passion dim our vision when we look only

at what is present. Asaph declared, "My feet were almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped; for I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Ps. 73:2, 3); but when he went into the sanctuary of God he said, "Then understood I their end" (verse 17), and that quieted him. Faith is occupied not with the scaffolding, but with the completed building; not with the medicine, but with the healthful effects it produces; not with the painful rod, but with the peaceable fruit of righteousness in which it issues.

Suffering, then, is a test of the heart; chastisement is a challenge to faith—our faith in His wisdom, His faithfulness, His love. As we have sought to show above the great need of the Christian is to keep himself in the love of God, for the soul to have an unshaken assurance of His tender care for us: "casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). But the knowledge of that "care" can only be experimentally maintained by the exercise of faith—especially is this the case in times of trouble. A preacher once asked a despondent friend, "Why is that cow looking over the wall?" And the answer was, "Because she cannot look through it." The illustration may be crude, yet it gives point to an important truth. Discouraged reader, look over the things which so much distress you, and behold the Father's smiling face; look above the frowning clouds of His providence, and see the sunshine of His never changing love.

"For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (verse 6). There is something very striking and unusual about this verse, for it is found, in slightly varied form, in no less than five different books of the Bible:—"Happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty" (Job 5:17); "Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of Thy law" (Ps. 94:12); "Whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth" (Prov. 3:12); "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Rev. 3:19). Probably there is a twofold reason for this reiteration. First, it hints at the importance and blessedness of this truth. God repeats it so frequently lest we should forget, and thus lose the comfort and cheer of realizing that Divine chastisement proceeds from love. This must be a precious word if God thought it well to say it five times over! Second, such repetition also implies our slowness to believe it; by nature our evil hearts are inclined in

the opposite direction. Though our text affirms so emphatically that the Christian's chastisements proceed from God's love, we are ever ready to attribute them to His harshness. It is really very humbling that the Holy Spirit should deem it necessary to repeat this statement so often.

"For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." Four things are to be noted. First, the best of God's children need chastisement—"every son." There is no Christian but what has faults and follies which require correcting: "in many things we all offend" (James 3:2). Second, God will correct all whom He adopts into His family. However He may now let the reprobate alone in their sins, He will not ignore the failings of His people—to be suffered to go on unrebuked in wickedness is a sure sign of alienation from God. Third, in this God acts as a Father: no wise and good parent will wink at the faults of his own children: his very relation and affection to them oblige him to take notice of the same. Fourth, God's disciplinary dealings with His sons proceed from and make manifest His love to them: it is this fact we would now particularly concentrate upon.

1. The Christian's chastisements flow from God's love. Not from His anger or hardness, nor from arbitrary dealings, but from God's heart do our afflictions proceed. It is love which regulates all the ways of God in dealing with His own. It was love which elected them. The heart is not warmed when our election is traced back merely to God's sovereign will, but our affections are stirred when we read "in love having predestinated us" (Eph. 1:4, 5). It was love which redeemed us. We do not reach the center of the atonement when we see nothing more in the Cross than a vindication of the law and a satisfaction of justice: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). It is love which regenerates or effectually calls us: "with loving kindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3). The new birth is not only a marvel of Divine wisdom and a miracle of Divine power, but it is also and superlatively a product of God's affection.

In like manner it is love which ordained our trials and orders our chastisements. O Christian, never doubt the love of God. A quaint old Quaker, who was a farmer, had a weather-vane on the roof of his barn, from which stood out in clear-cut letters "God is love." One day a preacher was being driven to the Quaker's home;

his host called attention to the vane and its text. The preacher turned and said, "I don't like that at all: it misrepresents the Divine character—God's love is not variable like the weather." Said the Quaker, "Friend you have misinterpreted its significance; that text on the weather-vane is to remind me that, no matter which way the wind is blowing, no matter from which direction the storm may come, still, "God is love."

2. The Christian's chastisements express God's love. Oftentimes we do not think so. As God's children we think and act very much as we did when children naturally. When we were little and our parents insisted that we should perform a certain duty we failed to appreciate the love which had respect unto our future well-being. Or, when our parents denied us something on which we had set our hearts, we felt we were very hardly dealt with. Yet was it love which said "No" to us. So it is spiritually. The love of God not only gives, but also withholds. No doubt this is the explanation for some of our unanswered prayers: God loves us too much to give what would not really be for our profit. The duties insisted upon, the rebukes given, the things withheld, are all expressions of His faithful love.

Chastisements manifest God's care of us. He does not regard us with unconcern and neglect, as men usually do their illegitimate children, but He has a true parent's solicitation for us: "Like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him" (Ps. 103:13). "And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live" (Deut. 8:3). There are several important sermons wrapped up in that verse, but we have not the space here to even outline them. God brings into the wilderness that we may be drawn nearer Himself. He dries up cisterns that we may seek and enjoy the Fountain. He destroys our nest down here that our affection may be set upon things above.

3. The Christian's chastisements magnify God's love. Our very trials make manifest the fullness and reveal the perfections of God's love. What a word is that in Lamentations 3:33; "He doth not afflict willingly"! If God consulted only His own pleasure, He would not afflict us at all: it is for our profit that He "scourges." Ever

remember that the great High Priest Himself is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities"; yet, notwithstanding, He employs the rod! God is love, and nothing is so sensitive as love. Concerning the trials and tribulations of Israel of old, it is written, "In all their affliction He was afflicted" (Isa. 63:9); yet out of love He chastens. How this manifests and magnifies the unselfishness of God's love!

Here, then is the Christian supplied with an effectual shield to turn aside the fiery darts of the wicked one. As we said at the beginning, Satan ever seeks to take advantage of our trials: like the fiend that he is, he makes his fiercest assaults when we are most cast down. Thus it was that he attacked Job—"Curse God and die." And thus some of us have found it. Did he not, in the hour of suffering and sorrow, seek to remind you that when you had become increasingly diligent in seeking to please and glorify God, the darkest clouds of adversity followed; and say, How unjust God is; what a miserable reward for your devotion and zeal! Here is your recourse, fellow-Christian: say to the Devil, "It is written, 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.' "

Again; if Satan cannot succeed in traducing the character of God and cause us to doubt His goodness and question His love, then he will assail our assurance. The Devil is most persevering: if a frontal attack falls, then he will make one from the rear. He will assault your assurance of sonship: he will whisper "You are no child of His: look at your condition, consider your circumstances, contrast those of other Christians. You cannot be an object of God's favor; you are deceiving yourself; your profession is an empty one. If you were God's child, He would treat you very differently. Such privations, such losses, such pains, show that you cannot be one of His." But say to him, "It is written, 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.' "

Let our final thought be upon the last word of our text: "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." The one whom God scourges is not rejected, but "received"—received up into glory, welcomed in His House above. First the cross, then the crown, is God's unchanging order. This was vividly illustrated in the history of the children of Israel: God "chose them in the furnace of affliction," and many and bitter were their trials ere they reached the promised land. So it is with us. First the wilderness, then Canaan; first the scourging, and then the

"receiving." May we keep ourselves more and more in the love of God.

Hebrews 12:7, 8

Chapter 89 - Divine Chastisement

The all-important matter in connection with Divine chastenings, so far as the Christian is concerned, is the spirit in which he receives them. Whether or not we "profit" from them, turns entirely on the exercises of our minds and hearts under them. The advantages or disadvantages which outward things bring to us, is to be measured by the effects they produce in us. Material blessings become curses if our souls are not the gainers thereby, while material losses prove benedictions if our spiritual graces are enriched therefrom. The difference between our spiritual impoverishment or our spiritual enrichment from the varied experiences of this life, will very largely be determined by our heart-attitude toward them, the spirit in which they are encountered, and our subsequent conduct under them. It is all summed up in that word "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7).

As the careful reader passes from verse to verse of Hebrews 12:3-11, he will observe how the Holy Spirit has repeatedly stressed this particular point, namely, the spirit in which God's chastisements are to be received. First, the tried and troubled saint is bidden to consider Him who was called upon to pass through a far rougher and deeper sea of suffering than any which His followers encounter, and this contemplation of Him is urged "lest we be wearied and faint in our minds" (verse 3.). Second, we are bidden to "despise not" the chastenings of the Lord, "nor faint" when we are rebuked of Him (verse 5). Third, our Christian duty is to "endure" chastening as becometh the sons of God (verse 7). Fourth, it is pointed out that since we gave reverence to our earthly fathers when they corrected us, much more should we "rather be in subjection" unto our heavenly Father (verse 9). Finally, we learn there will only be the "peaceable fruit of righteousness" issuing from our afflictions, if we are duly "exercised thereby" (verse 11).

In the previous articles we have sought to point out some of the principal considerations which should help the believer to

receive God's chastisements in a meet and becoming spirit. We have considered the blessed example left us by our Captain: may we who have enlisted under His banner diligently follow the same. We have seen that, however severe may be our trials, they are by no means extreme: we have not yet "resisted unto blood"—martyrdom has not overtaken us, as it did many who preceded us: shall we succumb to the showers, when they defied the fiercest storms! We have dwelt upon the needs-be for Divine reproof and correction. We have pointed out the blessed distinction there is between Divine punishment and Divine chastisement. We have contemplated the source from which all proceeds, namely, the love of our Father. We have shown the imperative necessity for the exercise of faith, if the heart is to be kept in peace while the rod is upon us.

"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" (verses 7, 8). In these verses another consideration is presented for the comfort of those whom God is chastening. That of which we are here reminded is, that, when the Christian comports himself properly under Divine correction, he gives proof of his Divine sonship. If he endure them in a manner becoming to his profession, he supplies evidence of his Divine adoption. Blessed indeed is this, an unanswerable reply to Satan's evil insinuation: so far from the disciplinary afflictions which the believer encounters showing that God loves him not, they afford a golden opportunity for him to exercise and display his unquestioning love of the Father. If we undergo chastisements with patience and perseverance, then do we make manifest, both to ourselves and to others, the genuineness of our profession.

In the verses which are now before us the apostle draws an inference from and makes a particular application of what had been previously affirmed, thereby confirming the exhortation. There are three things therein to be particularly noted. First, the duty which has been enjoined: Divine chastisements are to be "endured" by us: that which is included and involved by that term we shall seek to show in what follows. Second, the great benefit which is gained by a proper endurance of those chastisements: evidence is thereby obtained that God is dealing with us as "sons:" not as enemies whom He hates, but as dear children whom He loves. Third, a solemn

contrast is then drawn, calculated to unmask hypocrites and expose empty professors: those who are without Divine chastisement are not sons at all, but "bastards"—claiming the Church for their mother, yet having not God for their Father: what is signified thereby will appear in the sequel.

"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons." This statement supplements what was before us in verse 5. Both of them speak of the spirit in which chastisements are to be received by the Christian, only with this difference: verse 5 gives the negative side, verse 7 the positive. On the one hand, we are not to "despise" or "faint" under them; on the other hand, they are to be "endured." It has become an English proverb that "what cannot be cured must be endured," which is but another way of saying that we must grit our teeth and make the best of a bad job. It scarcely needs pointing out that the Holy Spirit has not used the term here in its lowest and carnal sense, but rather in its noblest and spiritual signification.

In order to ascertain the force and scope of any word which is used in Holy Scripture neither its acceptance in ordinary speech nor its dictionary etymology is to be consulted; instead, a concordance must be used, so as to find out how it is actually employed on the sacred page. In the case now before us, we do not have far to seek, for in the immediate context it is found in a connection where it cannot be misunderstood. In verse 2 we read that the Savior "endured the cross," and in verse 3 that He "endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself." It was in the highest and noblest sense that Christ "endured" His sufferings: He remained steadfast under the sorest trials, forsaking not the path of duty. He meekly and heroically bore the acutest afflictions without murmuring against or fainting under them. How, then, is the Christian to conduct himself in the fires? We subjoin a sevenfold answer.

First, the Christian is to "endure" chastisement inquiringly. While it be true that all chastisement is not the consequence of personal disobedience or sinful conduct, yet much of it is so, and therefore it is always the part of wisdom for us to seek for the why of it. There is a cause for every effect, and a reason for all God's dealings. The Lord does not act capriciously, nor does He afflict willingly (Lam. 3:33). Every time the Father's rod falls upon us it is

a call to self-examination, for pondering the path of our feet, for heeding that repeated word in Haggai "Consider your ways." It is our bounden duty to search ourselves and seek to discover the reason of God's displeasure. This may not be a pleasant exercise, and if we are honest with ourselves it is likely to occasion us much concern and sorrow; nevertheless, a broken and contrite heart is never despised by the One with whom we have to do.

Alas, only too often this self-examination and inquiring into the cause of our affliction is quite neglected, relief therefrom being the uppermost thought in the sufferer's mind. There is a most solemn warning upon this point in 2 Chronicles 16:12, 13, "And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great; yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but the physicians. And Asa slept with his fathers." How many professing Christians do likewise today. As soon as sickness strikes them, their first thought and desire is not that the affliction may be sanctified unto their souls, but how quickly their bodies may be relieved. We do not fully agree with some brethren who affirm that the Christian ought never to call in a doctor, and that the whole medical fraternity is of the Devil—in such case the Holy Spirit had never denominated Luke "the beloved physician," nor had Christ said the sick "need" a physician. On the other hand, it is unmistakably evident that physical healing is not the first need of an ailing saint.

Second, the Christian is to "endure" chastisement prayerfully. If our inquiry is to be prosecuted successfully, then we are in urgent need of Divine assistance. Those who rely upon their own judgment are certain to err. As our hearts are exercised as to the cause of the chastening, we need to seek earnestly unto God, for it is only in His light that we "see light" (Ps. 36:9). It is not sufficient to examine ourselves: we must request the Divine physician to diagnose our case, saying "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23, 24). Nevertheless, let it be pointed out that such a request cannot be presented sincerely unless we have personally endeavored to thoroughly search ourselves and purpose to continue so doing.

Prayer was never designed to be a substitute for the personal discharge of duty: rather is it appointed as a means for procuring

help therein. While it remains our duty to honestly scrutinize our hearts and inspect our ways, measuring them by the holy requirements of Scripture, yet only the immediate assistance of the Spirit will enable us to prosecute our quest with any real profit and success. Therefore we need to enter the secret place and inquire of the Lord "show me wherefore Thou contendest with me" (Job 10:2). If we sincerely ask Him to make known unto us what it is in our ways He is displeased with, and for which He is now rebuking us, He will not mock us. Request of Him the hearing ear, and He will tell what is wrong. Let there be no reserve, but an honest desire to know what needs correcting, and He will show you.

Third, the Christian is to "endure" chastisement humbly. When the Lord has responded to your request and has made known the cause of His chastening, see to it that you quarrel not with Him. If there be any feeling that the scourging is heavier than you deserve, the thought must be promptly rejected. "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment (or chastisement) of his sins?" (Lam. 3:39). If we take issue with the Most High, we shall only be made to smart the more for our pains. Rather must we seek grace to heed that word, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God" (1 Pet. 5:6). Ask Him to quicken conscience, shine into your heart, and bring to light the hidden things of darkness, so that you may perceive your inward sins as well as your outward. And then will you exclaim, "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Ps. 119:75).

Fourth, the Christian is to "endure" chastisement patiently. Probably that is the prime thought in our text: steadfastness, a resolute continuance in the path of duty, an abiding service of God with all our hearts, notwithstanding the present trial, is what we are called unto. But Satan whispers, "What is the use? you have endeavored, earnestly, to please the Lord, and how is He rewarding you? You cannot satisfy Him: the more you give, the more He demands; He is a hard and tyrannical Master." Such vile suggestions must be put from us as the malicious lies of him who hates God and seeks to encompass our destruction. God has only your good in view when the rod is laid upon you. Just as the grass needs to be mown to preserve its freshness, as the vine has to be pruned to ensure its fruitfulness, as friction is necessary to produce electric power, as fire

alone will consume the dross, even so the discipline of trial is indispensable for the education of the Christian.

"Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9). Keep before you the example of Christ: He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, yet before His shearers He was "dumb." He never fretted or murmured, and we are to "follow His steps." "Let patience have her perfect work" (James 1:4). For this we have to be much in prayer; for this we need the strengthening help of the Holy Spirit. God tells us that chastisement is not "joyous" but "grievous": if it were not, it would not be "chastening." But He also assures us that "afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:11). Lay hold of that word "afterward": anticipate the happy sequel, and in the comfort thereof continue pressing forward along the path of duty. "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit" (Ecclesiastes 7:8).

Fifth, the Christian is to "endure" chastisement believably. This was how Job endured his: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Ah, he looked behind all secondary causes, and perceived that above the Sabeans and Chaldeans was Jehovah Himself. But is it not at this point we most often fail? Only too frequently we see only the injustice of men, the malice of the world, the enmity of Satan, in our trials: that is walking by sight. Faith brings God into the scene. "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Ps. 27:13). It is an adage of the world that "Seeing is believing:" but in the spiritual realm, the order is reversed: there we must "believe" in order to "see." And what is it which the saint most desires to "see"? Why, "the goodness of the Lord," for unless he sees that, he "faints." And how does faith see "the goodness of the Lord" in chastisements? By viewing them as proceeding from God's love, as ordered by His wisdom, and as designed for our profit.

As the bee sucks honey out of the bitter herb, so faith may extract much good from afflictions. Faith can turn water into wine, and make bread out of stones. Unbelief gives up in the hour of trial and sinks in despair; but faith keeps the head above water and hopefully looks for deliverance. Human reason may not be able to

understand the mysterious ways of God, but faith knows that the sorest disappointments and the heaviest losses are among the "all things" which work together for our good. Carnal friends may tell us that it is useless to strive any longer; but faith says, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15). What a wonderful promise is that in Psalm 91:15, "I will be with him in trouble: I will deliver him." Ah, but faith alone can feel that Presence, and faith alone can enjoy now the assured deliverance. It was because of the joy set before Him (by the exercise of faith) that Christ "endured the cross," and only as we view God's precious promises will we patiently endure our cross.

Sixth, the Christian is to "endure" chastisement hopefully. Though quite distinct, the line of demarcation between faith and hope is not a very broad one, and in some of the things said above we have rather anticipated what belongs to this particular point. "For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. 8:24, 25). This passage clearly intimates that "hope" relates to the future. "Hope" in Scripture is far more than a warrantless wish: it is a firm conviction and a comforting expectation of a future good. Now inasmuch as chastisement, patiently and believingly endured, is certain to issue in blessing, hope is to be exercised. "When He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10): that is the language of confident expectation.

While it be true that faith supports the heart under trial, it is equally a fact—though less recognized—that hope buoys it up. When the wings of hope are spread, the soul is able to soar above the present distress, and inhale the invigorating air of future bliss. "For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen" (2 Cor. 4:17, 18): that also is the language of joyous anticipation. No matter how dark may the clouds which now cover thy horizon, ere long the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings. Then seek to walk in the steps of our father Abraham, "who against hope, believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations" (Rom. 4:18).

Seventh, the Christian is to "endure" chastisement thankfully.

Be grateful, my despondent brother, that the great God cares so much for a worm of the earth as to be at such pains in your spiritual education. O what a marvel that the Maker of heaven and earth should go to so much trouble in His son-training of us! Fail not, then, to thank Him for His goodness, His faithfulness, His patience, toward thee. "We are chastened of the Lord (now) that we should not be condemned with the world" in the day to come (1 Cor. 11:32): what cause for praise is this! If the Lord Jesus, on the awful night of His betrayal, "sang a hymn" (Matthew 26:30), how much more should we, under our infinitely lighter sorrows, sound forth the praises of our God. May Divine grace enable both writer and reader to "endure chastening" in this sevenfold spirit, and then will God be glorified and we advantaged.

"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons." This does not mean that upon our discharge of the duty enjoined God will act toward us "as with sons"; for this He does in the chastisements themselves, as the apostle has clearly shown. No, rather, the force of these words is, If ye endure chastening, then you have the evidence in yourselves that God deals with you as sons. In other words, the more I am enabled to conduct myself under troubles as becometh a child of God, the clearer is the proof of my Divine adoption. The new birth is known by its fruits, and the more my spiritual graces are exercised under testing, the more do I make manifest my regeneration. Furthermore, the clearer the evidence of my regeneration, the clearer do I perceive the dealings of a Father toward me in His discipline.

The patient endurance of chastenings is not only of great price in the sight of God, but is of inestimable value unto the souls of them that believe. While it be true that the sevenfold description we have given above depicts not the spirit in which all Christians do receive chastening, but rather the spirit in which they ought to receive it, and that all coming short thereof is to be mourned and confessed before God; nevertheless, it remains that no truly born-again person continues to either utterly "despise" the rod or completely "faint" beneath it. No, herein lies a fundamental difference between the good-ground hearer and the stony-ground one: of the former it is written, "The righteous also shall hold on his way" (Job. 17:9); of the latter, it is recorded, "Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution

ariseth because of the Word, immediately he is offended" (Matthew 13:21).

A mere suffering of things calamitous is not, in itself, any evidence of our acceptance with God. Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upwards, so that afflictions or chastisements are no pledges of our adoption; but if we "endure" them with any measure of real faith, submission and perseverance, so that we "faint not" under them—abandon not the Faith or entirely cease seeking to serve the Lord—then do we demonstrate our Divine sonship. So too it is the proper frame of our minds and the due exercise of our hearts which lets in a sense of God's gracious design toward us in His chastenings. The Greek word for "dealeth with us as with sons" is very blessed: literally it signifies "he offereth Himself unto us:" He proposeth Himself not as an enemy, but as a Friend; not as toward strangers, but as toward His own beloved children.

"But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" (verse 8). These words present the reverse side of the argument established in the preceding verse: since it be true, both in the natural and in the spiritual realm, that disciplinary dealing is inseparable from the relation between fathers and sons, so that an evidence of adoption is to be clearly inferred therefrom, it necessarily follows that those who are "without chastisement" are not children at all. What we have here is a testing and discriminative rule, which it behoves each of us to measure himself by. That we may not err therein, let us attend to its several terms.

When the apostle says, "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers," it is obvious that his words are not to be taken in their widest latitude: the word "all" refers not to all men, but to the "sons" of whom he is speaking. In like manner, "chastisement" is not here to be taken for everything that is grievous and afflictive, for none entirely escape trouble in this life. But comparatively speaking, there are those who are largely exempt: such the Psalmist referred to when he said, "For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men" (Ps. 73:4, 5). No, it is God's disciplinary dealings which the apostle is speaking of, corrective instruction which promotes holiness. There are many professors who, whatever trials they may experience, are without

any Divine chastisement for their good.

Those who are "without chastisement" are but "bastards." It is common knowledge that bastards are despised and neglected—though unjustly so—by those who illegitimately begot them: they are not the objects of that love and care as those begotten in wedlock. This solemn fact has its counterpart in the religious realm. There is a large class who are destitute of Divine chastisements, for they give no evidence that they receive them, endure them, or improve them. There is a yet more solemn meaning in this word: under the law "bastards" had no right of inheritance: "A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord" (Deut. 23:2): No cross, no crown: to be without God's disciplinary chastenings now, means that we must be excluded from His presence hereafter. Here, then, is a further reason why the Christian should be contented with his present lot: the Father's rod upon him now evidences his title unto the Inheritance in the day to come.

Hebrews 12:9

Chapter 90 - Divine Chastisement

The apostle Paul did not, like so many of our moderns, hurry through a subject and dismiss an unpleasant theme with a brief sentence or two. No, he could say truthfully, "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you." His chief concern was not to please, but to help his hearers and readers. Well did he know the tendency of the heart to turn away quickly from what is searching and humbling, unto that which is more attractive and consoling. But so far from acceding to this spirit, he devoted as much attention unto exhortation as instruction, unto reproving as comforting, unto duties as expounding promises; while the latter was given its due place the former was not neglected. It behooves each servant of God to study the methods of the apostles, and seek wisdom and grace to emulate their practice; only thus will they preserve the balance of Truth, and be delivered from "handling the Word deceitfully" (2 Cor. 4:2).

Some years ago, when the editor was preaching a series of sermons on Hebrews 12:3-11, several members of the congregation intimated they were growing weary of hearing so much upon the subject of Divine chastisement. Alas, the very ones who chafed so much at hearing about God's rod, have since been smitten the most severely by it. Should any of our present readers feel the same way about the writer's treatment of this same passage, he would lovingly warn them that, though these articles may seem gloomy and irksome while prosperity be smiling upon them, nevertheless they will be well advised to "hearken and hear for the time to come" (Isa. 42:23). The sun will not always be shining upon you, dear reader, and if you now store these thoughts up in your memory, they may stand you in good stead when your sky becomes overcast.

Sooner or later, this portion of Holy Writ will apply very pertinently unto each of our cases. God "scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." None of the followers of "The Man of sorrows" are exempted from sorrow. It has been truly said that "God had one Son without sin, but none without suffering." So much depends upon

how we "endure" suffering: the spirit in which it be received, the graces which are exercised by it, and the improvement which we make of it. Our attitude toward God, and the response which we make unto His disciplinary dealings with us, means that we shall either honor or dishonor Him, and suffer loss or reap gain therefrom. Manifold are our obligations to comport ourselves becomingly when God is pleased to scourge us, and many and varied are the motives and arguments which the Spirit, through the apostle, here presents to us for this end.

In the verse which is now to be before us a further reason is given showing the need of the Christian's duty to meekly bear God's chastenings. First, the apostle had reminded the saints of the teaching of Scripture, verse 5: how significant that he began with that! Second, he had comforted them with the assurance that the rod is wielded not by wrath, but in tender solicitude, verse 6. Third, he affirmed that God chastens all His children without exception, bastards only escaping, verses 7, 8. Now he reminds us that we had natural parents who corrected us, and we gave them reverence. Our earthly fathers had the right, because of their relationship, to discipline us, and we acquiesced. If, then, it was right and meet for us to submit to their corrections, how much more ought we to be in subjection unto our heavenly Father when He reproveth us.

"Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" (verse 9). The opening "Furthermore" is really humbling and searching. One would think sufficient had been said in the previous verses to make us be submissive under and thankful for the tender discipline of our God. Is it not enough to be told that the Scriptures teach us to expect chastisements, and exhort us not to despise them? Is it not sufficient to be assured that these chastisements proceed from the very heart of our Father, being appointed and regulated by His love? No, a "furthermore" is needed by us! The Holy Spirit deigns to supply further reasons for bringing our unruly hearts into subjection. This should indeed humble us, for the implication is clear that we are slow to heed and bow beneath the rod. Yea, is it not sadly true that the older we become, the more need there is for our being chastened?

The writer has been impressed by the fact, both in his study

of the Word and his observation of fellow-Christians, that, as a general rule, God uses the rod very little and very lightly upon the babes and younger members of His family, but that He employs it more frequently and severely on mature Christians. We have often heard older saints warning younger brethren and sisters of their great danger, yet it is striking to observe that Scripture records not a single instance of a young saint disgracing his profession. Recall the histories of young Joseph, the Hebrew maid in Naaman's household, David as a stripling engaging Goliath, Daniel's early days, and his three youthful companions in the furnace; and it will be found that all of them quitted themselves nobly. On the other hand, there are numerous examples where men in middle life and of grey hairs grievously dishonored their Lord.

It is true that young Christians are feeblest, and with rare exceptions, they know it; and therefore does God manifest His grace and power by upholding them: it is the "lambs" which He carries in His arms! But some older Christians seem far less conscious of their danger, and so God often suffers them to have a fall, that He may stain the pride of their self-glory, and that others may see it is nothing in the flesh—standing, rank, age, or attainments—which insures our safety; but that He upholds the humble and casts down the proud. David did not fall into his great sin till he had reached the prime of life. Lot did not transgress most grossly till he was an old man. Isaac seems to have become a glutton in his old age, and was as a vessel no longer "meet for the Master's use," which rusted out rather than wore out. It was after a life of walking with God, and building the ark, that Noah disgraced himself. The worst sin of Moses was committed not at the beginning but at the end of the wilderness journey. Hezekiah became puffed up with pride near the sunset of his life. What warnings are these!

God thus shows us there is no protection in years. Yea, added years seem to call for increased chastenings. Often there is more grumbling and complaining among the aged pilgrims than the younger ones: it is true their nerves can stand less, but God's grace is sufficient for worn-out nerves. Often there is more occupation with self and circumstances among the fathers and mothers in Israel, and less talking of Christ and His wondrous love, than there is among the babes. Yes, there is, much need for all of us to heed the opening "furthermore" of our text. Every physician will tell us there

are some diseases which become more troublesome in middle life, and others which are incident to old age. The same is true of different forms of sinning. If we are more liable to certain sins in our youth, we are in greater danger of others in advanced years. Undoubtedly it is the case that the older we get, the more need there is to heed this "furthermore" which prefaces the call of our being in subjection to the Father of spirits. If we do not need more grace, certain it is that we need as much grace, when we are grown old as while we are growing up.

The aged meet with as many temptations as do young Christians. They are tempted to live in the past, rather than in the future. They are tempted to take things easier, spiritually as well as temporally, so that it has to be said of some "ye did run well." O to be like Paul "the aged," who was in full harness to the end. They are tempted to be unduly occupied with their increasing infirmities; but is it not written "the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities"! Yet, because this is affirmed, we must not think there is no longer need to earnestly seek His help. This comforting word is given in order that we should frequently and confidently pray for this very thing. If it were not recorded, we might doubt His readiness to do so, and wonder if we were asking "according to His will." Because it is recorded, when feeling our "infirmities" press most heavily upon us, let us cry, "O Holy Spirit of God, do as Thou hast said, and help us."

In this connection let us remind ourselves of that verse, "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things: so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Ps. 103:5) The eagle is a bird renowned for its longevity, often living to be more than a hundred years old. The eagle is also the high-soaring bird, building its nest on the mountain summit. But how is the eagle's youth renewed? By a new crop of feathers, by the rejuvenation of its wings. And that is precisely what some middle-aged and elderly Christians need: the rejuvenation of their spiritual wings—the wings of faith, of hope, of zeal, of love for souls, of devotedness to Christ. So many leave their first love, lose the joy of their espousals, and instead of setting before younger Christians a bright example of trustfulness and cheerfulness, they often discourage by gloominess and slothfulness. Thus God's chastenings increase in severity and frequency!

Dear friend, instead of saying, "The days of my usefulness are over," rather reason, The night cometh when no man can work;

therefore I must make the most of my opportunities while it is yet called day. For your encouragement let it be stated that the most active worker in a church of which the editor was pastor was seventy-seven years old when he went there, and during his stay of three and a half years she did more for the Lord, and was a greater stimulus to him, than any other member of that church. She lived another eight years, and they were, to the very end, filled with devoted service to Christ. We believe that the Lord will yet say of her, as of another woman, "She hath done what she could." O brethren and sisters, especially you who are feeling the weight of years, heed that word, "Be not weary in well doing, for in due season, we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9).

"Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us and we gave them reverence." It is the duty of children to give the reverence of obedience unto the just commands of their parents, and the reverence of submission to their correction when disobedient. As parents have a charge from God to minister correction to their children when it is due—and not spoil them unto their ruin—so children have a command from God to receive parental reproof in a proper spirit, and not to be discontented, stubborn, or rebellious. For a child to be insubordinate under correction, evidences a double fault; the very correction shows a fault has been committed, and insubordination under correction is only adding wrong to wrong. "We gave them reverence," records the attitude of dutiful children toward their sires: they neither ran away from home in a huff, nor became so discouraged as to quit the path of duty.

From this law of the human home, the apostle points out the humble and submissive conduct which is due unto God when He disciplines His children: "Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits?" The "much rather" points a contrast suggested by the analogy: that contrast is at least fourfold. First, the former chastening proceeded from those who were our fathers according to the flesh; the other is given by Him who is our heavenly Father. Second, the one was sometimes administered in imperfect knowledge and irritable temper; the other comes from unerring wisdom and untiring love. Third, the one was during but a brief period, when we were children; the other continues throughout the whole of our Christian life. Fourth, the one was designed for our

temporal good; the other has in view our spiritual and eternal welfare. Then how much more should we readily submit unto the latter.

"Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits?" By nature we are not in subjection. We are born into this world filled with the spirit of insubordination: as the descendants of our rebellious first parents, we inherit their evil nature. "Man is born like a wild ass's colt" (Job 11:12). This is very unpalatable and humbling, but nevertheless it is true. As Isaiah 53:6 tells us, "we have turned every one to his own way," and that is one of opposition to the revealed will of God. Even at conversion this wild and rebellious nature is not eradicated. A new nature is given, but the old one lusts against it. It is because of this that discipline and chastisement are needed by us, and the great design of these is to bring us into subjection unto the Father of spirits. To be "in subjection unto the father" is a phrase of extensive import, and it is well that we should understand its various significations.

1. It denotes an acquiescence in God's sovereign right to do with us as He pleases. "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth: because thou didst it" (Ps. 39:9). It is the duty of saints to be mute under the rod and silent beneath the sharpest afflictions. But this is only possible as we see the hand of God in them. If His hand be not seen in the trial, the heart will do nothing but fret and fume. "And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruah? so let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so? And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: How much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him" (2 Sam. 16:10, 11). What an example of complete submission to the sovereign will of the Most High was this! David knew that Shimei could not curse him without God's permission.

"This will set my heart at rest,
What my God appoints is best."

But with rare exceptions many chastenings are needed to bring us to this place, and to keep us there.

2. It implies a renunciation of self-will. To be in subjection unto the Father presupposes a surrendering and resigning of ourselves to Him. A blessed illustration of this is found in Leviticus

10:1-3, "And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace." Consider the circumstances. Aaron's two sons, most probably intoxicated at the time, were suddenly cut off by Divine judgment. Their father had no warning to prepare him for this trial; yet he "held his peace!" O quarrel not against Jehovah: be clay in the hands of the Potter: take Christ's yoke upon you, and learn of Him who was "meek and lowly in heart."

3. It signifies an acknowledgment of God's righteousness and wisdom in all His dealings with us. We must vindicate God. This is what the Psalmist did: "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Ps. 119:75). Let us see to it that Wisdom is ever justified by her children: let our confession of her be, "Righteous art Thou, O Lord, and upright are Thy judgments" (Ps. 119:137). Whatever be sent, we must vindicate the Sender of all things: the Judge of all the earth cannot do wrong. Stifle, then, the rebellious murmur, What have I done to deserve such treatment by God? and say with the Psalmist, "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Ps. 103:10). Why, my reader, if God dealt with us only according to the strict rule of His justice, we had been in Hell long ago: "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark ("impute") iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Ps. 130:3).

The Babylonian captivity was the severest affliction which God ever brought upon His earthly people during O.T. times, yet even then a renewed heart acknowledged God's righteousness in it: "Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before Thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all Thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day. Howbeit Thou art just in all that is brought upon us: for Thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly" (Nehemiah 9:32, 33). God's enemies may talk of His injustice; but let His children proclaim His

righteousness. Because God is good, He can do nothing but what is right and good.

4. It includes a recognition of His care and a sense of His love. There is a sulking submission, and there is a cheerful submission. There is a fatalistic submission which takes this attitude—this is inevitable, so I must bow to it; and there is a thankful submission, receiving with gratitude whatever God may be pleased to send us. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes" (Ps. 119:71). The Psalmist viewed his chastisements with the eye of faith, and doing so he perceived the love behind them. Remember that when God brings His people into the wilderness it is that they may learn more of His sufficiency, and that when He casts them into the furnace, it is that they may enjoy more of His presence.

5. It involves an active performance of His will. True submission unto the "Father of spirits" is something more than a passive thing. The other meanings of this expression which we have considered above are more or less of a negative character, but there is a positive and active side to it as well, and it is important that this should be recognized by us. To be "in subjection" to God also means that we are to walk in His precepts and run in the way of His commandments. Negatively, we are not to be murmuring rebels; positively, we are to be obedient children. We are required to be submissive unto God's Word, so that our thoughts are formed and our ways regulated by it. There is not only a suffering of God's will, but a doing of it—an actual performance of duty. When we utter that petition in the prayer which the Savior has given us, "Thy will be done," something more is meant than a pious acquiescence unto the pleasure of the Almighty: it also signifies, may Thy will be performed by me. Subjection "unto the Father of spirits," then, is the practical owning of His Lordship.

Two reasons for such subjection are suggested in our text. First, because the One with whom we have to do is our Father. O how profoundly thankful we should be that the Lord God stands revealed to us as the "Father"—our Father, because the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and He rendered perfect obedience unto Him. It is but right and meet that children should honor their parents by being in complete subjection to them: not to do so is to ignore their relationship, despise their authority, and slight their

love. How much more ought we to be in subjection unto our heavenly Father: there is nothing tyrannical about Him: His commandments are not grievous: He has only our good at heart. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1), then let us earnestly endeavor to express our gratitude by dutifully walking before Him as obedient children, and no matter how mysterious may be His dealings with us, say with the Savior, "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11).

The particular title of God found in our text calls for a brief comment. It is placed in antithesis from "fathers of our flesh," which has reference to their begetting of our bodies. True, our bodies also are a real creation on the part of God, yet in connection therewith He is pleased to use human instrumentalities. But in connection with the immaterial part of our beings, God is the immediate and alone Creator of them. As the renowned Owen said, "The soul is immediately created and infused; having no other father but God Himself," and rightly did that eminent theologian add, "This is the fundamental reason of our perfect subjection unto God in all afflictions, namely, that our very souls are His, the immediate product of His Divine power, and under his rule alone. May He not do as He wills with His own?" The expression "Father of spirits," refutes, then, the error of traducianists, who suppose that the soul, equally with the body, is transmitted by our parents. In Numbers 16:22 He is called "the God of the spirits of all flesh" which refers to all men naturally; while the "Father of spirits" in our text includes the new nature in the regenerate.

The second reason for our subjection to the Father is, because this is the secret of true happiness, which is pointed out in the final words of our text "and live." The first meaning of those words is, "and be happy." This is clear from Deuteronomy 5:33, "Ye shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess:" observe the words "prolong your days" are added to "that ye may live," which obviously signifies "that ye may be happy"—compare Exodus 10:17, where Pharaoh called the miseries of the plagues "this death." Life ceases to be life when we are wretched. It is the making of God's will our haven, which secures the true

resting-place for the heart. The rebellious are fretful and miserable, but "great peace have they which love Thy law and nothing shall offend them" (Ps. 119:165). "Take My yoke upon you," said Christ, "and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Alas, the majority of professing Christians are so little in subjection to God, they have just enough religion to make them miserable.

"Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live?" No doubt words of this verse point these to a designed contrast from Deuteronomy 21:18-21, "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place . . . And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die." "The increase of spiritual life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, is that whereunto they (the words "and live") tend" (John Owen).

Hebrews 12:10

Chapter 91 - Divine Chastisement

Would any Christian in his right mind dare to pray, Let me not be afflicted, no matter what good it should do me? And if he were unwilling and afraid to pray thus, why should he murmur when it so falls out? Alas, what a wide breach there is, usually, between our praying and the rest of our conduct. Again; if our rescuer dislocated our shoulder when pulling us out of the water in which we were drowning, would we be angry with him? Of course not. Then why fret against the Lord when He afflicts the body in order to better the soul? If God takes away outward comforts and fills us with inward peace, if he removes our worldly wealth but imparts to us more of the true riches, then, instead of having ground for complaint, we have an abundant cause for thanksgiving and praise. Then why should I fear to enter the dark shaft of tribulation if persuaded that it leads to the gold mines of spiritual experience.

In Scripture, afflictions are compared to fire that purges away the dross (1 Pet. 1:7), to the fan which drives away the chaff (Matthew 3:12), to a pruning-hook which cuts off superfluous branches and makes more fruitful the others that remain (John 15:2), to physic that purges away poisonous matter (Isa. 27:9), to plowing and harrowing the ground that it may be prepared to receive good seed (Jer. 4:3). Then why should we be so upset when God is pleased to use the fire upon us in order to remove our dross, to employ the fan so as to winnow away the chaff, to take the pruning-hook to lop off the superfluities of our souls, to give us physic to purge out our corruptions and filth, to drive the plow into us so as to break up our fallow ground and to destroy the weeds which grow in our souls? Should we not rather rejoice that He will not leave us alone in our carnality, but rather fit us to become partakers of His holiness?

A little child requires much coaxing (at times, something more!) in order to make him take his medicine. He may be very ill, and mother may earnestly assure him that the unpleasant potion will

bring sure relief; but the little one cries out, "I cannot take it, it is so nasty." But adults, generally, need not have the doctor argue and plead with them: they will swallow the bitterest remedy if convinced that it will do them good. The application of this to spiritual matters is obvious. Those Christians who are but spiritual babes, fret and fume when called upon to endure Divine chastisement, knowing not the gains they will receive if it be accepted in the right spirit. But those who have grown in grace, and become men in Christ, who know that all things work together for good to them that love God, and who have learned by experience the precious fruits which issue from sanctified afflictions, accept from God the bitterest cup, and thank Him for it.

But alas, many of God's people are but infants experimentally, and need much coaxing to reconcile them to the cup of trial. Therefore is it needful to present to our consideration one argument after another. Such is the case here in Hebrews 12: if one line of reasoning does not suffice, perhaps another will. The Christian is very skeptical and takes much convincing. We have heard a person say to one who claims he has done, or can do, some remarkable thing, "You must show me before I will believe you." Most of us are very much like that in connection with spiritual things. Though the Scriptures assure us, again and again, that chastisement proceeds from our Father's love, and is designed for our good, yet we are slow, very slow, to really believe it. Therefore does the apostle here proceed from one consideration to another so as to assure the hearts and establish the faith of his afflicted brethren upon this important subject.

O that our hearts might be so taught by the Spirit, our understandings so enlightened, our faith so strengthened by Him, that we would be more grateful and increasingly thankful for the merciful discipline of our Father. What a proof of His love is this, that in His chastening of us, His object is to bring us nearer Himself and make us more like His blessed Son. The more highly we prize health, the more willing are we to take that which would cure our sickness; and the more we value holiness (which is the health of our souls) the gladder shall we be for that which is a means to increase the same in us. We are on a low plane of spiritual experience, if we do nothing more than simply "bow" to God's hand. Scripture says, "Giving thanks always, for all things unto God and the Father in the

name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20); and again it exhorts us "Rejoice in the Lord alway" (Phil. 4:4). We are to "glory in tribulation" (Rom. 5:3), and we shall when we perceive more clearly and fully what blessed fruits are brought forth under the pruning knife.

"For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness" (v. 10). This is a continuation of what was before us in the previous verse. A further reason is given why Christians should be "in subjection unto" their heavenly Father, when His correcting rod is laid upon them. Not only is it becoming for them so to do, because of the relationship which exists between them: but it is also meet they should act thus, because of the gains they receive thereby. The consideration which the apostle now presents to the attention of the afflicted saints is really a double one. First, the chastisement we received from our earthly parents had reference mainly to our good in this life, whereas the disciplinary dealings of our heavenly Father looks forward to the life to come (2 Cor. 4:17). Second, the chastisement of our earthly parents was often a matter of their caprice and sometimes issued from irritability of temper, but the rod of our heavenly Father is wielded by infinite goodness and wisdom, and has in view our well being.

We regard the words "for they verily for a few days chastened us" as referring not so much to the brief season of our childhood, but more to the fact that our parents had only our temporal interests in view: whereas God has our eternal welfare before Him. "The apostle seems to bring in this circumstance to contrast the dealings of earthly parents with those of God. One of the circumstances is, that the corrections of earthly parents had a much less important object than those of God. They related to this life—a life so brief that it may be said to continue but a "few days." Yet, in order to secure the benefit to be derived for so short a period from fatherly correction, we submitted without murmuring. Much more cheerfully ought we to submit to that discipline from the hand of our heavenly Father which is designed to extend its benefits through eternity" (A. Barnes).

The added words "after their own pleasure" or "as seemed good" to them, points another contrast between the disciplinary dealings of our earthly parents and those of our heavenly Father. In

their infirmity, sometimes the rod was used upon us in a fit of anger, rather than from a loving desire to reform our manners. "Meaning that it was sometimes done arbitrarily, or under the influence of passion. This is an additional reason why we should submit to God. We submitted to our earthly parents, though their correction was sometimes passionate, and was designed to gratify their own pleasure rather than to promote our good. There is much of this kind of punishment in families; but there in none of it under the administration of God. 'But He for our profit:' never from passion, from caprice, from the love of power or superiority, but always for our good" (A. Barnes).

Now the particular contribution which our present verse makes to the subject of chastisement is, the apostle here makes known the general end or design of God in the same, namely "our profit." And let it be pointed out that whatsoever He purposes must surely come to pass, for He will make the means He employs effectual unto the accomplishment of His end. Many are the blessings comprehended and various are the fruits produced through and by means of Divine chastisement. This word "for our profit" is a very embracing one, including the development of our characters, the enrichment of our spiritual lives, a closer conformity to the image of Christ. The same truth is found again in the "that we might be partakers of His holiness:" that our lusts might be mortified, our graces vivified, our souls sanctified. Whatever be the form, degree, or duration of our afflictions, all is ordered by infinite wisdom so as to secure this object. But to particularize: the benefits of Divine chastisement—

1. It weans us from the world. One of the greatest surprises of the writer's Christian life in connection with his fellow-saints has been, not their ignorance, nor even their inconsistencies, but their earthliness, their reluctance to leave this world. As "strangers and pilgrims" we should be longing and yearning for our Heavenly Home; as those who are away from Him whom they love best, we should desire to "depart and be with Him" (Phil. 1:23). Paul did. Christ has promised to return for His people, yet how few of them are daily crying, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." How rarely we hear them saying, in the language of the mother of Sisera, "Why is His chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of His chariot?"

"And all the trials here we see

Should make us long to be with Thee."

Scripture speaks of this world as a "dry and thirsty land, where no water is" (Ps. 63:1), and God intends for us to prove this in our experiences. His Word also affirms that this world is a "dark place" (2 Pet. 1:19), and He means for us to discover that this is so.

One would think that after the soul had once seen the King in His beauty, it would henceforth discover no attractions elsewhere. one would suppose that once we had quenched our thirst at the Fountain of living waters, we would no more want to drink from the unsatisfying and polluted cisterns of this world. Surely now that we have experienced a taste and foretaste of Heaven itself, we shall be repelled and nauseated by the poor husks this world has to offer. But alas! the "old man" is still in us, unchanged; and though Divine grace subdues his activities, still he is very much alive. It is because of this that we are called on to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts." And this is not only an unpalatable, but a very hard task. Therefore does God in His mercy help us: help us by chastenings, which serve to loosen the roots of our souls downward and tighten the anchor-hold of our hearts Heavenward.

This God does in various ways. Sometimes He causes us to lose our confidence in and draw us away from fellowship with worldings by receiving cruel treatment at their hands. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate" is the Lord's word to His people. But they are slow to heed; oftentimes they must be driven out. So with worldly pleasures: God often makes the grapes of earthly joys bitter to our taste, so that we should no longer seek after them. It is earthly disappointments and worldly disillusionments which make us sigh for our Heavenly Home. While the Hebrews enjoyed the land of Goshen they were content: hard and cruel bondage was needed to make them ready to leave for the promised land. We were once familiar with a Christian who had formed a habit of meeting each worldly difficulty or trial to the flesh by saying, "This is only another nail in my coffin." But that is a very gloomy way of viewing things: rather should the children of God say after each trial or affliction, "That severs another strand in the rope which binds me to this world, and makes me long all the more for Heaven.

2. It casts us back the more upon God. By nature we are filled with a spirit of independency. The fallen sons of Adam are like

wild asses' colts. Chastisement is designed to empty us of our self-sufficiency, to make us feel weakness and helplessness. If "in their affliction they will seek Me early" (Hos. 5:15), then surely afflictions are for our "profit." Trials and troubles often drive us to our knees; sickness and sorrow make us seek unto the Lord. It is very noticeable in the four Gospels how rarely men and women that were in health and strength sought out Christ; it was trouble and illness which brought them to the great Physician. A nobleman came to Christ—why? Because his son was at the point of death. Jairus sought out the Master—why? Because his little daughter was so low. The Canaanitish woman interviewed the Lord Jesus—why? On behalf of her tormented daughter. The sisters of Lazarus sent a message to the absent Savior—why? Because their brother was sick.

Afflictions may be very bitter, but they are a fine tonic for the soul, and are a medicine which God often uses on us. Most vividly is this illustrated in Psalm 107—read carefully verses 11 to 28. Note that it is when men are "brought down," when they are "afflicted," when they are "at their wits' end" that they "cry unto the Lord in their trouble." Yes, it is "trouble" which makes us turn unto the Lord, not in a mechanical and formal way, but in deep earnestness. Remember that it is the "effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man that availeth much." When you observe that the fire in your room is getting dull, you do not always put on more coal, but simply stir with the poker; so God often uses the black poker of adversity in order that the flames of devotion may burn more brightly.

Ah, my brethren, all of us delight in being made to lie down in the "green pastures" and being led beside the "still waters;" yet it would not be for God's glory nor for our own highest good to luxuriate spiritually at all times. And why not? Because our hearts would soon be more occupied with the blessings rather than with the Blesser Himself. Oftentimes the sheep have to be brought into the dry and desolate wilderness, that they may be made more conscious of their dependency upon the Shepherd. May we not discern here one reason why some saints so quickly lose their assurance: they are occupied more with their graces or comfortable feelings than they are with the Giver of them. God is a jealous God, and will not tolerate idols in the hearts of His people. A sense of our acceptance in Christ is indeed a blessed thing, yet it becomes a hindrance if it be

treasured more highly than the Savior Himself.

3. It makes the promises of God more precious to us. Trouble often acts on us like a sharp knife which opens the truth of God to us and our hearts unto the truth. Experience unlocks passages which were otherwise closed. There is many a text in the Bible which no commentator can helpfully expound to a child of God: it must be interpreted by experience. Paul wrote his profoundest epistles while in prison; John was "in tribulation" on Patmos when he received the Revelation. If you go down into a deep well or mine in the daytime, you will then see the shining of stars which were not visible from the earth's surface; so God often brings us low in order that we may perceive the shining beauty of some of His comforting assurances. Note how Jacob, in Genesis 32, pleaded God's promises when he heard that Esau was approaching with four hundred men! The promises of resurrection mean far more unto Christians when some of their loved ones have been removed by death.

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned" (Isa. 43:2) means far more to afflicted souls than it can to those who are not under the rod. So, too, the many "fear not" promises are most valued when our strength fails us and we are ready to sink under despair. As the late C.H. Spurgeon was wont to say, "There are some verses written, as it were, in a secret ink, which must be held before the fire of adversity before they become visible." There are many passages in Job, the Psalms, and the Lamentations of Jeremiah which do not appeal to one while the sun is shining; but which, in times of adversity, are like the welcome beams of the moon on a dark night. It was his painful thorn in the flesh which taught Paul the blessedness of that text, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

4. It qualifies us to sympathize with others. If we have never trod the vale of sorrow and affliction we are really unable to "weep with those that weep." There are some surgeons who would be more tender if they had suffered from broken bones themselves. If we have never known much trouble, we can be but poor comforters to others. Even of our Savior it is written, "For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted He is able to succor them that are tempted" (Heb. 2:18). Bunyan could never have written the book which he

did, unless God had permitted the Devil to tempt and buffet him severely for so many years. How clearly is all this brought out in 2 Corinthians 1:4: "Who comforteth us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." Luther frequently said, "Three things make a good preacher: prayer, meditation, and temptation."

5. It demonstrates to us the blessedness and sufficiency of Divine grace. "My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). But in order to prove this, we have to be brought into the place of severe testing and trial, and made to feel our own incompetency and nothingness. Brethren, if you have prospered in business all your lives, and have always had an easy time financially, then it is probable you know very little about God's strength being perfected in your weakness. If you have been healthy all your lives and have never suffered much weakness and pain, then you are not likely to know much about the strength of God. If you have never been visited with trying situations which bring you to your wits' end, or by heartrending bereavements, you may not have discovered much of the sufficiency of Divine grace. You have read about it in books, or heard others speak of it, but this is a very different thing from having an experimental acquaintance of it for yourself. It is much tribulation which brings out the sufficiency of God's strength to support under the severest trials, and demonstrates that His grace can sustain the heart under the heaviest losses.

It is in the stormiest weather that a captain gives most heed to the steering of his ship; so it is in seasons of stress and grief that Christians pay most attention to, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). If Israel had journeyed directly to Canaan, they would have missed the tender care of Jehovah in the wilderness. If Lazarus had not died, Martha and Mary would not have received such a demonstration of Christ as the Resurrection and the Life. And if you, my brother, my sister, had not been cast into the furnace of affliction, you would not have known the nearness and preciousness of His presence with you there. Yes, God intends us to prove the reality and sufficiency of His grace.

6. It develops our spiritual graces. This is clearly set forth in

that familiar passage Romans 5:3-5: "We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed." This "rejoicing" is not in tribulations considered in themselves, but because the Christian knows they are appointed by his Father, and because of their beneficial effects. Three of these effects or spiritual graces thus developed are here mentioned. First, tribulation worketh "patience." Patience never thrives except under buffetings and disappointments: it is not even called into exercise while things are going smoothly and pleasantly. Sanctified tribulations call into activity that strength and fortitude which is evidenced by a submissive endurance of suffering. The patience here referred to signifies deliverance from murmuring, refusing to take things into our own hands (which only causes additional trouble), a contented waiting for God's time of deliverance, and a persevering continuance in the path of duty.

Second, patience worketh experience, that is a vital experience of the reality of what we profess; a personal acquaintance with that which before we knew only theoretically; an experience of the sufficiency of Divine grace to support and sustain; an experience of God's faithfulness, that He is "a very present help in trouble"; an experience of the preciousness of Christ, such as the three Hebrews had in the furnace. The Greek word for "experience" also means "the obtaining of proof." The patient submission which tribulation works in the saint proves both to him and to his brethren the reality of his trust in God: it makes manifest the fact that the faith which he professes is genuine. Instead of his faith being overcome, it triumphs. The test of a ship is to weather the storm; so it is with faith. Real faith ever says, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Third, experience worketh hope. This is a grace which anticipates the future. While circumstances are as we like them, our outlook is mainly confined to the present: but sorrows and trials make us long for the future bliss. "As an eagle stirreth up her nest... so the Lord led Israel" (Deut. 32:11, 12). God removes us from our comfortable resting places for the purpose of teaching us to use the wings of hope.

7. It brings us into fellowship with the sufferings of Christ. The cross is the symbol of Christian discipleship. Like the scars which the wounded soldier prizes above all other distinctions, so our

sufferings are the proof of our oneness with Christ (Rom. 8:17). Not only so, they make us appreciate the more what He endured for us. While we have plenty, we cannot properly estimate or appreciate the poverty which our Savior endured. While we enjoy a comfortable bed we cannot truly sympathize with Him who "had not where to lay His head." It is not till some familiar friend, on whom we counted, has basely betrayed our trust, that we can enter into something of what the Savior suffered through the perfidy of Judas. It is only when some brother has denied you, that you begin to understand what Christ felt, when Peter denied Him. As we, in some small measure, obtain an experimental acquaintance with such trials, it makes Christ increasingly precious to us, and enables us to appreciate the more all that He went through on our behalf. In a coming day we are going to share His throne; now we are privileged to taste His cross.

If, then, trials and tribulations, under God, produce such delightful fruits, then welcome chastisements that are for "our profit." Let the rains of disappointment come if they water the plants of spiritual graces. Let the winds of adversity blow if they serve to root more securely in grace the trees of the Lord's planting. Let the sun of prosperity be eclipsed if this brings us into closer communion with the Light of life. Oh, brethren and sisters, however distasteful they are to the flesh, chastisements are not to be dreaded, but welcomed, for they are designed to make us "partakers of God's holiness."

Hebrews 12:11

Chapter 92 - Divine Chastisement

One reason, perhaps, why so little is written to-day upon Divine chastisement, and why it so rarely forms the theme of the pulpit, is because it suits not the false temper and sentiments of this superficial age. The great majority of the preachers are men-pleasers, and carefully do they trim their sails to the breezes of popular opinion. They are paid to speak "smooth things" and not those which will disturb, to soothe consciences rather than search them. That which is unpalatable, mournful, solemn, dread-inspiring, is sedulously avoided, and attractive, cheerful, and comforting subjects are substituted in their stead. Hence, not only is it now rare for the preacher to dwell upon the eternal punishment of the wicked and bid the unsaved flee from the wrath to come, but Christians hear very little about the Father's rod, and the groans it occasions, or the fruits it afterwards produces. Fifty years ago a faithful servant of God wrote:

"One of the platitudes of the present day is, that religion is not a gloomy, but a cheerful thing. Although it is easy to see what was meant by him who first opposed this assertion, either to morbid and self-assumed gloom, or to the ignorant representation of the world; yet as it is generally understood, nothing can be less true. Blessed are they that mourn. Woe unto you that laugh. Narrow is the way. If any man will serve Me, let him take up his cross, and follow Me. He that seeketh his life shall lose it. Although the Christian anoints his head and washes his face, he is always fasting; the will has been broken by God, by wounding or bereaving us in our most tender point; the flesh is being constantly crucified. We are not born to be happy either in this world or in our present condition, but the reverse to be unhappy; nay, to try constantly to be dead to self and the world, that the spirit may possess God, and rejoice in Him.

"As there is a false and morbid asceticism, so there is also a false and pernicious tendency to cover a worldly and shallow method of life under the phrase of 'religion being joyous, and no

enemy to cheerfulness.' To take a very simple and obvious instance. What is meant by a 'cheerful, pleasant Sunday?' No doubt men have erred on the side of strictness and legalism; but is a 'cheerful Sunday' one in which there is much communion with God in prayer and meditation on God's Word, much anticipation of the joys of Heaven in praise and fellowship with the brethren? Alas! too many understand by a cheerful Sunday a day in which the spiritual element is reduced to a minimum" (Adolph Saphir).

Alas, that conditions have become so much worse since then. The attractions of the world, and everything which is pleasing to the flesh, have been brought into thousands of "churches" (?) under the plea of being "necessary if the young people are to be held." Even in those places where the bars have not thus been let down, where the grosser forms of worldliness are not yet tolerated, the preaching is generally of such a character that few are likely to be made uneasy by it. He who dwells on the exceeding sinfulness of sin, who insists that God will not tolerate unjudged sin even in His own people, but will surely visit it with heavy stripes, is a "kill joy," a "troubler of Israel," a "Job's comforter"; and if he persists in enforcing the precepts, admonitions, warnings, and judgments of Holy Writ, is likely to soon find all doors dosed against him. But better this, than be a compromiser; better be deprived of all preaching engagements, than miss the Master's "Well done" in the Day to come.

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (verse 11). In this verse the apostle concludes his discussion of that theme which is now so unwelcome to the majority of professing Christians. Therein he brings to a close all that he had said concerning those disciplinary afflictions which an all-wise God brings upon His people in this life, His gracious design in the same, and the duty incumbent upon them to receive these in a right spirit. He sums up his argument by balancing the good over against the evil, the future over against the present, the judgment of faith over against the feelings of the flesh.

Our present text is added to what has been said in the previous verses for the purpose of anticipating and removing an objection. After all the comforting and encouraging statements made, namely, that chastisements proceed not from enemies but from our Father, that they are sent not in anger but in love, that they

are designed not to crush but "for our profit"; carnal sense and natural reason interposes an objection: "But we find no joy under our afflictions, instead much sorrow. We do not feel that they are for our profit; we cannot see how they can be so; therefore we are much inclined to doubt what you have said." The apostle grants the force of the objection: that for the present, chastening does "seem to be grievous and not joyous." But he brings in a double limitation or qualification: in reference to outward sense, it only "seems" so; in reference to time, this is only for "the present." Having made this concession, the apostle turns to the objector and says, "Nevertheless." He reminds him that, first, there is an "afterward" beyond the present moment, to be borne in mind; second, he presses on him the need of being "exercised thereby"; third, he assures him that if he is so exercised "peaceable fruit" will be the happy issue. There are four things told us in the text about chastisement as it is viewed by human reason.

1. All that carnal reason can perceive in our chastenings is But Seeming. All that flesh and blood can discover about the nature and quality of Divine afflictions is but their outward and superficial appearance. The eye of reason is utterly incapable of discovering the virtue and value of sanctified trials. How often we are deceived by mere "seeming"! This is true in the natural sphere: appearances are proverbially deceptive. There are many optical illusions. Have you not noticed some nights when the sun is sinking in the west, that it is much bigger than at its zenith? Yet it is not so in reality; it only "seems" to be so. Have you stood on the deck of a ship in mid-ocean and, while gazing at the horizon, suddenly been startled by the sight of land?—the outline of the coast, with the rising hills in the background, there deafly defined? Yet after all, it was but "seeming"; it was nothing but clouds. In like manner, you have read of a mirage seen by travelers in the desert: away over the sands, they see in the distance green trees and a shining pool of water; but this is only an optical delusion, effected in some way by the atmosphere.

Now if this be so in connection with natural things, the "seeming" not being the actual, the apparent not being the reality, how much more is it true in connection with the things of God! Afflictions are not what they "seem" to be. They appear to work for our ill, and not for our good; so that we are inclined to say, "An enemy hath done this." They seem to be for our injury, rather than

our "profit," and we murmur and are cast down. So often fear distorts our vision; so often unbelief brings scales over our eyes, and we exaggerate the dimensions of trials in the dark and dim light. So often we are selfish, fond of our fleshly ease; and therefore spiritual discernment falls to a low ebb. No, chastenings for the present do not seem to be joyous, but "grievous"; but that is because we view them through our natural senses and in the light of carnal reason.

2. Carnal reason judges afflictions in the light of the PRESENT. The tendency with all of us is to estimate things in the light of the now. The ungodly are ever ready to sacrifice their future interests for present gratification. One of their favorite mottos is, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush:" it may be to the slothful, but the enterprising and diligent would rather be put to a little trouble and secure the two. Man is a very shortsighted creature, and even the Christian is often dominated by the same sentiments that regulate the wicked. The light of the now is generally the worst in which to form a true estimate of things. We are too close to them to obtain a right perspective, and see things in their proper proportions. To view an oil painting to the best advantage, we need to step back a few feet from it. The same principle applies to our lives. Proof of this is found as we now look back upon that which is past. Today the Christian discovers a meaning, a needs-be, a preciousness, in many a past experience, and even disappointment, which he could not discern at the time.

The case of Jacob is much to the point, and should guard us against following his foolish example. After Joseph had been removed from his doting father, and when he thought he had lost Simeon too, viewing things in the light of "the present," he petulantly said, "All these things are against me" (Gen. 42:36). Such is often the mournful plaint which issues from our short-sighted unbelief. But later, Jacob discovered his mistake, and found that all those things had been working together for good to himself and his loved ones. Alas, we are so impatient and impetuous, so occupied with the present, that we fail to look forward and by faith anticipate the happy sequel. Then, too, the effects which afflictions have upon the old man, disqualify us to estimate them aright. If my heart is palpitating, if my mind is agitated, and my soul is cast down, then I am in no fit state to judge the quality and blessedness of Divine afflictions. No, chastenings for the present do not "seem to be

joyous, but grievous;" that is because we take such a shortsighted view of them and fail to look forward with the eyes of faith and hope.

3. To carnal reason afflictions never seem "joyous." This logically follows from what has been before us under the first two points. Because carnal reason sees only the "seeming" of things, and because it estimates them only in the light of "the present," afflictions are not joyous. Nor does God intend that, in themselves, they should be. If afflictions did "seem" to be joyous, would they be chastisements at all? It would be of little use for an earthly parent to whip his child in such a way as to produce only smiles. Such would be merely a make-belief; no smart, no benefit. Solomon said, "It is the blueness of the wound which maketh the heart better;" so if Divine chastisements are not painful to the flesh and extort a groan and cry, what good end would they serve? If God sent us trials such as we wished, they would not be chastenings at all. No, afflictions do not "seem" to be joyous.

They are not joyous in the form they assume. When the Lord smites, He does so in a tender place, that we may feel the smart of it. They are not joyous in the force of them. Oftentimes we are inclined to say, If the trial had not been quite so severe, or the disappointment had not been so great, I could have endured it. God puts just so much bitter herbs into our cup as to make the draught unpleasant. They are not joyous in the time of them. We always think they come at the wrong season. If it were left to our choosing, they would never come; but if we must have them, we would choose the time when they are the least grievous; and thus miss their blessing. Nor are they joyous in the instruments used: "If it were an enemy, then I could have borne it," said David. That is what we all think. O if my trial were not just that! Poverty I could endure, but not reproach and slander. To have lost my own health would have been a hard blow, but I could have borne it; but the removal of that dear child, the light of my eyes, how can I ever rejoice again? Have you not heard brethren speak thus?

4. To carnal reason afflictions ever seem to be "grievous." Probably the most grievous part to the Christian is that he cannot see how much a loss or trial can possibly benefit him. If he could thus see, he would rejoice. Even here we must walk by faith and not by sight. But this is easier said than done; yea, it can only be done by

God's enabling. Usually, the Christian altogether fails to see why such a trouble is sent upon him; it seems to work harm and not good. Why this financial loss, when he was giving more to the Lord's work? Why this breakdown in health, when he was being most used in His service? Why this removal of a Sabbath school teacher, just when he was most needed? why was my husband called away, when the children most required him? Yes, such afflictions are indeed grievous to the flesh.

But let it be pointed out that these reasonings are only "seeming." The Christian, by grace, eventually triumphs. Faith looks up at the cloud (though it is often very late in doing so) and says, The chastisement was not as severe as it might have been, certainly it was not as severe as I deserved, and truly it was nothing in comparison to what the Savior suffered for me. O let faith expel carnal reason, and say, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." But note carefully that this is only while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (2 Cor. 4:17, 18). For much in the above four points the writer acknowledges his indebtedness to a sermon by C.H. Spurgeon on the same verse.

"Nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." This is what the apostle sets over against the estimate of carnal reason and the feelings of our natural senses. Medicine may not be a pleasant thing to take, but if it be blest by God, the renewed health it gives is good compensation. The pruned vine at the end of the winter presents a sorry appearance to the eye, but its heavily-laden branches in the autumn vindicate the gardener's efforts. Did not the "afterward" prove to Jacob that his doleful reasonings were quite unwarranted? Job squirmed under the rod, as well he might, but was not his end more prosperous than his beginning? Thank God for this "Nevertheless afterward."

Yet this "afterward" is also a very searching word: it is one which should pierce and test each of us. Have we not all passed through sorrow? Can any of us look back on the past without recalling seasons of deep and heavy affliction? Has no sword pierced our souls? no painful sacrifice been demanded of us? But, my reader, do these experiences belong to the past in every sense?

Have they gone, disappeared, without leaving any effects behind them? No, that is impossible: we are either the better or the worse because of them. Then ask yourself, What fruits have they produced? Have your past experiences hardened, soured, frozen you? Or have they softened, sweetened, mellowed you? Has pride been subdued, self-pleasing been mortified, patience developed? How have afflictions, chastisements, left us? What does the "afterward" reveal?

Not all men are the gainers by afflictions; nor are Christians so always. Many seek to flee from trials and troubles, instead of being "exercised" thereby. Others are callous and do not yield: as Hebrews 12:5 intimates, they "despised" the chastenings of the Lord. There are some who imagine that, when visited with affliction, it is a display of courage if they refuse to be affected. They count it weakness to mourn over losses and weep over sorrows. But such an attitude is altogether un-Christian. Christ wept and again and again we are told that He "groaned." Such an attitude is also foolish to the last degree, for it is calculated to counteract the very design of afflictions, and only calls for severer ones to break our proud spirits. It is no mark of weakness to acknowledge that we feel the strokes of an Almighty arm.

It is the truest wisdom to humble ourselves beneath "the mighty hand of God." If we are among His people, He will mercifully compel us to acknowledge that His chastenings are not to be despised and made light of. He will—and O how easily He can do it—continue or increase our afflictions until He tames our wild spirits, and brings us like obedient children into subjection to Himself. What a warning is found in Isaiah 9:9-11. "And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, that say in the pride and stoutness of heart, The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars. Therefore the Lord shall set up the Adversaries of Rezin against him, and join his enemies together." This means that, because the people had hardened themselves under the chastening hand of God, instead of being "exercised" thereby, that He sent sorer afflictions upon them.

The ones benefited by the Father's chastenings are they who are "exercised thereby." The Greek word for "exercised" was borrowed from the gymnastic games. It had reference to the athlete

stripping himself of his outer clothing. Thus, this word in our text is almost parallel with the "laying aside of every weight" in 5:1. If afflictions cause us to be stripped of pride, sloth, selfishness, a revengeful spirit, then "fruit" will be produced. It is only as we improve our chastenings, that we are gainers. The natural effect of affliction on an unsanctified soul is either to irritate or depress, which produces rebellion or sinking in despair. This is the result of hardness of heart and unbelief. Even with regard to the Christian it is true that, only as he views them as proceeding from his Father in order to bring him into subjection, and as he is "exercised thereby," he is truly profited.

1. The conscience needs to be "exercised." There must be a turning unto the Sender of our trials, and a seeking from Him of the meaning and message of them. "There was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David inquired of the Lord" (2 Sam. 21:1)! So should we when the providences of God frown upon us. There must be an honest self-examination, a diligent scrutiny of our ways, to discover what it is God is displeased with. Careful investigation will often show that much of our supposed godly zeal in service is but the result of habit, or the imitating of some eminent saint, instead of proceeding from the heart, and being rendered "unto the Lord."

2. Prayer has to be "exercised" or engaged in. It is true that painful afflictions have a tendency to stifle the voice of supplication, that one who is smarting under the rod feels little inclination to approach the Throne of Grace, but this carnal disposition must be steadily resisted, and the help of the Holy Spirit definitely sought. The heavier our load, the more depressed our heart, the sorer our anguish, the greater our need to pray. God requires to be sought unto for grace to submit to His dealings, for help to improve the same, for Him to sanctify unto our good all that perplexes and distresses us.

3. The grace of meekness must be "exercised," for "a meek and quiet spirit" is of "great price" in the sight of Him with whom we have to do (1 Pet. 3:4). Meekness is the opposite of self-will and hardness of heart. It is a pliability of soul, which is ready to be fashioned after the Divine image. It is a holy submission, willing to be molded as the Heavenly Potter determines. There can be no "peaceable fruit of righteousness" until our wills are broken, and we have no mind of our own. How much we need to heed that word of

Christ's, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, for I am meek" (Matthew 11:29).

4. Patience must be "exercised." Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him" (Ps. 37:7): "wait" for His time of deliverance, for if we attempt to deliver ourselves, we are very likely to plunge into deeper trials. Fruit is not ripened in a day; nor do the benefits of chastisements appear immediately. Patience must have her perfect work if the soul is to be enriched by afflictions. In the interval of waiting, allow nothing to deter your plodding perseveringly along the path of duty.

5. Faith must be "exercised." God's hand must be seen in every trial and affliction if it is to be borne with meekness and patience. While we look no further than the malice of Satan, or the jealousy, enmity, injustice of men, the heart will be fretful and rebellious. But if we receive the cup from the Father's hand, our passions will be calmed and the inward tumult stilled. Only by the exercise of faith will the soul be brought into a disposition to quietly submit, and digest the lessons we are intended to learn.

6. Hope must be "exercised." As faith looks upward and sees God's hand in the trial, hope is to look forward and anticipate the gains thereof. Hope is a confident expectation of future good. It is the opposite of despair. Hope lays hold of the promised "Afterward," and thus it sustains and cheers in the present. Hope assures the cast-down soul "I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance" (Ps. 42:5). "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 Pet. 5:10).

7. Love must be "exercised." It is the Father's love which chastens us (verse 5); then ought not we to love Him in return for His care and patient training of us? Instead of doubting His wisdom or questioning His goodness, there should be an affectionate gratitude flowing out to the One who is seeking naught but our welfare. "We can never find any benefit in chastenings, unless we are exercised by them, that is, unless all our graces are stirred up by them to a holy, constant exercise" (John Owen)—how different that, from the fatalistic inertia of many hyper-Calvinists!

What we have sought to bring out above is the fact that spiritual "fruit" is not the natural or spontaneous effect of affliction. Nay, have we not observed that few of those who suffer severe

financial reverses, heavy domestic bereavements, or personal bodily pain, are, spiritually, the gainers thereby. Yea, do we need to look any further than ourselves, to perceive how little we have learned by and profited from past trials? And the cause is plain: we were not duly exercised thereby. May this word abide with each of us for the future.

What is meant by "the peaceable fruit of righteousness"? If we took this expression by itself, it would signify the effects of righteousness, the fruit which righteousness itself brings forth. But in our text it is chastenings or afflictions which are specifically mentioned as producing this fruit. It is the Spirit tranquilizing and purifying the heart. "Righteousness" in our text is parallel with "His holiness" in verse 10. It may be summed up in the mortification of sin and the vivification of vital godliness. It is called the "peaceable fruit" because it issues in the taming of our wild spirits, the quieting of our restless hearts, the more firm anchoring of our souls. But this only comes when we truly realize that it is the Father's love which has afflicted us. May the Spirit of God grant us all "exercised" hearts, so that we shall daily search ourselves, examine our ways, and be stripped of all that is displeasing to Him.

Hebrews 12:12, 13

Chapter 93 - A Call to Steadfastness

The didactic (teaching) portions of Scripture are very much more than abstract statements of truth: they are designed not only for the instructing of the mind, but also for the influencing of the heart. This is far too little recognized in our day, when the craving for information is so often divorced from any serious concern as to the use to be made of the same. This, no doubt, is one of the evil fruits borne by the modern school-methods, where instead of seeking to draw out (the meaning of the word "educate") and develop the mind of the pupil, he is made to "cram" or fill his head with a mass of facts and figures, most of which are of no service to him in the later life. Not such is God's method. His method of instruction is to set before us moral and spiritual principles, and then show us how to apply them in a practical way; inculcate a motive, and thereby call into exercise our inward faculties. Hence, the test of Christian knowledge is not how much we understand, but how far our knowledge is affecting our lives.

It is one thing to possess a clear intellectual grasp of the doctrines of grace, it is quite another to experience the grace of the doctrines in a spiritual way. It is one thing to believe the Scriptures are the inspired and inerrant Word of God, it is another for the soul to live under the awe of their Divine authority, realizing that one day we shall be judged by them. It is one thing to be convinced that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, it is another to surrender to His scepter and live in personal subjection to Him. What does it profit me to be convinced that God is omnipotent, unless I am learning to lean upon His mighty arm? What avail is it to me that I am assured of God's omniscience unless the knowledge that His eye is ever upon me acts as a salutary restraint to my actions? What does it advantage me to know that without holiness no man shall see the Lord, unless I am making the acquirement of holiness my chief concern and aim!

That which has been pointed out above has to do with no

obscure and intricate subject which lies far above the reach of the rank and file of the common people, but is plain, self-evident, simple. Alas, that our hearts are so little impressed by it and our consciences so rarely exercised over it. When we measure ourselves by that standard, have we not all of us much cause to hang our heads in shame? Our intellects are stored with Scripture truth, but how little are our lives moulded thereby. Our doctrinal views are sound and orthodox, but how little we know experimentally of "the truth which is after godliness" (Titus 1:1). Has not the Savior much ground for saying to both writer and reader, "Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). O that we may be duly humbled over our sad failures.

The above reflections have been suggested by the use which the apostle makes in our text of the subject he had been discussing in the previous verses. His opening "Wherefore" denotes that he was now going to make a practical application unto those whom he was writing to of the exposition just given of the truth of Divine chastisement. In this we may see him following out the course he pursued in all his epistles, and which the servants of God are required to emulate today. No matter what was the doctrine under consideration, the apostle always turned it to a practical end, as his oft-repeated "Therefore" and "Wherefore" intimate. Was he contending for the Christian's emancipation from the ceremonial law, then he adds, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" (Gal. 5:1). Was he opening up the glorious truth of resurrection, then he concludes with "therefore... be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). Was he setting forth the blessed hope of Christ's return, then he finishes with "Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18).

It is this which urgently needs to be laid to heart—the use we make of the precious truths which the Most High has so graciously revealed to us. That is (partly, at least) what the Savior had in mind when He said, "Take heed therefore how ye hear" (Luke 8:18)—see to it that your hearts are duly affected, so that the truth will regulate all your conduct. It is not sufficient that I assume a reverent demeanor when attending the means of grace, that I pay close attention to what I hear: it is the assimilation of the same, so that I go forth and live under the power thereof, which is the all-important

matter. The same is true of our reading; it is not the book which adds to my store of information, or which entertains and thrills, but the one which stirs me up to godly living, which proves the most helpful. So it is with our response to the Scriptures, it is not how many difficult passages do I have light upon, nor how many verses have I memorized, but how many of its commands and precepts am I honestly endeavoring to obey.

This is the keynote struck by the apostle in the verses which are now to engage our attention. He had thrown not a little light on the distressing circumstances in which the Hebrews then found themselves, namely, the bitter persecution they were encountering at the hands of their unbelieving countrymen. He had pointed out that so far from their afflictions being exceptional, and a warrantable ground for consternation, they were, in some form or other, the common portion of all God's people, while they are left in this scene. He had set before them some most blessed truths, which were well calculated to strengthen their faith, comfort their hearts, and raise their drooping spirits. He had given an exposition of the subjection of Divine chastisement, such as must bring peace and consolation to all who mix faith therewith. He had silenced every objection which could well be made against the duty to which he had called them. And now he presses upon them the practical profit to which they must turn the doctrine inculcated.

"Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed" (verses 12, 13). Here we have, First, the conclusion drawn from the preceding premises. Second, the several duties enjoined. Third, the reason by which they are enforced. The duties are expressed in figurative language, yet in such terms as the meaning is not difficult to perceive. The enforcing reason or motive for compliance is taken from the evil effects which a non-compliance of one's duty would have upon others, which plainly inculcates the importance and value of personal example, and the influence which it exerts upon our fellows.

"Wherefore" means, in view of what has been said: because of the preceding considerations a certain course of conduct ought to follow. There is, we believe, a double reference in this opening "wherefore," namely, an immediate and a remote one. Immediately,

it connects with the preceding verse, the most important word of which is "exercised." The apostle was alluding again to the well-known Grecian "Games." In the gymnasium, the instructor would challenge the youth to combat. He was an experienced man, and knew how to strike, guard, wrestle. Many severe blows would the combatants receive from him, but it was part of their training, preparing them for their future appearance in the public contests. The youth whose athletic frame was prepared for the coming great venture, would boldly step forward, willing to be "exercised" by his trainer; but he who shirked the trial and refused to encounter the master, received no help at his hands; but the fault was entirely his own.

This, it seems to us, is the figure carried forward in our text; "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down." The Christian who gives way before trial, who sinks under affliction, who sulks or repines beneath persecution, will bring forth none of the "peaceable fruit of righteousness." If he "faints" under chastisement, if his hands become idle and his legs no longer capable of supporting him, a profitable use cannot be made of the tribulation through which he is called upon to pass. Then let him pull himself together, gird up the loins of his mind and "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3). Let his attitude be, Now is the time of my training, so I will seek to play the man; I will seek grace from God to muster all my faith and courage and valiantly wrestle with whatever opposes and oppresses me.

More remotely, our opening "Wherefore" looks back unto all that has been said in the previous verses. Hebrews 12 opens with a stirring call for God's people to persevere in the course of Christian duty, to go forward in the spiritual life, no matter what impediments might stand in their way; to "run with patience (or perseverance) the race which is set before us," drawing strength from the Christ for enablement (verses 1, 2). Then he anticipated an objection: We are being sorely oppressed, tempted to renounce our profession, hounded by our unbelieving brethren. To this he replies, Consider your Master, who went before you in the same path of suffering (verse 3). Bear in mind that your lot has not become extreme: ye

have not yet been called upon to experience a martyr's death (verse 4). Furthermore, you are losing sight of that scriptural exhortation, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord" (verse 5). This led the apostle to open to them, in a most precious manner, the whole subject of Divine chastisement. Let us present a brief summary of the same.

The trials through which the children of God are called upon to pass are not Divine punishments, but gracious discipline designed for their good. We are expressly bidden "not to faint" beneath them (verse 5). The rod is wielded not in wrath, but in tender solicitude, and is a manifestation not of God's anger but of His love (verse 6). Our duty then is to "endure" chastening as becometh the children of God (verse 7). To be without chastisement, so far from being an evidence of our spiritual sonship, would demonstrate we were not sons at all (verse 8). Inasmuch as we gave reverence to our earthly parents when they corrected us, how much more ought we to be in subjection to our heavenly Father (verse 9). God's design in our afflictions is our "profit," that by them we might become increasingly "partakers of His holiness" in an experimental way. Though these chastenings are unpleasant to flesh and blood, nevertheless "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" issues therefrom when we are suitably "exercised thereby" (verse 11).

Now from these considerations a very obvious conclusion is drawn, and by them a bounden duty is enforced. In view of the "great cloud of witnesses" by which we are encompassed (verse 1), seeing that the saints of other days—in themselves as weak, as sinful, as much oppressed by the world as we are—fought a good fight, kept the faith, and finished their course, let us gird ourselves for the contest and strain every effort to persevere in the path of duty. In view of the fact that our Leader, the Captain of our salvation, has left us such an example of heroic endurance (verse 3), let us earnestly seek to follow His steps and acquit ourselves like men. Finally, because God Himself is the Author and Regulator of our trials—the severest of our chastenings proceed from a loving Father, seeking our good—then let us not be cast down by the difficulties of the way nor discouraged by the roughness of the path; but let us nerve ourselves to steadfastness in the faith and fidelity to our Redeemer.

Thus the coherence of our opening "Wherefore" is perfectly

obvious and the duty it presses so plain that there cannot be misunderstanding. In view of all the above-mentioned considerations, and particularly in view of the fact that the most precious fruits issue from afflictions when we are duly "exercised" by them, then let us not be dejected in our minds nor faint in our spirits by reason thereof. As the champions in the public "Games" used their hands and arms to the very best of their ability, and as the runners in the races used their legs and knees to the best possible effect—and in case their hands and knees began to fail and flag, exerted their wills to the utmost to rouse up their members to renewed effort—so should we be very courageous, zealous and active, and in case our hearts begin to fail us through multiplied discouragements, we must marshal all our resolution and strive prayerfully and manfully against giving way to despair.

"Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down." The duty here enjoined is set forth in figurative language, but the meaning is nonetheless obvious because of the graphic metaphors used. The apostle transferred unto members of our physical body the condition in which the faculties of our souls are liable to fall under certain trials. For the hands to hang down and the knees to become feeble are figurative expressions, denoting the tendency to abandon the discharge of our Christian duty because of the opposition encountered. For the hands of a boxer or fencer to hang down means that his arms are become weary to the point of exhaustion; for the knees to be feeble signifies that through the protracted exertions of the runner his legs have been debilitated by their nervous energy being spent. The spiritual reference is to a decay in the Christian's courage and resolution. Two evils produce this: despondency as to success—when hope is gone effort ceases; weariness in the performance of duty.

This same figure is employed in other passages of Scripture. In Ezekiel 7:16, 17 we read, "But they that escape of them shall escape, and shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, every one for his iniquity. All hands shall be feeble, and all knees shall be as weak as water:" here the reference is to that inertia which is produced by poignant conviction of sin after a season of backsliding. Again, in Ezekiel 21:7 we are told, "When they shall say unto thee, Wherefore sighest thou? that thou shalt answer, For the tidings, because it cometh: and every heart shall

melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall fail, and all knees shall be as weak as water:" where we behold the paralyzing effects of consternation in view of the tidings of sore judgment. But in our text the reference is to the disheartenment caused by fierce opposition and persecution. Despair and becoming weary of well doing are the two evils in all our afflictions which we most need to guard against. It is failure at this point which has led to so many scandalous backslidings and cursed apostasies. Such an exhortation as the one before us intimates that the Hebrews had either already given way to an enervating spirit of gloom or were in great danger of so doing.

Now "It is the duty of all faithful ministers of the Gospel to consider diligently what failures or temptations their flocks are liable or exposed to, so as to apply suitable means for their preservation" (John Owen). This is what the apostle is seen doing here. In view of the lethargy of the Hebrews he exhorts them to "lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees." The word "lift up" signifies not simply to elevate, but to "rectify" or set right again, restoring them to their proper state, so as to apply them to duty. It was a call to steadfastness and resolute perseverance: be not dejected in your minds nor faint in your spirits by reason of the present distress, nor be so terrified of the threatening danger as to give up hope and be completely overwhelmed. Under sore trial and affliction, persecution and the prospect of yet sorer opposition, the temptation is for the heart to sink within us and the path of duty to be forsaken.

"Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees:" literally, "hands which are loose" or slack, dangling inert; "feeble knees" is still stronger in the Greek, being almost the equivalent of palsied knees—enervated knees which need bandages to brace them. In view of which he calls them to arouse themselves, to stir up all their graces unto exercise, to refuse taking the line of least resistance, to renew their courage and bear up under their trials. Resolution will accomplish much to stimulate jaded nerves and flagging energies. The Christian life, from start to finish is a struggle, a fight, an unceasing warfare against foes within and without, and only he who endures to the end shall receive the crown of life. To give way to dejection is harmful, to sink into despair is dangerous, to quit the discharge of our duties is the fore-runner of

apostasy.

But the question arises how are we to set about this particular task? To say that we are helpless in ourselves affords no encouragement; in fact to affirm that the Christian is utterly impotent is to deny that there is any vital difference between himself and those who are dead in sins. Christians in their greatest weakness have some strength, some grace, some spiritual life; and where there is some life, there is some ability to stir and move. And God is pleased to assist where there is sincere endeavor. The believer is responsible to arm his mind against discouragements by considering God's design in them, and the blessed fruits which issue from trials and afflictions when we are duly exercised by them. Of what value is a clear intellectual grasp of the nature and end of Divine chastisements unless it produces a practical effect upon the heart and life? Let the distressed saint ponder anew the blessed considerations set before him in Hebrews 12:1-11 and find in them motives and incentives unto renewed courage, fidelity and perseverance.

Let the hope of ultimate victory nerve you. Look forward to the goal: the determination to reach home is a powerful stimulus to a weary traveler. Earnestly endeavor to counteract every disposition to faintness and despondency by viewing your trials and persecutions as a part of God's discipline for your soul: then submit to them as such, and seek to get them sanctified to your spiritual profit. Remember that you cannot fight with hands hanging down, nor run the race set before us if your knees give way; so summon all your resolution to remain steadfast in the discharge of every duty God has appointed and assigned you. Rest in the love of your heavenly Father, assured that all of the present distress is designed for your ultimate good, and this will reinvigorate the soul. Finally, seek grace to lay hold of and plead the promise, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isa. 40:31).

It is to be noted that this exhortation is couched abstractly. It is not "lift up your hands," which would restrict it individually; nor is it "lift up the hands of those who are dejected," which would limit the exhortation to a ministry unto others. Worded as it is there is a double reference: it is a call to the individual Christian to persevering activity, and it is an exhortation for him to seek the well being of his fellow-Christians. That our text has a reference to our seeking to encourage and strengthen fellow-pilgrims is clear from a

comparison of Job 4:3, 4 and Isaiah 35:3, 4, with which 1 Thessalonians 5:14 may be compared. The best way for the individual Christian to strengthen the hands of his feeble fellows is by setting before them a worthy example of faith, courage, and steadfastness. In addition, he is to pray for them, speak words of encouragement, remind them of God's promises, relate to them His gracious dealings and powerful deliverances in his own life.

"And make straight paths for your feet." The previous verse concerns the inward frame and spirit of the believer's mind; this one has respect to his outward conduct. As Barnes has well pointed out, the term used here signifies "straight" horizontally, that is level and plain, all obstacles are to be removed so that we do not stumble and fall—cf. Proverbs 4:25-27. The word for "paths" is derived from one meaning "a wheel" and signifies here "the marks made by a wheel"—it is paths marked out for others, leaving the tracks which may be followed by them. The reference, then, is to the believer so manifesting his course that his fellows may see and follow it. The Christian course is exemplary, that is, it is one which impresses and influences others. How very careful should we be then as to our conduct!

Here, then, is an exhortation unto the Christian to see well to his walk, which means the regulating of all his actions by the revealed will of God, to be obedient unto the Divine precepts, to follow not the ways and fashions of an evil world, but to cleave to the narrow way, and turn not aside from the Highway of Holiness. "It is our duty not only to be found in the ways of God in general but to take care that we walk carefully, circumspectly, uprightly and diligently in them. Hereon depends our own peace, and all our usefulness toward others. It is a sad thing when some men's walk in the ways of God shall deter others from them or turn them out of them" (John Owen).

"And make straight paths for your feet." A most timely word for us today when iniquity abounds and the love of many waxes cold, when the poor and afflicted in Zion stand in need of all the godly encouragement they can obtain. We are surrounded by a "crooked generation," both of professing and profane, whose evil ways we are but too apt to learn; we are beset on every hand by temptations to turn aside into what Bunyan termed "By-path Meadow," to enter paths which God has prohibited, to feed on pride

and indulge our lusts. How the heart of the mature Christian aches for the lambs of Christ's flock, and how it behooves him to walk softly and carefully lest he put some stumbling-block in their way. Solemn indeed is "As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity" (Ps. 125:5), and also "They have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace" (Isa. 59:8).

"Lest that which is lame be turned out of the way." The word "lest" is a translation of two Greek words, "that not." It is a word of caution and prevention, warning each of us that carelessness as to our own walk is likely to have an ill effect upon weaker Christians. The word "lame" is transferred from the body to some defect of our graces which unfits the soul for the discharge of Christian duty: one who is lame is ill-capacitated to run in a race, and one who is lacking in courage, zeal, and perseverance is ill-fitted to fight the good fight of faith. Walk carefully then, my brother, if for no reason than for the sake of the feebler saints. Backslidden Christians are the plague of the church: inconsistencies in God's people spread discouragements among weak believers.

There are always some "lame" sheep in God's earthly flock. While there are some Christians with strong and vigorous faith, so that they "mount up with wings as eagles, run and are not weary," and make steady progress in practical holiness, all are not so highly favored. In most families of any size there is one frail and sickly member; so it is in the various branches of the Household of Faith. Some are constitutionally gloomy, temperamentally vacillating, physically infirm, and these have a special claim upon the strong. They are not to be snubbed and shunned: they need an example of cheerfulness set before them, wise counsel given to them, their arms supported by prayer and love's solicitude for their good. Whatever is weak in their faith and hope, whatever tends to dishearten and discourage them, should be carefully attended to, so far as lies in our power. A stitch in time saves nine: many a sheep might have been kept from falling into the ditch, had one with a shepherd's heart gone after it at the first sign of straying.

"But let it rather be healed." "Heal" signifies to correct that which is amiss. It is the recovering of a lapsed one which is here in view. Instead of despising sickly Christians, exercise love's sympathy toward them. While we should be thankful if God has

granted us healthy graces, we must beware of presumption: "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). To those groaning under the burden of sin, tell them of the sufficiency of Christ's blood. To those fearful about the future, remind them of God's faithfulness. To those who are despondent, seek to cheer by citing some of God's precious promises. Study the holy art of speaking a word in season to the needy. You will be of great value to the church if you develop a spirit of compassion and the gift of lifting up those fallen by the wayside."

Hebrews 12:14

Chapter 94 - A Call to Diligence

The connection between the verses which were before us on the last occasion and that which is now to engage our attention is not apparent at the first glance. There the apostle made a practical application to his readers of the important considerations he had been setting before them in the preceding verses, calling them unto the duty of steadfastness. Here there is a lively exhortation unto the pursuit of peace and holiness. The relation between these exhortations and those which follow, is more intimate than a number of pearls strung together, rather is it more like that of the several members of our physical body, which are vitally joined and dependent upon one another. Failure to observe this fact results in loss, for not only do we fail to appreciate the living connection of one part with another, but we lose the motive and incentive which they mutually supply. It is the business of the teacher to point this out, that we may be duly affected thereby and rejoice together in the perfect handiwork of God.

"From his exhortation unto patient perseverance in the profession of the Gospel under sufferings and affliction, the apostle proceeds unto a prescription of practical duties; and although they are such as are absolutely necessary in themselves at all times, yet they are here peculiarly enjoined with respect to the same end, or our constancy in professing the Gospel. For no light, no knowledge of the truth, no resolution or courage, will preserve any man in his profession, especially in times of trial, without a diligent attention unto the duties of holiness and Gospel obedience. And he begins with a precept, general and comprehensive of all others" (John Owen).

The connection between Hebrews 12:14, etc., and verses 12, 13, is threefold. First, the diligent pursuit of peace toward our fellows and of holiness toward God are timely aids unto perseverance in the faith and in consequence, powerful means for preservation from apostasy. The one is so closely joined to the other

that the former cannot be realized without an eager striving after the latter. Second, inasmuch as love toward our neighbor ("peace," with all that that involves and includes) and love toward God ("holiness") is the sum of our duty, it is impossible that we should devote ourselves unto their cultivation and exercise so long as we are permitting afflictions and persecution to paralyze the mind: the spirit of resolute determination must possess us before we can develop our spiritual graces. Third, oppression and suffering provide an opportunity for the exercise and manifestation of our spiritual graces, and are to be improved by us to this very end. "If the children of God grow impatient under afflictions, they will neither walk so quietly and peaceably towards men nor so piously toward God as they should do" (Matthew Henry).

The first thing which needs to be borne in mind as we approach each verse of this epistle is the special circumstances of those immediately addressed, and to perceive the peculiar pertinency of the apostle's instruction to those who were so situated, for this will the better enable us to make a correct application unto ourselves. Now the Hebrews were living among a people where their own espousal of Christianity had produced a serious breach, which had stirred up the fierce opposition of their fellow-countrymen. The attitude of these Hebrews towards Christ was neither understood nor appreciated by the unbelieving Jews; so far from it, they were regarded as renegades and denounced as apostates from the faith of their fathers. Every effort was made to poison their minds against the Gospel, and where this failed, relentless persecution was brought to bear upon them. Hence, it was by no means an easy matter for them to maintain the spirit of the Gospel and live amicably with those who surrounded them; instead, they were sorely tempted to entertain a bitter spirit toward those who troubled them so unjustly, to retaliate and avenge their wrongs. Here, then, was the need for them to be exhorted "follow peace with all men!"

Now while it be true that Christians are now, for the most part, spared the severe suffering which those Hebrews were called upon to endure, yet faithfulness to Christ is bound to incur the hostility of those who hate Him, and will in some form or other issue in opposition. There is a radical difference in nature between those treading the narrow way to Heaven and those following the

broad road to Hell. The character and conduct of the former condemn and rile the self-pleasing disposition and flesh-indulging ways of the latter. The children of the Devil have no love for the children of God, and they delight in doing whatever they can to annoy and aggravate them; and nothing gives them more pleasure than to see successful their efforts to tempt them to compromise or stir up unto angry retaliation. Thus it is a timely injunction for all believers, in any age and in any country, to strive earnestly to live in peace with all men.

"Follow peace with all men." This is a very humbling word that Christians require to be told to do this. Its implication is clear: by nature men are fractious, wrathful, revengeful creatures. That is one reason why Christ declared "it must needs be that offenses come" (Matthew 18:7)—"must" because of the awful depravity of fallen human nature; yet forget not that He at once added, "But woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." It is because of this contentious, envious, revengeful, spirit which is in us, that we need the exhortation of our text, and in view of what is recorded in Scripture, even of saints, its timeliness is the more apparent. Have we not read of "the strife" between the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot which caused the patriarch and his nephew to part asunder? Have we not read of the discords and fightings between the tribes of Israel issuing in their kingdom being rent in twain? Have we not read of the "contention" between Paul and Barnabas which issued in their separating? These are solemn warnings, danger-signals, which we all do well to take to heart.

"It is the duty of Christians to be at peace among themselves, to be on their guard against all alienation of affection towards each other; and there can be no doubt that the maintenance of this brotherly-kindness is well fitted to promote steadfastness in the faith and profession of the Gospel. But in the words before us there seems to be a reference not so much to the peace which Christians should endeavor to maintain among themselves, as that which they should endeavor to preserve in reference to the world around them. They are to 'follow peace with all men.'

"They live amidst men whose modes of thinking, and feeling and acting are very different from—are in many points directly opposite to—theirs. They have been fairly warned, that 'if they would live godly in this world, they must suffer persecution.' They

have been told that 'if they were of the world, the world would love its own; but because they are not of the world, therefore the world hateth them.' 'In the world,' says their Lord and Master, 'ye shall have tribulation.' But this, so far from making them reckless as to their behavior towards the men of the world, ought to have the directly opposite effect. If the world persecute them, they must take care that this persecution has in no degree been provoked by their improper or imprudent behavior. They must do everything that lies in their power, consistent with duty, to live in peace with their ungodly neighbors. They must carefully abstain from injuring them; they must endeavor to promote their happiness. They must do everything but sin in order to prevent a quarrel.

"This is of great importance, both to themselves and to their unbelieving brethren. A mind harassed by those feelings which are almost inseparable from a state of discord is not by any means in the fittest state for studying the doctrines, cherishing the feelings, enjoying the comforts, performing the duties of Christianity; and, on the other hand, the probability of our being useful to our unbelieving brethren is greatly diminished when we cease to be on good terms with them. As far as lies in us, then, if it be possible, we are to 'live peaceably with all men'" (John Brown, 1872).

"Follow peace with all men." The Greek word for "follow" is a very emphatical one, signifying an "earnest pursuit:" it is the eager chasing after something which flies from one, being used of hunters and hounds after game. The Christian is to spare no effort to live amicably with all men, and no matter how contentious and unfriendly they may be, he is to strive and overtake that which seeks to flee from him. Peace is one of the outstanding graces which the Christian is called upon to exercise and manifest. All things pertaining to the Church are denominated things of peace. God is "the God of peace" (Heb. 13:20), Christ is "the Prince of peace" (Isa. 9:6), a believer is designated "the son of peace" (Luke 10-6), and Christians are bidden to have their "feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15).

In this term "follow," or pursue, the apostle continues to preserve the central figure of the entire passage, introduced in the first verse of our chapter, of the running of a race: the same word is rendered "I press forward" in Philippians 3:14. Peace may be elusive and hard to capture, nevertheless strive after it, run hard in the chase

thereof, for it is well worth overtaking. Spare no pains, strain every nerve to attain unto it. If this exhortion be duly heeded by us then Christians are plainly forbidden to embroil themselves or take any part in the strifes and quarrels of the world: thus they are hereby forbidden to engage in politics, where there is little else than envy, contention and anger. Still less may the Christian take any part in war: there is not a single word in all the N.T. which warrants a follower of the Prince of peace slaying his fellowmen. "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it" (Ps. 34:14).

The word "follow" or pursue does not imply the actual obtainment of peace: the most eager hunters and hounds often miss their prey. Nevertheless, nothing short of our utmost endeavors are required of us. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18): with fellow-Christians, with those who are strangers to Christ (Eph. 2:19), with our enemies (Matthew 5:44). Few things more adorn and beautify a Christian profession than exercising and manifesting the spirit of peace. Then let us prayerfully strive to avoid those things which occasion strife. Remember the old adage that "It takes two to make a quarrel:" therefore see to it that you provoke not others. Give no encouragement to those who love contention; refrain from all argument—the things of God are too holy: debating is a work of the flesh. To "follow peace with all men" presupposes righteousness in our dealings with them, for we most certainly are not entitled to expect them to treat us amicably unless we give unto each his due, and treat others as we would have them treat us.

Do not merely be placid when no one irritates you, but go out of your way to be gracious unto those who oppose. Be not fretful if others fail to render the respect which you consider to be your due. Do not be so ready to "stand up for your rights," but yield everything except truth and the requirements of holiness. "If we would follow peace, we must gird up our loins with the girdle of forbearance: we must resolve that as we will not give offense, so neither will take offense, and if offense be felt, we must resolve to forgive" (C.H. Spurgeon). Remember we cannot successfully "pursue peace" if the heavy burden of pride be on our shoulder: pride ever stirs up strife. Nor can we "pursue peace" if the spirit of envy fills the heart: envy is sure to see faults where they exist not, and make trouble. Nor can we "pursue peace" if we are loose-

tongued, busybodies, talebearers.

Even when opposed, our duty is to be peaceful toward those who persecute—a hard lesson, a high attainment, yet Divine grace (when earnestly sought) is "sufficient" even here. Remember the example which the Savior has left us: and cry mightily unto God for help to emulate the same. "When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not" (1 Pet. 2:23): He prayed for God to forgive His very murderers. "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2). Ah, there are the prerequisites for the procuring of peace—the lack of which being the cause of so much confusion, strife and war. If love reigns our skirts will be dear, for "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

"Follow peace with all men." This includes even more than we have intimated above: the Christian is not only to be a peace-keeper, but he should seek to be a peace-maker: such have the express benediction of Christ—"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Seek, then, to restore amicable relations between those who are at enmity and be used of God as a medium of their reconciliation. Instead of fanning the flames of dissension or driving the wedge of division further in, endeavor to cool them by the water of the Word, and by a gracious demeanor and wise counsel seek to smooth out difficulties and heal wounds. "And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3:18). "Peaceable men do sow a seed that afterward will yield sheaves of comfort into their own bosoms" (T. Manton).

"Follow peace with all men and holiness." First, the cultivation of peace is a great aid unto personal and practical holiness: where discontent, envy, and strife dominate the heart, piety is choked. The two things are inseparably connected: where love to our neighbor is lacking, love to God will not be in exercise. The two tables of the law must not be divorced: God will not accept our worship in the house of prayer while we entertain in our heart the spirit of bitterness toward another (Matthew 5:23, 24). "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not

his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20). O my reader, if we imagine that we are sincere in our quest after holiness while striving not to live peaceably with all men, we are cherishing a vain deceit.

"Some who have aimed at holiness have made the great mistake of supposing it needful to be morose, contentious, faultfinding, and censorious with everybody else. Their holiness has consisted of negatives, protests, and oppositions for oppositions sake. Their religion mainly lies in contrarieties and singularities; to them the text offers this wise counsel, follow holiness, but also follow peace. Courtesy is not inconsistent with faithfulness. It is not needful to be savage in order to be sanctified. A bitter spirit is a poor companion for a renewed heart. Let your determination principle be sweetened by tenderness towards your fellow-men. Be resolute for the right, but be also gentle, pitiful, courteous. Consider the meekness as well as the boldness of Jesus. Follow peace, but not at the expense of holiness. Follow holiness, but do not needlessly endanger peace" (C.H. Spurgeon, on text, 1870).

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness." By a harmless, kind, and useful behavior toward their unbelieving neighbors the people of God are to conduct themselves. They must avoid that which fosters bitterness and strife, and make it manifest they are followers of the Prince of peace. Yet in pursuing this most needful and inestimable policy there must be no sacrifice of principle. While peace is a most precious commodity nevertheless, like gold, it may be purchased too dearly. "The wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable" (James 3:17). Peace must not be severed from holiness by a compliance with any evil or a neglect of any duty. "First being by interpretation king of righteousness, and after that also King of peace" (Heb. 7:2). "Peace has special relation to man and his good, holiness to God and His honor. These two may no more be severed than the two tables of the law. Be sure then that peace lacks not this companion of holiness: if they cannot stand together, let peace go and holiness be cleaved unto" (W. Gouge).

There may be the former without the latter. Men may be so determined to maintain peace that they compromise principle, sacrifice the truth, and ignore the claims of God. Peace must never be sought after a price of unfaithfulness to Christ. "Buy the truth and sell it not" (Prov. 23:23) is ever binding upon the Christian. Thus,

important though it be to "follow peace with all men," it is still more important that we diligently pursue "holiness." Holiness is devotedness to God and that temper of mind and course of conduct which agrees with the fact that we are "not our own, but bought with a price." Peace with men, then, is not to be purchased at the expense of devotedness to God: "infinitely better to have the whole world for our enemies and God for our friend, than to have the whole world for our friends and God for our enemy" (John Brown).

The Christian is not only to be diligent in his quest for peace, but he is to be still more earnest in his pursuit after personal and practical holiness. Seeking after the good will of our fellows must be subordinated unto seeking the approbation of God. Our chief aim must be conformity to the image of Christ. If He has delivered us from wrath to come, we must endeavor by all that is within us to follow Him along the narrow way which leadeth unto Life. If He be our Lord and Master, then He is to be unreservedly obeyed. To "follow" holiness is to live like persons who are devoted to God—to His glory, to His claims upon us, to His cause in this world. It is to make it evident that we belong to Him. It is to separate ourselves from all that is opposed to Him. It is to mortify the flesh, with its affections and lusts. It is to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit" (2 Cor. 7:1). It is a life task from which there is no discharge while we remain in the body.

To urge us the more after holiness, the apostle at once adds "without which no man shall see the Lord"—"which" is in the singular number, showing that the antecedent is "holiness." The believer may fail to "follow peace with all men," and though he will suffer loss thereby and bring himself under the chastening rod of his Father, yet this will not entail the Loss of Heaven itself. But it is otherwise with holiness: unless we are made partakers of the Divine nature, unless there be personal devotedness to God, unless there be an earnest striving after conformity to His will, then Heaven will never be reached. There is only one route which leads to the Country of everlasting bliss, and that is the Highway of Holiness; and unless (by grace) we tread the same, our course must inevitably terminate in the caverns of eternal woe.

The negative here is fearfully emphatic: "without which (namely, "holiness") no man shall see the Lord"—in the Greek it is still stronger the negative being threefold—"not, without, no man."

God Himself is essentially, ineffably, infinitely holy, and only holy characters shall ever "see" Him. Without holiness no man shall see Him: no, no matter how orthodox his beliefs, how diligent his attendance upon the means of grace, how liberal he may be in contributing to the cause, nor how zealous in performing religious duties. How this searching word should make everyone of us quail! Even though I be a preacher, devoting the whole of my life to study and laboring for the good of souls, even though I be blest with much light from the Word and be used of God in turning many from Satan to Christ, yet without holiness—both inward and outward—I shall never see the Lord. Unless the earnest pursuit of holiness occupy all my powers, I am but a formal professor, having a name to live while being spiritually dead.

Without holiness men are strangers to God and cannot be admitted to His fellowship, still less to His eternal habitation. "Thus saith the Lord God; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh shall enter into My sanctuary" (Ezek. 44:9): such as have no holiness within and without, in heart or in life, cannot be admitted into the sanctuary. If God shut the door of His earthly sanctuary against such as were strangers to holiness, will He not much more shut the doors of His celestial tabernacle against those who are strangers to Christ? "For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?" (2 Cor. 6:14, 15).

Unholy persons have fellowship and are familiar with Satan: "Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (John 8:44); and again "The whole world lieth in the Wicked one" (1 John 5:19). It would be awful blasphemy to affirm that the thrice holy God would have fellowship with those who are in covenant with the Devil. O make no mistake upon this point, dear reader: if you are not walking after the Spirit, you are walking after the flesh: if you are not living to please Christ, you are living to please self; if you have not been delivered from the power of Darkness, you cannot enjoy the Light. Listen to those piercing words of the Redeemer, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3), and the new birth is holiness begun, it is the implantation of a principle of holiness in the heart, which is the life task of the Christian to cultivate.

The "holiness" referred to in our text is not imputed holiness, for we cannot be exhorted to "follow after" that! No, it is personal and practical holiness, which is not attained by standing still, but by an earnest, diligent, persistent pursuit after the same. "It will be well for us to remember that the religion of Jesus Christ is not a matter of trifling, that the gaining of Heaven is not to be achieved by a few half-hearted efforts; and if we will at the same time recollect that all-sufficient succor is prepared for us in the covenant of grace we shall be in a right state of mind: resolute, yet humble, leaning upon the merits of Christ, and yet aiming at personal holiness. I am persuaded that if self-righteousness be deadly, self-indulgence is indeed ruinous. I desire to maintain always a balance in my ministry, and while combating self-righteousness, to war perpetually with loose living" (C.H. Spurgeon).

But for the comfort of the poor and afflicted people of God, who find sin their greatest burden and who grieve sorely over their paucity of holiness, let it be pointed out that our text does not say "without the perfection of holiness no man shall see the Lord." Had it done so, we would not be writing this article, for then the editor had been entirely without hope. There is none upon earth who is fully conformed to God's will. Practical holiness is a matter of growth. In this life holiness is but infantile, and will only be matured in glory. At present it exists more in the form of longings and strivings, hungerings and efforts, rather than in realizations and attainments. The very fact that the Christian is exhorted to "follow" or pursue holiness, proves that he has not yet reached it.

"Without holiness no man shall see the Lord" spiritually, not corporeally: with an enlightened understanding and with love's discernment, so as to enjoy personal communion with Him. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth" (1 John 1:6): how clear is that! "The pure in heart shall see God" (Matthew 5:8): see Him in His holy ordinances, see His blessed image reflected, though dimly, by his saints, see Him by faith with the eyes of the heart, as Moses, who "endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27); and thus be prepared and capacitated to "see" Him in His unveiled glory in the courts above. O to be able to truthfully say, "As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness" (Ps. 17:15). How we should labor after holiness, using all the means

appointed thereto, since it is the medium for the soul's vision of God.

Hebrews 12:15

Chapter 95 - A Call to Examination

We had first thought of giving a brief exposition of this verse at the close of the preceding article. But we felt this would scarcely satisfy some of our more critical readers. Nor is it our custom to dodge difficulties, and this presents a real difficulty unto not a few. Those Arminians who are ready to grasp at a straw have appealed to it in support of their favorite tenet "falling from grace." On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that the replies given by Calvinists thereon have often been unsatisfactory. It seems therefore that a more careful consideration and fuller elucidation of its contents are called for. Following, then, our usual practice, we shall endeavor, as God assists, to bring out the meaning of its several terms and apply them to our consciences and lives.

The following are the points upon which our attention needs to be concentrated. First, the connection between our present verse and its context. Second, the duty enjoined: "looking diligently." Third, the danger to be avoided: "lest any man fail of the grace of God." Fourth, the evil warned against: "lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you." Fifth, the resultant consequence if the evil be tolerated: "and thereby many be defiled." In considering these points it will have to be carefully ascertained what it is about which we are here exhorted to be "looking diligently." What is signified by "lest any man fail of the grace of God," and if that be the correct translation, or whether the Greek requires us to accept the marginal alternative of "falling from the grace of God." And finally, what is denoted by the "root of bitterness springing up." May wisdom be granted us from on High.

First, then, the connection between our present verse and its context. We will first consider its more general and remote relation, and then its more specific and immediate. The link between Hebrews 12:15 and that which precedes may be thus exhibited: if the afflictions which fidelity to Christ occasion and the chastenings of the Father are not duly improved by professing Christians they

are almost certain to become a serious stumbling-block in the way of personal piety, yea, a temptation to apostasy itself. This, we believe, is the first reference in the "looking diligently." Unless professing Christians are duly "exercised" (verse 11) over God's disciplinary dealings with them, they are very apt to misconstrue them, chafe against them, call into question the Divine goodness, and sink into a state of despair, with its accompanying inertia.

What has just been pointed out above receives confirmation from the verses which immediately follow, for verses 16 and 17 are obviously a continuation of our present text. There we find a solemn exhortation against apostasy itself, pointed by the awful case and example of Esau. Here we are warned against that, which if neglected, has a fearful tendency unto apostasy. Most of us know from painful experience how easily we become discouraged when things do not go as we want, how ready we are to "faint" (verse 5) when the rod of adversity is laid upon us, how real is the temptation to compromise or forsake the path of duty altogether when trials multiply or opposition and persecution is all that our best efforts meet with. Real, then, is our need for heeding this exhortation "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God."

It is unspeakably solemn to note that in the case of Esau his temptation to sell his birthright—apostatize—was occasioned by his faintness, for we are told that he said to Jacob, "Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint" (Gen. 25:30). And is it not when we are faint in our minds, cast down by the difficulties of the way, disheartened by the lack of appreciation our efforts meet with, and crushed by one trial on top of another, that Satan bids us give up the fight of faith and "get what pleasure we can out of life" by indulging the lusts of the flesh? Looked at thus our text points out the spring of apostasy—"falling of the grace of God;" the nature of apostasy—a "root of bitterness springing up;" and the result of apostasy—"many be defiled."

Considering now the more specific and immediate connection of our verse with its context. First, unless the hands which hang down be lifted up and the feeble knees strengthened (verse 12), there will be a "failing of the grace of God;" and unless straight paths are made for our feet and that which is "lame" be prevented from "turning out of the way" (verse 13), then a "root of bitterness" (an apostate) will spring up, and in consequence, "many

will be defiled." Second, in verse 14 we are exhorted to "follow" two things, namely, "peace" and "holiness;" while in verse 15 we are warned to avoid two things, namely, "failing of the grace of God" and suffering "a root of bitterness to spring up." The opening "Looking diligently" clearly denotes that our avoidance of the two evils of verse 15 turns or is dependent upon our earnest pursuit of the spiritual graces inculcated in verse 14.

We are now ready to contemplate the duty which is here enjoined: "looking diligently." This is a call to examination: first, to self-examination. Its immediate force is derived from the closing words of the preceding verse, where the solemn and searching statement is made that "without which (namely 'holiness') no man shall see the Lord." No matter though I am in fellowship with the people of God, a member of a scriptural church, a regular attender upon the means of grace, a firm believer in all the doctrines of the Word; yet, if I have never been sanctified by the Spirit of God, if I am not diligently and earnestly cultivating practical holiness, both of heart and life, then I shall never enter Heaven, and enjoy the beatific vision. Hence the pertinency and urgency of this exhortation, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God." There is far too much at stake to remain in uncertainty upon such a vital matter, and only the religious trifler will disregard this imperative summons.

The call to careful self-examination receives its urgency from the very great danger there is of self-deception. Sin darkens the understanding, so that man is unable to perceive his real state before God. Satan "hath blinded the minds of them which believe not" (2 Cor. 4:4). The deep-rooted pride of our hearts makes us think the best of ourselves, so that if a question is raised in our hearts, we are ever prone to give ourselves the benefit of the doubt. A spirit of sloth possesses us by nature, so that we are unwilling to go to the trouble which real self-examination calls for. Hence the vast majority of religious professors remain with a head knowledge of the Truth, with outward attention to forms and ceremonies, or resting on a mere consent to the letter of some verse like John 3:16, refusing to "make their calling and election sure."

God has warned us plainly in His Word that, "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes and yet is not washed from their filthiness" (Prov. 30:12). He has set before us those who

say "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," and who know not that they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). And let it be duly noted that those were in church association, and that at a time before the last of the apostles had left the earth. Christ has told us that "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works?" yea, that they affirm "we have eaten and drunk in Thy presence" (Luke 13:26); yet will He answer them "I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:23). How such words as those should make each of us tremble! How it behooves us to be "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God." Alas that such words—written first to those who had been addressed as "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (3:1)—should, for the most part, fall upon unheeding ears.

The fact is, that our diligence and honesty in self-examination will largely be determined by the value which we set upon our soul and its eternal interests. Alas, the vast majority of professing Christians today are far, far more concerned about their bodies than their souls, about carnal pleasures than spiritual riches, about earthly comforts than heavenly consolations, about the good opinion of their fellows rather than the approbation of God. But a few—and O how few—are made serious, become in deadly earnest to examine well their foundations and test every inch of the ground they stand on. With them religion is not something to be taken up and laid down according to their fitful moods. Where will they spend ETERNITY is their all-absorbing concern. Every other interest in life sinks into utter insignificance before the vital consideration of seeking to make sure that they have "the root of the matter" in them.

O my reader, can you be satisfied with the cheap, easy-going religion of the day, which utterly ignores the clamant call of the Son of God "Agonize to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke 13:24)? Can you rest content with the "smooth things" now being proclaimed from well nigh every pulpit, which assures those who are at enmity with God they can become Christians more easily than a youth can join the army, or a man become a 'free mason' or 'odd fellow'? Can you follow the great crowd who claim to have "received Christ as their personal Savior" when no miracle of grace has been wrought in

their hearts, while the Lord Himself declares "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:14)? Dare you rest upon some "decision" made when you were deeply stirred by some anecdotes addressed to your emotions? Have you nothing more than some change in your religious views or some reformation in your outward ways to show that you are "a new creature in Christ Jesus"? Slight not, we beseech you, this pressing word, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God."

But the word "Looking diligently" has a wider signification than self-examination: it also points out our duty toward each other. The Greek term means "overseeing," exercising a jealous care for one another. This seems to have misled Owen and several others who confined the exhortation unto "the body of the church or society of the faithful" in their mutual relation. But as Spurgeon pointed out on the text, "In the church of God each one should be on his watchtower for himself and for others. The first person who is likely to fail in the church is myself. Each one ought to feel that: the beginning of the watch should therefore be at home." Our text is very similar to the exhortation found in Hebrews 3:13, 14, which is first unto the individual and then to the assembly—"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily."

Earnestly endeavoring to look well unto my own going, it is then both my duty and privilege to exercise watchfulness over others. "How many persons might be saved from backsliding by a little oversight! If we would speak to the brother kindly and considerately, when we think he is growing a little cold, we might restore him. We need not always speak directly to him by way of rebuke, but we may place a suggestive book in his way, or speak generally upon the subject. Love can invent many ways of warning a friend without making him angry, and a holy example will also prove a great rebuke to sin. In the church we ought to bear one another's burden, and so fulfill the law of Christ, exercising the office of bishops over one another, and watching lest any man fail of the grace of God" (C.H. Spurgeon).

How little of this loving solicitude for the spiritual well-being of our fellow-pilgrims is in evidence today! How little earnest and diligent praying for one another! How little faithfulness in

counseling, warning, exhorting! Probably one principal reason for this is the hyper-touchiness of so many professing Christians in this generation. No matter how tactfully the counsel be tendered, how faithfully the warning be given, or how lovingly the rebuke be administered; no matter though it be given by an experienced senior to one he is on familiar terms with, yet in nine cases out of ten his efforts are resented, and he is told—by attitude if not in words—to "mind his own business." Never mind, even if a single ear be gained and a single soul helped, it is worth the disappointments of being repulsed by the others. Only one leper out of the ten appreciated Christ's kindness!

"Lest any man fail of the grace of God." This is the clause which has occasioned controversy: though really it affords no warrant for it, nor will the Greek permit of the marginal rendering. The root word which is here rendered "fail" occurs many times in the N.T., but never once has it the force of "fall from." It means "to lack" or "be deficient of." In Romans 3:23 it is rendered "come short of," in Luke 15:14 to "want," in 2 Corinthians 12:11 "come behind," in Matthew 19:20 "lack," in Philippians 4:12 "suffer need," in Hebrews 11:37 to be "destitute." Thus there is no room for uncertainty as to the meaning of this exhortation: "Looking diligently lest any man fail—come short of, be deficient in, lack—the grace of God."

But to what does "the grace of God" here refer? That is not quite so easy to answer, for sometimes "grace" is to be regarded objectively, sometimes subjectively; in some passages it refers to the free favor of God, in others to His benevolent operation within the heart, in still others to the effects produced thereby. In our present passage, it seems to the writer, to be used more abstractly, having a comprehensive scope as it is applicable to widely different cases. We feel it safest to regard the clause thus, for God's commandment is "exceeding broad" (Ps. 119:96), and very often a single word has a twofold or threefold reference, and therefore we need to be constantly on our guard against limiting the meaning or restricting the application of any utterance of Holy Writ. According to our light we will endeavor to show some of the different cases to which this exhortation belongs.

"By 'the grace of God,' God's favor and acceptance in Christ, as it is proposed and declared by the Gospel, is intended.

Herein all spiritual mercies and privileges, in adoption, justification, sanctification and consolation, do consist. For these things, proceeding from the love, grace, and goodness of God in Christ, and being effects thereof, are called the grace of God. The attaining and participation of these things, is that which in the faith and profession of the Gospel, men aim at and design; without which, both the one and the other are in vain. This grace, under all their profession of the Gospel, men may fail of, and this is the evil cautioned against" (John Owen).

Men may "fail of the grace of God," then, by not submitting themselves to the terms of the Gospel. Those terms are repugnant to the natural man: they are distasteful to his carnal lusts, they are humbling to his pride. But it is at the former of these two points that the majority "fail." The Gospel calls upon sinners to repent, and they cannot do that with sincerity unless they throw down the weapons of their rebellion against God. The thrice holy God will pardon no man so long as he is determined to please himself and continue in a course of sinning. Again; the Gospel calls on sinners to receive Christ Jesus as Lord: to give Him the throne of their hearts, to bow to His scepter. The holy Redeemer will save no man who is unwilling for Him to "rule over" him (Luke 19:14).

Second, to "fail of the grace of God" is to be satisfied with something short of Divine grace communicated to and ruling in the heart. It is to be contented with a religious substitute for it. How many are deceived by "a form of godliness" who know nothing of its "power" (2 Tim. 3:5). How many mistake a head-knowledge of the Truth for a miracle of grace wrought in the heart. How many substitute outward forms and ceremonies for an experimental acquaintance with the substance of them. How many confuse an external reformation of life with the Divine regeneration and transformation of the soul. Alas, of how very many does it have to be said, "He feedeth on ashes; a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul" (Isa. 44:20). O how few there are who know "the grace of God in truth" (Col. 1:5). Do you, my reader? Do you?

"Some have maintained an admirable character to all appearance all their lives, and yet have failed of the grace of God because of some secret sin. They persuaded even themselves that they were believers, and yet they were not truly so; they had no

inward holiness, they allowed one sin to get the mastery, they indulged in an unsanctified passion, and so, though they were laid in the grave like sheep, they died with a false hope, and missed eternal life. This is a most dreadful state to be in, and perhaps some of us are in it. Let the prayer be breathed, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' Are ye earnest in secret prayer? Do ye love the reading of the Bible? Have ye the fear of God before your eyes? Do you really commune with God? Do you truly love Christ? Ask yourselves these questions often, for though we preach the free Gospel of Jesus Christ, I hope as plainly as any, we feel it to be just as needful to set you on self-examination and to excite in you a holy anxiety. It ought to be often a question with you 'Have I the grace of God, or do I fall short of it? Am I a piece of rock crystal which is very like the diamond, but yet is not diamond?'" (C.H. Spurgeon).

Third, multitudes "fail of the grace of God" by not persevering in the use of the outward means. They are very earnest and zealous at first, but become careless and slothful. "There are some persons who for a time appear to possess the grace of God, and for a while exhibit many outward evidences of being Christians, but at last the temptation comes most suitable to their depraved tastes, and they are carried away with it. They fail of the grace of God. They appear to have attained it, but they fail at last; like a man in business who makes money for a time, but fails in the end. They fail of the grace of God—like an arrow shot from the bow, which goes straight towards the target for a time, but having too little impetus, fails to reach the mark. There are some who did run well, what doth hinder them that they should not obey the truth?" (C.H. Spurgeon).

Finally, genuine Christians themselves "fail of the grace of God" by not improving that which God has already bestowed upon them. Faith has been imparted to them, but how little they exercise it. There is an infinite fullness in Christ for them, but how little do they draw upon it. Wondrous privileges are theirs, but how little do they use them. Light has been communicated to them, but how little do they walk in it. They fail to watch and pray lest they enter into temptation (Mark 14:38). They fail to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1). They fail to grow in

grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus (2 Pet. 3:18). They fail to keep themselves from idols (1 John 5:21). They fail to keep themselves in the love of God (Jude 21). And by so failing, their peace is disturbed, their joy is diminished, their testimony is marred, and frequent chastenings are brought upon them.

"Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you." This is the evil warned against. Observe how abstractly this also is worded: it is not "lest any root of bitterness spring up in you," or "among you," but simply "springing up." The reference, we believe, is again a double one: first to the individual himself, and then to the corporate company. This second "lest" is obviously related intimately to the first: if we "fail of the grace of God" then "a root of bitterness springing up" is to be surely expected. Nor can there be any doubt as to what is signified by this figure of a "root of bitterness springing up"—the uprising of evil is evidently that which is in view. This is what we are here to guard against: failure to do so will bring "trouble" upon us and occasion a stumbling-block to others.

The first thing to be noted here is the expression "root of bitterness." Now the root of a tree is that part of it which is underground, hence the reference is to that which is unseen. It points to indwelling sin, which continues in a man even after he is regenerated. That is why the Christian is exhorted, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Rom. 6:12). And if that is to be obeyed, then it is imperative we heed the word "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). Every stirring of sin within is to be resisted, every defiling effect of it confessed to God. If the weeds be not kept down, the flowers and vegetables will be choked. If the Christian fails in the work of mortification then the cultivation of his graces will be arrested.

"Lest any root of bitterness springing up." The "springing up" is the appearance of its stalk above the ground. It is the open manifestation of sin in the life, issuing from an unmortified lust in the soul, which is here in view. What is unjudged before God in secret usually ends in becoming open before men. "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23) is a solemn word for each of us on this point. "Lest any root" emphasizes the need of constant watchfulness against every sin, for many branches and sprigs are ready to issue

from the main trunk of indwelling corruption. Our safeguards are to yield ourselves wholly to God without reserve at any point, to be well instructed in practical godliness, to preserve a tender conscience, to be more distrustful about ourselves, to cultivate closer daily communion with God, to fix our affections upon things above.

"Lest any root of bitterness springing up." By nature, sin is pleasant and delightful to us, but in the end it "biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder" (Prov. 23:32). Particularly is this the case with the Christian. God will not long suffer him to indulge his lusts, without making him taste the bitter consequences of the same. The lashings of his conscience, the convictions of the Spirit, the wretchedness of his soul, will cause him to say, "He hath filled me with bitterness, He hath made me drunken with wormwood" (Lam. 3:15). As our text says, "lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble." That which is contrary to God's holiness and offends His majesty, He makes a source of trouble to us, either in our minds, bodies, estates, or families. "And many be defiled:" sin is like leaven—its influence spreads: "evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33).

The second half of our text also refers to the local church: in it there is, no doubt, an allusion to Deuteronomy 29:18. Great watchfulness needs to be exercised and a strict discipline maintained therein. Unregenerate professors are ever seeking to creep into the assembly of the saints. If God's servants sleep, the Enemy will sow his tares among the wheat. When the suspicion of church officers is aroused, prayer for discernment and guidance is called for. Where the one suspected breaks out in corrupt doctrine or in loose living, he is to be dealt with promptly. Delay is dangerous. The allowance of a "little leaven" will soon corrupt the whole lump. At no point does the local church fail more deplorably today than in its refusal to maintain Scriptural discipline.

Hebrews 12:16, 17

Chapter 96 - A Warning Against Apostasy

The verses which we are now to consider are among the most solemn to be found in the Word of God. They present a most pointed warning against apostasy. They bring before us what is to all tender consciences a terror-provoking subject, namely, sin for which there is no forgiveness. It is indeed to be deplored that recent writers have dealt with it like they do with most matters—very superficially or quite erroneously. Either they have limited themselves unto two or three passages, ignoring many others directly relating to the theme, or they have wrongly affirmed that no one can commit "the unpardonable sin" during this present dispensation. On the other hand, most of the old writers seem to have devoted their efforts to re-assuring weak and fearing Christians that they had not committed this awful offense, rather than in making any attempt to define the character of the transgression itself.

The subject is admittedly a difficult one, and we believe God has permitted a measure of obscurity to rest upon it, and that in order to deter men from rashly venturing too near the brink of this terrible precipice. It therefore becomes us to approach it in fear and trembling, with modesty and humility, seeking grace and wisdom from on High to deal with it in a faithful, clear, and helpful manner. For this is no easy thing, if we are to avoid error and preserve the balance of truth. Two extremes have to be guarded against: a blunting of its fearful point so that the wicked would be encouraged to continue trifling with God and sporting with their eternal destiny, or failing to write with sufficient definiteness so that awakened and contrite sinners would not be delivered from sinking into despair beneath Satan's lying misuse of it against them.

Before turning to the positive side it seems necessary to briefly point out wherein they seriously err, who insist that no one ever sins beyond the possibility of Divine pardon during this present era of grace. There are quite a number of passages in the N.T. epistles which clearly show the contrary. In 2 Thessalonians 2:11, 12

we read, "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." In Hebrews 6:4, 6 it is said of some that "it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance." In Hebrews 10:26, 27 it is said, "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries;" while in 1 John 5:16 we are expressly informed "there is a sin unto death." In our judgment each of these passages refers to a class of offenders who have so grievously provoked God that their doom is irrevocably sealed while they are yet here upon earth.

Against the testimony of the above scriptures an appeal has often been made to, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." But the Word of God does not contradict itself, and it is an evil practice which cannot be too strongly condemned to pit one passage against another: any attempt to neutralize one text by another is handling the Truth deceitfully. With regard to 1 John 1:7 three things need to be pointed out.

First, the precious blood of Christ was never designed to cleanse from every sin—was it designed to cleanse Judas from his betrayal of the Savior! Its application is no wider than its impetration: its virtue does not extend beyond the purpose for which it was shed. Second, it does not say "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from all sin;" instead, it is strictly qualified: "cleanseth us from all sin," that is, God's own people. It is dishonest to appropriate these words to unbelievers. Third, the promise is further limited in the preceding clause, "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light."

Nor do we at all agree with those writers who, while allowing that "the unpardonable sin" may be committed during this present dispensation, yet affirm it is a very rare occurrence, a most exceptional thing, of which only one or two isolated cases may be found. On the contrary, we believe that the Scriptures themselves dearly intimate that many have been guilty of sins for which there was no forgiveness either in this world or the world to come. We say "sins," for a careful and prolonged study of the subject has convinced us that "the unpardonable sin" is not one particular act of

committing some specific offense, like maliciously ascribing to Satan the works of the Holy Spirit (which, no doubt, is one form of it), but that it varies considerably in different cases. Both of these conclusions of the present writer will receive illustration and confirmation in what follows.

The first human being who was guilty of unpardonable sin was Cain. He was a professor or outward worshipper of God, but because Abel's offering was accepted and his own rejected, he waxed angry. The Lord condescended to expostulate with him, and went so far as to assure him that if he did well he would not lose his pre-eminence as the firstborn. But so far from doing well, he persisted in wickedness, and his enmity against God was evidenced by his hatred of His child, ending in the murder of him. Whereupon the Lord said unto him, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth... A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth" (Gen. 4:10-12). To which Cain answered, "Mine iniquity is greater than it may be forgiven" (Gen. 4:13, margin).

The record of Genesis 6 makes it clear that a whole generation of the world's inhabitants had transgressed beyond all hope of remedy or forgiveness. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth" (Gen. 6:5-7), which was duly accomplished by the Flood. The whole of mankind in the days of Nimrod sinned so grievously (Rom. 1:21-23) that "God gave them up" (Rom. 1:24-26), for His Spirit "will not always strive with men."

A whole generation of the Hebrews were also guilty of "the great transgression." In Exodus 23:20, 21, we read, "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him, and obey His voice, provoke Him not; for He will not pardon your transgressions: for My Name is in Him." Alas they heeded not this solemn word: "our fathers would not obey, but thrust Him from them, and in their hearts turned back into Egypt" (Acts 7:39). Consequently the Lord said, "Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart, and they have not known My ways. So I

sware in My wrath, They shall not enter into My rest" (Heb. 3:10, 11).

It seems evident to the writer that there have been some in every age who have gone beyond the bounds of Divine mercy. Passing by such individual cases as Pharaoh, Balaam, and Saul, we would observe that the Pharisees of Christ's day—the bulk of them at least—were guilty of sin for which there was no forgiveness. It is clear from John 3:2 that they recognized Him as "a Teacher come from God" and from John 11:47 that they could not gainsay His miracles. Nay more, it is plain from Mark 12:7 that they knew the righteousness of His claims: "But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the Heir: come, let us kill Him." Thus they acted with their eyes wide open, sinning against their own confession, against light and knowledge, against the strong conviction His miracles produced, and against His holy life spread before them. Therefore did Christ say to them, "I go My way, and ye shall seek Me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come" (John 8:21).

"Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression" (Ps. 119:13). Here the unpardonable sin is denominated "the great transgression." It is called such because this is what a bold and audacious defiance of God necessarily culminates in, unless sovereign grace intervenes. "Presumptuous" sins are committed by those who, while professing God's name and avowing a claim upon His mercy, persist in a known course contrary to His Word. Such rebels, presuming upon God's patience and goodness, are mocked by Him, being suffered to go beyond the bounds of His forgiveness. It is also called "blasphemy against the Spirit" (Matthew 12:31), "resisting the Spirit" (Acts 7:51), "doing despite unto the Spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:29). The "new testament" or "covenant" is "the ministration of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:8), which far exceeds in glory the legal dispensation. To be guilty of the great transgression is to sin willfully against and to speak maliciously of the Holy Spirit, who is revealed and promised in the Gospel; it is a quenching of His convictions, resisting His enlightenment, defying His authority.

It is called "a sin unto death" (1 John 5:16) because its perpetrator is now out of the reach of the promise of eternal life,

having made the Gospel, which is a proclamation of Divine grace unto those who will submit themselves to its requirements, a "savor of death unto death" to himself. He was convicted by it that he was legally dead, and because of his impenitence, unbelief, hardheartedness, and determination to go on having his own way, he is left spiritually dead. Unto others God grants "repentance unto life," (Acts 11:18), but when once "sin unto death" has been committed, it is "impossible to renew again unto repentance" (Heb. 6:4-6). By his opposition to the Gospel and refusal to receive Christ's "yoke," the guilty rebel has trampled under foot the blood of God's Son, and as that alone can procure forgiveness, there is now no pardon available for him.

The very fact that it is designated "a sin unto death" rather than "the sin unto death" confirms what we said in a previous paragraph, namely, that it is not some specific offense but rather that the particular form it takes varies in different cases. And herein we may perceive how the sovereignty of God is exercised in connection therewith. God allows some to go to greater lengths of wickedness than others: some evil-doers He cuts off in youth, while other workers of iniquity are permitted to live unto old age. Against some He is more quickly and more strongly provoked than others. Some souls He abandons to themselves more readily than He does others. It is this which renders the subject so unspeakably solemn: no man has any means of knowing how soon he may cross the line which marks the limits of God's forbearance with him. To trifle with God is hazardous to the last degree.

That the sovereignty of God is exercised in this matter appears very clearly from the cases of those whom He is pleased to save. What fearful crimes Manasseh was guilty of before Divine grace renewed him! What dreadful sins Saul of Tarsus committed ere the Lord Jesus apprehended him! Let the writer and the reader review their own unregenerate days: how dreadfully did we provoke the Majesty on high; how long did we persevere in a course of open rebellion; against what restraints, privileges, light and knowledge, warnings and entreaties, did we act! How many of the godless companions of our youth were cut off in their guilt, while we were spared. Was it because our sins were less crimson? No, indeed; so far as we can perceive, our sins were of a deeper dye than theirs. Then why did God save us? and why were they sent to Hell? "Even

so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight" must be the answer.

A sovereign God has drawn the line in every life which marks the parting of the ways. When that line is reached by the individual, God does one of two things with him: either He performs a miracle of grace so that he becomes "a new creature in Christ Jesus," or henceforth that individual is abandoned by Him, given up to hardness of heart and final impenitency; and which it is, depends entirely upon His own imperial pleasure. And none can tell how near he may be to that line, for some reach it much earlier in life than others—according as God sovereignly decreed. Therefore it is the part of wisdom for each sinner to promptly heed that word "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found" (Isa. 55:6), which plainly denotes that soon it may be too late—as Proverbs 1:28-31 and Matthew 25:8-12 plainly show.

This solemn distinction which God makes between one case and another was strikingly shadowed out under the law. We refer to a remarkable detail concerning the jubilee year, a detail which seems to have escaped the notice of those who have preached and written on the subject. Those in Israel who, through poverty, had sold their possessions, had them restored at the year of jubilee: see Leviticus 25:25-28. That was a wondrous and beautiful figure of the free grace of God towards His people in Christ, by which, and not because of anything of their own, they are restored to the Divine favor and given a title to the heavenly inheritance. But in connection therewith there was an exception, designed by God, we doubt not, to adumbrate that which we are here treating upon. That exception we will briefly notice.

"If a man sell a dwelling-house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; within a full year may he redeem it. And if it be not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house that is in the walled city shall be established forever to him that bought it throughout his generations: it shall not go out in the jubilee" (Lev. 25:29, 30). We cannot now attempt an exposition of this interesting passage or dwell upon its leading features. No part of the "land" could be sold outright (see 5:23), for that was the free gift of God's bounty—there can be no failure in Divine grace; but houses in the city were the result of their labor human responsibility being in view. If the house was sold and not repurchased within a year, it passed beyond the reach of redemption,

its forfeiture being irrevocable and irrecoverable! Symbolically, the "house" spoke of security under the Divine covenant, for in all generations God in covenant has been the "dwelling-place" of His people (Ps. 90:1). To part with his house typified a professor selling himself to work presumptuous wickedness (1 Kings 21:20), and so selling his soul, his God, his all. To such an one the Spirit will never "proclaim liberty" of the Jubilee, for Satan holds him fast, and Divine justice forbids his discharge: when God "shutteth up a man, there can be no opening" (Job 12:14).

In view of all that has been before us, how softly we should tread, how careful we should be of not provoking the Holy One! How earnestly we should pray to be kept back from "presumptuous sins"! How diligently should the young improve their privileges: how they should heed that warning, "He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Prov. 29:1)! How careful we should be against adding sin to sin, lest we provoke God to leave us unto final impenitency. Our only safeguard is to heed the voice of the Lord without delay, lest he "swear in His wrath" that we "should not enter into His rest"! How we need to beg God to write those words upon our hearts, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Heb. 3:12), for there is no hope whatever for the apostate.

A word now unto those with tender consciences that fear they may have committed sin for which there is no forgiveness. The trembling and contrite sinner is the farthest from it. There is not one instance recorded in Scripture where any who was guilty of "the great transgression" and had been given up by God to inevitable destruction, ever repented of his sins, or sought God's mercy in Christ; instead, they all continued obstinate and defiant, the implacable enemies of Christ and His ways unto the end. While there be in the heart any sincere valuing of God's approbation, any real sense of His holiness which deters from trifling with Him, any genuine purpose to turn unto Him and submit to His requirements, any true fearing of His wrath, that soul has not been abandoned by Him. If you have a deep desire to obtain an interest in Christ, or become a better Christian; if you are deeply troubled over sin, if your heart grieves over its hardness, if you yearn and pray for more tenderness of conscience, more yieldedness of will, more love and

obedience to Christ, then you have no cause to suspect you have committed "the unpardonable sin."

"Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who, for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (Heb. 12:16,17). These verses continue what was before us in the preceding one, and complete the series of exhortations begun in verse 12. As we pointed out at the close of the previous article, the ultimate reference in verse 15 is first a warning against that which if disregarded would end in apostasy, and second, a caution against suffering one who evidences the symptoms of an apostate to remain in the assembly—its language being an allusion unto Deuteronomy 29:18. That warning and caution is now exemplified by citing the fearful example of Esau, who, though born among the covenant people and receiving (we doubt not) a pious upbringing, committed a sin for which there was no forgiveness, and became an apostate.

First of all, two particular sins are here warned against: "fornication" and "profanity," each of which is "a root of bitterness," which if permitted to "spring up" will cause "trouble" to the guilty one and "defile many" with whom he is associated. Both "fornication" and "profanity" are opposed unto the holiness exhorted unto in verse 14. Fornication is a sin against the second table of the Law, and profanity a breach of its first table. As in verse 14 the apostle had enjoined the Hebrews to "follow peace" which has respect to man and "holiness" which regards our relation to God, so now he forbids two sins, the first of which would be committed against man, the second against God. The two sins go together, for where a course of moral uncleanness is followed, profanity almost always accompanies it; and on the other hand, profane persons habitually think lightly of immorality. The forsaking of either sin by sincere repentance is exceedingly rare.

The term "profane" has a more specific meaning and a wider application than it is commonly accorded in our speech today. "Holy things are said to be profaned when men take off the veneration that is due unto them, and expose them to common use or contempt. To 'profane' is to violate, to corrupt, to prostitute to common use things sacred, either in their nature or by Divine institution. A profane

person is one that despiseth, sets light by, or condemneth sacred things. Such as mock at religion, or who lightly regard its promises and threatenings; who despise or neglect its worship, who speak irreverently of its concerns, we call profane persons, and such they are, and such the world is filled with at this day. This profaneness is the last step of entrance into final apostasy. When men, from professors of religion, become despisers of and scoffers at it, their state is dangerous, if not irrevocable" (John Owen).

An instance of this evil is given in Esau, and a fearfully solemn case his is, one which would warn us not to put our trust in external privileges. "He was the firstborn of Isaac, circumcised according to the law of that ordinance, and partaker of all the worship of God in that holy family; yet an outcast from the covenant of grace and the promise thereof" (Owen). The particular offense with which he is here charged is that "for one morsel of meat" he "sold his birthright." Now the birthright or privilege of the firstborn carried with it the following things: the special blessing of his father, a double portion of his goods, dominion over his brethren, and priestly functions (Num. 3:41) when the father was absent from home. The "birthright" was regarded as a very special thing, being typical of the primogeniture of Christ, of the adoption of saints, and of a title to the heavenly inheritance. All of this Esau despised.

The historical account of Esau's sin is recorded in the closing verses of Genesis 25: the heinousness of it is exhibited in our text. Esau preferred the gratification of the flesh rather than the blessing of God. He relinquished all claims to the privileges contained in and annexed to his being the firstborn, for a trifling and temporary enjoyment of the body. Alas, how many there are like him in the world today. What vast numbers prefer carnal pleasures to spiritual joys, temporal advantages to eternal riches, physical gratification to the soul's salvation. By calling Esau "profane," the Holy Spirit reveals that he placed no higher value upon sacred things than he did upon those which were common. That which he received at the price of his wickedness is termed "meat," to indicate that satisfying of the flesh was his motive; and a "morsel," to emphasize the paltriness of his choice.

The enormity of the sin of "profanity" is determined by the sacredness of the objects to which it is opposed: let the reader carefully compare Leviticus 18:21; 21:9; Nehemiah 13:17; Ezekiel

22:26. The "profane" are guilty of trampling God's pearls beneath their feet. To spurn the Scriptures, to desecrate the Sabbath, to revile God's servants, to despise or ridicule the Gospel, to mock at the future state, are all so many forms of this unspeakable wickedness. As helps against it we would mention the need of being well instructed from the Word, so that we may know what are "holy" things. To bring our hearts to realize the superlative excellency of holiness. To meditate seriously and frequently upon God's indignation against those who slight what He highly esteems.

"For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (verse 17). This takes us back to the closing section of Genesis 27, where we learn the consequences which his sin entailed. Isaac had pronounced the patriarchal benediction upon Jacob, which, when his brother learned thereof deeply agitated him: "He cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry" (Gen. 27:34). It was then that his "tears" were shed: but they proceeded not from anguish of heart because he had sinned so grievously against God, rather did they flow from a sense of self-pity—they expressed his chagrin for the consequences which his folly had produced. Similar are the lamentations of probably ninety-nine out of a hundred so called "death-bed repentances." And such will be the "weeping and wailing" of those in Hell: not because God was so slighted and wronged by them, but because of the eternal suffering which their sins have justly resulted in.

Esau's "tears" were of no avail: "he was rejected." His appeal came too late: Isaac had already bestowed the blessing upon Jacob. It was like an Israelite seeking to recover his property eighteen months after he had sold it: see again Leviticus 25:30. Isaac, who was a prophet of God, His mouthpiece, refused to be moved by Esau's bitter wailing. In like manner, the Lord says of those who have sinned away the day of grace "They shall call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me" (Prov. 1:28); and "Therefore will I also deal in fury: Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in Mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them" (Ezek. 8:18). O what point that gives to the call "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near" (Isa. 55:6). Reader, if you have not yet genuinely responded to that call, do so at once; delay is

fraught with the utmost peril to your soul.

The apostle was here addressing professing Christians, and the fearful case of Esau is set before them (and us!) as a warning against departing from the Narrow Way, of exchanging the high privileges of the faithful for the temporary advantages of a faithless world. The doom of the apostate is irretrievable. To lightly esteem, and then despise, sacred things, will be followed "afterward" by bitter regret and unavailing anguish. To reject the terms of the Gospel in order to gratify the lusts of the flesh for a brief season, and then suffer forever and ever in the Lake of Fire, is the height of madness. No excuse could palliate Esau's profanity, and nothing can extenuate the wickedness of him who prefers the drudgery of Satan to the freedom there is in Christ. Esau's rejection by Isaac was the evidence of his reprobation by God. May it please the Lord to use this article to search the heart of every reader.

Hebrews 12:18, 19

Chapter 97 - The Inferiority of Judaism

As there are certain parts of a country which offer less attraction than others unto tourists and sight-seers, so there are some portions of Scripture which are of less interest to most readers and writers. As there are some scenes in Nature which can be taken in at a glance while others invite a repeated survey, so there are verses in each Epistle which afford less scope than others unto the teacher. That is why almost every preacher has a sermon on certain favorite texts, whereas other verses are neglected by nearly all pulpits. But the expositor has not the same freedom to follow his inclinations as the textual sermonizer: unless he shirks his duty, he must go through a passage verse by verse, and clause by clause. Still more so is this the case with one who essays to write a commentary upon a whole book of the Bible: he is not free to pick and choose, nor yield to his personal preferences, but must give the same attention and enlargement to one part as to another.

The above reflections have occurred to the editor as he has pondered the verses which next claim our consideration in Hebrews 12. Their contents are not likely to make much appeal unto the ordinary reader, for there seems little in them which would be relished either by those who have an appetite for "strong meat" or by those preferring the "milk" of babes. Our passage neither sets forth any of the "doctrine of grace" nor presents any practical exhortation for the Christian life. Instead, it alludes to an historical incident which was chiefly of interest to the Jews, and multiplies details from the same which would be tedious unto the average churchgoer of this untoward generation. Nevertheless, it is a part of God's Word, and as it lies in our immediate path through this Epistle we shall not ignore or turn from it. As the Lord enables, we shall endeavor to give it the same attention and space as what has preceded it.

The passage upon which we are about to enter (which reaches from Hebrews 12:18 to the end of the chapter) has been variously interpreted by different commentators. One class of more

recent writers have, it seems to us, been far more anxious to read into it their own pet theory regarding the future, than to interpret these verses in accord with the theme of the Epistle in which they are found. It would indeed be strange for the apostle to introduce here a reference to some future "millennium:" the more so in view of the fact that he has studiously avoided the use of the future tense—note the emphatic "ye are come" (verse 22) and "but now" (verse 26). If due attention be paid unto the main line of the apostle's argument in this treatise, then there should be no difficulty in arriving at a correct understanding—of the substance of it, at least—of this portion of it.

As we pointed out so frequently in the earlier articles of this series, the immediate and principal design of the apostle in this Epistle, was to prevail with the Hebrews in persuading them unto a perseverance in their profession of the Gospel, for therein they appear at that time to have been greatly shaken. Therefore does he warn them, again and again, of the various causes and occasions of backsliding. Principal among these were, first, an evil heart of unbelief, the sin which did so easily beset them. Second, an undue valuation of the excellency of Judaism and the Mosaical church-state. Third, wavering under the afflictions and persecutions which fidelity to the Gospel entailed. Fourth, prevalent lusts, such as profaneness and fornication. Each of these we have considered in the preceding sections.

The principal argument which the apostle had urged unto their constancy in Christianity, was the superlative excellency, glory, and benefit of the Gospel-state into which the Hebrews had been called. This he has accomplished and proved by setting forth the person and office of its Author, His priesthood and sacrifice, with all the spiritual worship and privileges belonging thereto. Each of these he compared and contrasted with the things that corresponded unto the same during the O.T. dispensation. Thereby he set over against each other the type and the antitype, the shadow and the substance, and by so doing made it unmistakably evident that the new economy was immeasurably superior to the old, that all the ordinances and institutions of the law were but prefigurations of those spiritual realities which are now revealed by the Gospel.

Having insisted so largely and so particularly on these things in the preceding chapters and brought his arguments from them to a

plain issue, he now recapitulates them as a whole. In the passage which is now to engage our attention the apostle presents a brief scheme of the two states or economies (designated as "testaments" or "covenants"), balancing them one against another, and thereby demonstrating the conclusive force of his central argument and the exhortations which he had based upon it, unto constancy and perseverance in the faith of the Gospel. It is no new argument which he here proceeds with, nor is it a special amplification of the warning pointed by the example of Esau; still less is it a departure from his great theme by a sudden excursus into the realm of eschatology. Instead, it is a forcible summary, under a new dress, of all he had previously advanced.

The central design, then, of our passage as a whole, was to present one more and final antithesis of Judaism and Christianity. The contrast here drawn is virtually parallel with the one instituted in Galatians 4 between Hagar and Sarah, the figure of two "mounts" being used instead of the two women. The great honor and chief privilege of the Judaical Church-state whereon all particular advantages did depend, was their coming to and station in mount Sinai at the giving of the Law. It was there that Jehovah revealed Himself with all the insignia of His awe-inspiring majesty. It was there that they were taken into covenant with the Lord (Ex. 24), to be His peculiar people above all the world. It was there that Israel was formed into a national Church (Acts 7:38). It was there that they had committed unto them all the privileges of Divine worship. It is that very glory which the Jews boast of to this day, and whereon they rest in their rejection of the Gospel.

It was necessary, then, for the apostle to make direct reference unto that upon which the unbelieving Hebrews based all their hopes, and to which they were appealing in their efforts to get their believing brethren to apostatize from Christ. His argument had neither been complete nor conclusive unless he could undermine their confidence in the foundational glory of Judaism, take off their hearts from unduly admiring, and show that it had been succeeded by that which "excelleth." He therefore directs attention to those features in connection with the giving of the Law, which so far from being calculated to win the affections, inspired with dread and terror. He points out a number of items which by their very nature intimated that the Divine communications vouchsafed at Sinai were

not the full and final unveiling of the Divine character, such as the souls of awakening sinners longed for.

Our introduction has been a somewhat lengthy one, though briefer than that of J. Owen, which we have closely followed in the last paragraphs; yet we deemed it necessary. The details of our present passage cannot be viewed in their true perspective until they are rightly focused in the light of our Epistle as a whole. The scope of the passage must first be determined, before we are ready to examine its several members. This calls for time and real study, yet only as this preliminary work is properly executed will we be preserved from those errors which are inevitably fallen into when a passage is treated hurriedly and superficially. This is only another way of saying that, the foundation must be well and securely laid, if it is to bear successfully the superstructure which is raised upon it. Alas that such foundation-labor is so little appreciated today.

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire" (v. 18). The apostle here returns to his central theme by an easy and natural transition. He had just been dehorting from back-sliding, pointed out by the solemn case of Esau. Now he urges unto constancy by appealing to the privileges they enjoyed. As Calvin well put it, "The higher the excellency of Christ's kingdom than the dispensation of Moses, and the more glorious our calling than that of the ancient people, the more disgraceful and the less excusable is our ingratitude, unless we embrace in a becoming manner the great favor offered to us, and humbly adore the majesty of Christ which is here made evident. And then, as God does not present Himself to us clothed in terrors as He did formerly to the Jews, but lovingly and kindly invites us to Himself, so the sin of ingratitude will be thus doubled, except we willingly and in earnest respond to His gracious invitation."

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched." The principal design which the apostle here had in hand was to set forth, in its most attractive form (see verses 22-24), that evangelical state where-unto the Hebrews had been called and into which they had entered. This he first does negatively, by describing the Church-state under the O.T., from which they had been delivered. Thus, before the "Ye are come" of verse 22, he introduces this "For ye are not come." Two things were thereby noted: that order or system to which their fathers belonged, but from which they had been freed by

their responding to the Gospel call. They were no more concerned in all that dread and terror, and their consideration of that fact supplied a powerful motive to their perseverance in the Christian faith.

Freely granting that a great privilege was conferred on their fathers at Sinai, the apostle observes "that it was done in such a way of dread and terror, as that sundry things are manifest therein: as, 1. That there was no evidence in all that was done of God's being reconciled to them, in and by those things. The whole representation of Him was of an absolute Sovereign and a severe Judge. Nothing declared Him as a Father, gracious and merciful. 2. There was no intimation of any condescension from the exact severity of what was required in the law or of any relief or pardon in case of transgression. 3. There was no promise of grace in a way of aid or assistance for the performance of what was required. Thunders, voices, earthquakes and fire gave no signification of these things. 4. The whole was hereby nothing but a glorious ministration of death and condemnation (as the apostle speaks: 2 Corinthians 3:7) whence the conscience of sinners were forced to subscribe to their own condemnation, as just and equal.

"5. God was here represented in all outward demonstrations of infinite holiness, justice, severity and terrible majesty on the one hand; and on the other, men in their lowest condition of sin, misery, guilt and death. If there be not therefore something else to interpose between God and men, somewhat to fill up the space between infinite severity and inexpressible guilt, all this glorious preparation was nothing but a theater set up for the pronouncing of judgment and the sentence of eternal condemnation against sinners. And on this consideration depends the force of the apostle's argument; and the due apprehension and declaration of, is a better explanation of vv. 18-21 than the opening of the particular expressions will amount to; yet they also must be explained.

"It is hence evident, that the Israelites in the station of Sinai, did bear the persons of convicted sinners under the sentence of the law. There might be many of them justified in their own persons by faith in the promise; but as they stood and heard and received the law, they represented sinners under the sentence of it, not yet relieved by the Gospel. And this we may have respect to in our exposition, as that which is that final intention of the apostle to declare, as is manifest from the description which he gives of the

Gospel-state, and of those that are interested therein" (John Owen).

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched." It is both pathetic and amusing to read the various shifts made by some of the commentators to "harmonize" the opening words of our text with what is said in Exodus 19:12, "Thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall surely be put to death." Some have pleaded that the little "not be touched" was inadvertantly dropped by a copyist of the Greek manuscript. Others insist our verse should be rendered, "Ye are come to a mount not to be touched." But the only "discrepancy" here is in the understanding of the expositors. The apostle was not making a quotation from Exodus. but rather describing, negatively, that order of things unto which the Gospel had brought the believing Hebrews. In so doing, he shows the striking contrast between it and the order of things connected with the giving of the Law.

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched." The simple and evident meaning of this is: The Gospel has not brought you unto that which is material and visible, palpable and touchable by the physical senses, but only what is spiritual and can only be apprehended by faith. A "mount" is a thing of the earth; whereas the glory of Christianity is entirely celestial. The passage which most clearly interprets this clause is found in our Lord's discourse with the woman at the well: "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father... But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21, 23). Judaism was the Church's kindergarten, in which its infantile members were instructed, mainly, through their bodily senses. Christianity has introduced a far superior order of things.

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched," then, is a figurative way of saying that Christ has opened a way into something infinitely superior to a system which, as such, had nothing better than "a worldly sanctuary" and "carnal ordinances" (Heb. 9:1, 10). The Greek word for "come" in our text is that technical or religious term which had been used repeatedly by the apostle in this Epistle to express a sacred access or coming to God in His worship: see Hebrews 4:16, 7:25, 10:1—last clause "comers

thereunto." Mount Sinai was a material thing, exposed to the outward senses, and was an emblem of the entire order of things connected with Judaism. As such, it was in complete contrast from that order of things brought in by Christ, which is wholly spiritually, invisible, and celestial. The one was addressed to the bodily senses; the other to the higher faculties of the soul. Spiritually speaking, Romanists and all other Ritualists are occupied with "the mount that might be touched"!

"And that burned with fire." In their most literal sense those words allude to what transpired at Sinai. In Exodus 19:18 we read, "And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire." But it is with their figurative purport we are more concerned. In Scripture "fire" is the symbol of Divine wrath and judgment. As we are told in Deuteronomy 4:24, "The Lord thy God is a consuming fire, a jealous God," and the "jealousy" of God is, His holy severity against sin, not to leave it unpunished. With respect unto the law which He there gave—for Deuteronomy 33:2 declares "from His right hand went a fiery law"—it signified its inexorable sternness and efficacy to destroy its transgressors. Thus, the "fire" denoted the awful majesty of God as an inflexible Judge, and the terror which His law strikes into the minds of its violators with expectations of fiery indignation.

This was the first thing which the people beheld when they came to Sinai: God as a "consuming fire" presented to their view! Thus it is in the experience of those whom God saves. For many years, it may be, they lived in a state of unconcern: they had no heart-affecting views of the majesty and authority of God, and no pride-withering apprehensions of the fearfulness of their guilt. But when the Spirit awakens them from the sleep of death, gives them to realize Who it is with whom they have to do, and whose anger burns against sin; when the Law is applied to their conscience, convicting them of their innumerable offenses, their hearts are filled with dread and misery as they perceive their undone condition. There the law leaves them, and thence they must be consumed, unless they obtain deliverance by Jesus Christ.

And that was exactly what, by Divine grace, these believing Hebrews had obtained. The Redeemer had "delivered them from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10). They were now as secure in Him as Noah was in the ark. The fire of God's wrath had spent itself on the

person of their Substitute. God was now reconciled to them, and henceforth they had an inalienable standing before Him—not as trembling criminals, but as accepted sons. To them the word was "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). No, as Christians, we have nothing more to do with the mount "that burned with fire," but only with "the Throne of Grace." Hallelujah! Alas that so many Christians are being robbed of their birthright. If Romanists and Ritualists are guilty of being occupied with "the mount that might be touched," then those who are constantly presenting God before His people in His dread majesty—instead of as a loving Father—are taking them back to the mount "that burned with fire."

"Nor unto blackness and darkness." Here again the literal allusion is unto the awe-inspiring phenomena which attended the giving of the law. There was "a thick cloud upon the mount, . . . mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke" (Ex. 19:16, 18). Different commentators have resorted to various conjectures in their efforts to "harmonize" the "blackness and darkness" with the "fire:" some suggesting the one was followed by the other after an interval of time, others supposing the "darkness" was over the camp and the "fire" at the summit of the mount. But such theorizings are worthless in the face of Deuteronomy 5:22-23, "The Lord spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness . . . ye heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, for the mountain did burn with fire." The fact is this "fire" was supernatural: as that of Babylon's furnace burned not while the three Hebrews were in it (Dan. 3), this glowed not—increasing the terror of its beholders because it emitted no light!

If the above explanation be deemed "far fetched," we would appeal to the corroborating correspondency in the experience of those who have been saved. Was it not a fact that when we were shut up under guilt and terrified by the representation of God's severity against sin, we looked in vain for anything in the Law which could yield relief? When the glory of God's holiness shined into your conscience and His law was applied in convicting and condemning power, did you perceive His merciful design in the same? No, indeed; at that time, His gracious purpose was covered with "blackness," and "darkness" filled your soul. You perceived not that

the law was His instrument for flaying your self-righteous hopes (Rom. 7:10) and "a schoolmaster unto Christ" (Gal. 3:24). Your case appeared hopeless; and despite the fiery power of the law, you knew not how to "order your speech (before God) by reason of darkness" (Job 37:19).

"And tempest:" under this term the apostle comprises the thundering, lightnings, the earthquake which were on and in mount Sinai (Ex. 19:16, 18) all of which symbolized the disquieting character of so much that marked the Mosaic economy—in contrast from the peace and assurance which the Gospel imparts to those who believingly appropriate it. The order here agrees with the experience of those whom God saves. First, there is an application of the "fiery law," which burns and terrifies the conscience. Second, there is the blackness and darkness of despair which follows the discovery of our lost condition. Third, there is the agitation of mind and turmoil of heart in seeking help by self-efforts and finding none. The soul has no light and knows not what to do. The mind is in a tumult, for no escape from the law's just course seems possible. Not yet has Christ appeared to the distressed one.

"And the sound of a trumpet." This too, we believe, was a supernatural one, emitting ear-splitting tones, shrill and loud, designed to inspire both awe and fear. It signified the near approach of God. It was to summon the people before Him as their lawgiver and Judge (Ex. 19:17). It was the outward sign of the promulgation of the Law, for immediately upon the sound of it, God spoke unto them. It was a pledge of the final judgment, when all flesh shall be summoned before God to answer the terms of His law. Experimentally, it is the imperative summons of the Word for the soul to answer to God's call. Those who neglect it, will have to answer for the whole when they receive the final summons at the last day. Those who answer it now, are brought into God's presence in fear and trembling, who then reveals to them Christ as an all-sufficient Savior.

"And the voice of words." This is the seventh and final detail which the apostle here noticed. The "voice of words" was articulate and intelligible, in contrast from the dull roar of the thunder and the shrill tones of the trumpet. Those "words" were the ten commandments, written afterward on the two tables of stone: see Deuteronomy 5:22 and the preceding verses. Those "words" were

uttered by the voice of the Lord God Almighty (Ex. 20:1), concerning which we are told, "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty; the voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars" (Ps. 29:4,5) etc. It was God declaring unto His Church the eternal establishment of His Law, that no alteration should be made in its commands or penalties, but that all must be fulfilled.

"Which voice they that heard entreated that the words should not be spoken to them any more." This reveals the terror-stricken state of those who were encamped before Sinai. There was that on every side which inspired awe and dread: Nature itself convulsed and supernatural phenomena attending the same. This was intended to show the people that God had ascended His awful tribunal as a strict Judge. But that which filled them with intolerable consternation was the voice of God Himself speaking immediately to them. It was not that they refused to hear Him, but that they desired Him to speak to them through Moses, the typical Mediator. Experimentally, the sinner is overwhelmed when the voice of God in the law comes in power to his conscience.

Hebrews 12:20, 21

Chapter 98 - The Inferiority of Judaism

The Divine law was, for the substance of it, originally written in the hearts of mankind by God Himself, when their federal head and father was created in His own image and likeness. But through the fall it was considerably marred, as to its efficacious motions in the human heart. The entrance of sin and the corruption of our nature largely silenced its authoritative voice in the soul. Nevertheless, its unchanging demand and dread penalty were secured in the consciences of Adam's depraved posterity. The law is so inlaid with the principles of our moral nature, so engrafted on all the faculties of our souls, that none has been able to completely get from under its power. Though the wicked find it utterly contrary to their desires and designs, and continually threatening their everlasting ruin, yet they cannot utterly cast off its yoke: see Romans 2:14, 15. Hence it is that, even among the most degraded and savage tribes, a knowledge of right and wrong, with some standard of conduct, is preserved.

Not only was the impression of the Divine law upon the human heart largely—though not totally—defaced by Adam's apostasy, but from Cain unto the Exodus succeeding generations more and more flouted its authority, and disregarded its requirements in their common practice. Therefore, when God took Israel into covenant relationship with Himself and established them into a national Church, He restored to them His law, in all its purity, majesty, and terror. This He did, not only to renew it as a guide unto all righteousness and holiness, as the only rule of obedience unto Himself and of right and equity amongst men, and also to be a check unto sin by its commands and threatenings, but principally to declare in the Church the eternal establishment of it, that no alteration should be made in it, but that all must be fulfilled to the uttermost before any sinner can have any acceptance with Him.

As the Law was the original rule of obedience between God and mankind, and as it had failed of its end through the entrance of

sin, the Lord had never revived and proclaimed it in so solemn a manner at Sinai, had it been capable of any abrogation and alteration at any time. Nay, He then gave many additional evidences of its perpetuity and abiding authority. It was solely for the promulgation of His law that the presence of God appeared on the mount, attended with such dreadful solemnity. The Ten Commandments were the only communication which God then gave directly unto the people themselves—those institutions which were to be repealed at a later date (the ceremonial laws) were given through Moses! Those ten commandments were spoken directly unto the whole nation with a Voice that was great and terrible. Later, they were written by His own finger on tables of stone. Thus did God confirm His law and evidence that it was incapable of dissolution. How it has been established and fulfilled the Epistle to the Romans makes known.

The different forms which the Lord's appearances took in O.T. times were always in accord with each distinct revelation of His mind and will. He appeared to Abraham in the shape of a man (Gen. 18:1, 2), because He came to give promise of the Seed of blessing and to vouchsafe a representation of the future incarnation. To Moses He appeared as a flame in a bush which was not consumed (Ex. 3), because He would intimate that all the fiery trials through which the Church should pass would not consume it, and that because He was in it. To Joshua He appeared as a man of war, with drawn sword in His hand (Josh. 5:13), because He would assure him of victory over all his enemies. But at Sinai His appearing was surrounded by terrors, because He would represent the severity of His law, with the inevitable and awful destruction of all those who lay not hold of the promise for deliverance.

The place of this glorious and solemn appearing of the Lord was also full of significance. It was neither in Egypt nor yet in Canaan, but in the midst of a great howling desert. Only those who have actually seen the place, can form any adequate conception of the abject dreariness and desolation of the scene. It was an absolute solitude, far removed from the habitation and converse of man. Here the people could neither see nor hear anything but God and themselves. There was no shelter or place of retirement: they were brought out into the open, face to face with God. Therein He gave a type and representation of the Great Judgment at the last day, when all who are out of Christ will be brought face to face with their

Judge, and will behold nothing but the tokens of His wrath, and hear only the Law's dread sentence announcing their irrevocable doom.

Sinai was surrounded by a barren and fruitless wilderness, wherein there was neither food nor water. Accurately does that depict the unregenerate in a state of sin: the Law brings forth nothing in their lives which is acceptable to God or really beneficial to the souls of men. The Mount itself produced nothing but bushes and brambles, from which some scholars say its name is derived. From a distance that vegetation makes an appearance of some fruitfulness in the place, but when it be more closely examined it is found that there is nothing except that which is fit for the fire. Thus it is with sinners under the law. They seem to perform many works of obedience, yea, such as they trust in and make their boast of; but when they are weighed in the Divine balance, they are found to be but thorns and briars, the dead works of those whose minds are enmity against God. Nothing else can the law bring forth from those who are out of Christ: "From Me is thy fruit found" (Hos. 14:8) is His own avowal.

Nor was there any water in the desert of Horeb to make it fruitful. Pause, my reader, and admire the "wondrous works" (Ps. 145:5) of God. When we are given eyes to see, we may discern the Creator's handiwork as plainly in the desolate wastes of Nature as in the fertile fields and gardens, as truly in the barren and forbidding mountains as in the fruitful and attractive valleys. He whose fingers had shaped the place where His Son was crucified as "a place of a skull" (Matthew 27:33), had diverted from the desert of Horeb all rivers and streams. That water upon which the people of God then lived, issued from the smitten rock (Ex. 17:6), for it is only through Christ that the Holy Spirit is given: see John 7:28, 39, Acts 2:33, Titus 3:5, 6. They who reject Christ have not the Spirit: see Romans 8:9, Jude 19.

We may further observe that, the appearing of the Lord God at the giving of the Law was on the top of a high mountain, and not in a plain: this added to both the glory and the terror of it. This gave a striking adumbration of the Throne of His majesty, high over the people, who were far below at its base. As they looked up, they saw the mount above them full of fire and smoke, the ground on which they stood quaking beneath their feet, the air filled with thunderings and lightnings, with the piercing blasts of the trumpet and the voice

of the Lord Himself falling on their ears. What other thought could fill their minds than that it was "a fearful thing" to be summoned to judgment before the ineffably Holy One? O that the preachers of our day could say with him who had experienced the reality of Sinai in his own soul, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11).

The Lord's appearing on mount Sinai was only a temporary one—in contrast with His "dwelling" in Zion (Isa. 8:18). This shadowed-forth the fact that the economy there instituted was but a transient one—though the Law there promulgated is eternal. Those, then, who turn unto Sinai for salvation are left entirely unto themselves. "God dwells no more on Sinai. Those who abide under the law (as a covenant, A.W.P.) shall neither have His presence nor any gracious pledge of it. And all these things are spoken to stir us up to seek for an interest in that blessed Gospel-state which is here proposed to us. And thus much we have seen already, that without it there is neither relief from the cure of the law, nor acceptable fruit of obedience, nor pledge of Divine favor to be obtained" (John Owen, whom we have again followed closely in the above paragraphs).

Before turning to the final lines in the graphic picture which the apostle gave of the appearing of the Lord at Sinai, let us again remind ourselves of his principal design in the same. The immediate end which the apostle had before him, was to persuade the Hebrews to adhere closely to the Gospel, his appeal being drawn from the evident fact of the superlative excellency of it to the law. In particular, he was here enforcing his former exhortations unto steadfastness under afflictions, to an upright walk in the ways of God, to the following of peace with all men, and to persevere diligently that they failed not of the grace of God. This he does by pointing out that ancient order of things from which they had been delivered, for such is the force of his opening words "ye are not come unto" etc. (verse 18).

"For they could not endure that which was commanded" (verse 20). Having mentioned in the preceding verses seven things which their fathers came unto at Sinai, the apostle now describes the effects which those startling phenomena produced upon them. The first was, the people "entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more" (verse 19), the reason being "for they could not endure" it. The display of God's terrible majesty, the distance from

Him they were required to maintain, and the high spirituality of the Law then promulgated, with its fearful penalty attending the least infraction of it, completely overwhelmed them. So it is still: a view of God as a Judge, represented in fire and blackness, will fill the souls of convicted sinners with dread and terror. No matter how boldly and blatantly they have carried themselves, when the Spirit brings a transgressor to that Mount, the stoutest heart will quake.

When God deals with men by the Law, He shuts them up to Himself and their own conscience. As we pointed out in an earlier paragraph, God gave the Law to Israel neither in Egypt nor in Canaan, but in a desert, a place of absolute solitude, remote from the commerce of men. There the people could neither see nor hear anything but God and themselves. There was no shelter or place or retirement: they were brought out into the open, face to face with Him with whom they had to do. So it is now: when God has designs of mercy toward a sinner, when He takes him in hand, He brings him out of all his retreats and refuges, and compels him to face the just demands of His Law, and the unspeakable dreadful manner in which he has hitherto disregarded its requirements and sought to hear not its accusations.

When the Law is preached to sinners—alas in so many places today that which gives "the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20) is entirely omitted—it usually falls upon the ears of those who promptly betake themselves to various retreats and reliefs for evading its searching and terror-producing message. They seek refuge in the concerns and amusements of this life in order to crowd out serious and solemn thoughts of the life to come. They listen to the bewitching promises of self-pleasing, "the pleasures of sin for a season." Or, they put far forward in their minds the "evil day," and take security in resolutions of repentance and reformation before death shall come upon them. They have many other things to engage their attention than to listen to the voice of the Law; at least, they persuade themselves it is not yet necessary that they should seriously hearken thereto.

But when God brings the sinner to the Mount, as He most certainly will, either here or hereafter, all these pretenses and false comforts vanish, every prop is knocked from under him: to hide away from his Judge is now impossible. "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep

away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place" (Isa. 28:17). Then it is that the sinner discovers that "the bed is shorter than a man can stretch himself on it: the covering narrower than he can wrap himself in it" (Isa. 28:20). He is forced out into the open: he is brought face to face with his Maker; he is compelled to attend unto the voice of the Law. There is neither escape nor relief for him. His conscience is now held to that which he can neither endure nor avoid. He is made to come out from behind the trees, to find his fig-leaves provide no covering (Gen. 3:9-11).

As the stern and inexorable voice of the Law enters into his innermost being, "piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12), the poor sinner is paralyzed with fear. The sight of the Divine Majesty on His throne, overwhelms him: the terms and curse of the Law slay his every hope. Now he experiences the truth of Romans 7:9, 10, "For I was alive (in my own estimation) without the law once; but when the commandment came (applied in power to the conscience by the Spirit) sin revived (became a living, raging, cursed reality) and I died (to all expectation of winning God's approval). And the commandment, which was unto life, I found unto death." Like Israel before Sinai, the sinner cannot endure the voice of the Law. The Law commands him, but provides no strength to meet its requirements. It shows him his sins, but it reveals no Savior. He is encompassed with terror and sees no way of escape from eternal death.

That is the very office of the Law in the hands of the Holy Spirit: to shatter the sinner's unconcern, to make him conscious of the claims of the holy God, to convict him of his lifelong rebellion against Him, to strip him of the rags of his self-righteousness, to slay all hope of self-help and self-deliverance, to bring him to the realization that he is lost, utterly undone, sentenced to death. "Which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more; for they could not endure that which was commanded" (Heb. 12:19, 20). When the Holy Spirit applies the Law in power, the sinner's own conscience is obliged to acknowledge that his condemnation is just. And there the Law leaves him: wretched, hopeless, terror-stricken. Unless he flies for refuge to Christ he is lost forever.

Reader, suffer us please to make this a personal issue. Have you ever experienced anything which corresponds, in substance, to what we have said above? Have you ever heard the thunderings and felt the lightnings of Sinai in your own soul? Have you, in your conscience, been brought face to face with your Judge, and heard Him read the fearful record of your transgressions? Have you received by the Law such a knowledge of sin that you are painfully conscious that every faculty of your soul and every member of your body is defiled and corrupt? Have you been driven out of every refuge, and relief and brought into the presence of Him who is ineffably holy and inflexibly just, who "will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. 34:7)? Have you heard that dread sentence "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10)? Has it brought you down into the dust to cry, "I am lost: utterly, hopelessly lost; there is nothing I can do to deliver myself"? The ground must be ploughed before it can receive seed, and the heart must be broken up by the Law before it is ready for the Gospel.

In addition to the other terror-producing elements connected with the institution of Judaism, the apostle mentions two other features. "And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart" (verse 20). To increase the reverence which was due to the appearing of Jehovah on Sinai, the people were required to keep their distance at the base of the mount, and were strictly forbidden an approach beyond the bounds fixed to them. This command was confirmed by a penalty, that every one who transgressed it should be put to death, as a disobedient rebel, devoted to utter destruction. This restriction and its sanction was also designed to produce in the people awe and terror of God in His giving of the Law.

That to which the apostle referred is recorded in Exodus 19:12, 13, "Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: There shall not a hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live." As Owen well suggested, the prohibition respecting the cattle of the Israelites not only made the more manifest the absolute inaccessibility of God in and by the Law, but also seemed to intimate the uncleanness of all things which sinners possess, by

virtue of their relation to them. Everything that fallen man touches is defiled by him, and even "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 15:8).

The punishment of the man who defiantly touched the Mount was death by stoning, that of a beast by stoning or being thrust through with a dart. In either case they were slain at a distance: no hand touched the one who had offended. This emphasized the heinousness of the offense and the execrableness of the offender: others must not be defiled by coming into immediate contact with them—at what a distance ought we to keep ourselves from everything which falls under the curse of the Law! How the whole of this brings out the stern severity of the Law! "If even an irrational animal was to be put to death in a manner which marked it as unclean—as something not to be touched—what might rational offenders expect as the punishment of their sins? and if the violation of a positive institution of this kind involved consequences so fearful, what must be the result of transgressing the moral requirements of the great Lawgiver?" (John Brown).

"And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake" (verse 21). The apostle now turns from the people themselves, and describes the effect upon their leader of the terror-producing phenomena that attended the institution of Judaism. Here was the very man who had dared, again and again, to confront the powerful monarch of Egypt and make known to him the demand of God, and later announced to his face the coming of plague after plague. Here was the commander-in-chief of Israel's hosts, who had boldly led them through the Red Sea. He was a holy person, more eminent in grace than all others of his time, for he was "very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). Now if such a man was overcome with dread, how terrible must be the severity and curse of the Divine Law!

Furthermore, let it be carefully borne in mind that Moses was no stranger to the Lord Himself: not only was he accustomed to receive Divine revelations, but he had previously beheld a representation of the Lord's presence at the bush. Moreover, he was the Divinely-appointed intermediary, the mediator between God and the people at that time. Yet none of these privileges exempted him from an overwhelming dread of the terror of the Lord in the giving the Law. What a proof is this that the very best of men cannot stand

before God on the ground of their own righteousness! How utterly vain are the hopes of those who think to be saved by Moses (John 9:28)! Surely if there be anything in all the Scriptures which should turn us from resting on the Law for salvation, it is the horror and terror of Moses on mount Sinai.

"And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake." The fact that there is no record given in the O.T. of this particular item, occasions no difficulty whatever unto those who believe in the full inspiration of Holy Writ. Nor is there any need for us to have recourse unto the Romish theory of "unwritten tradition," and suppose that a knowledge of the terror of Moses had been orally preserved among the Jews. That which had not been chronicled in the book of Exodus, was here revealed to the apostle by the Holy Spirit Himself, and was now recorded by him for the purpose of accentuating the awfulness of what occurred at Sinai; and this, that the Hebrews should be increasingly thankful that Divine grace had connected them with so different an order of things.

The scope and design of the whole of our passage should now be obvious to the reader. The purpose of the apostle was to show again how inferior Judaism was to Christianity. This he here does by taking us back to Sinai, where Judaism was formally instituted by the appearing of Jehovah at the giving of the law, and where the Mosaic economy was established by a covenant based thereon. All the circumstances connected with its institution were in most striking accord with the leading features and characteristics of that dispensation. At that time the nation of Israel was in a waste, howling wilderness, standing in speechless terror at the foot of the Mount. There Jehovah manifested Himself in His awful holiness and majesty, as Lawgiver and Judge; the people at a distance fenced off from Him. How profoundly thankful should Christians be that they belong to a much more mild and gracious order of things!

Sinai was "the mount that might be touched"—a symbol of that order of things which was addressed to the outward senses. The "blackness and darkness" which covered it was emblematic of the obscurity of spiritual things under the Mosaic economy, a thick veil of types and shadows hiding the substance and reality now revealed by the Gospel. The people being fenced off at the base of the mount denoted that under Judaism they had no way of approach and no access into the immediate presence of God. The thunderings,

lightnings and fire, expressed the wrath of God against all who transgress His righteous Law. The "tempest" was a sign of the instability and temporariness of that dispensation, in contrast with the peace which Christ has made and the permanent and eternal order of things which He has brought in. The utter consternation of Moses gave clear proof that he was not the perfect and ultimate Mediator between God and men. All of which plainly intimated the need for something else, something better, something more suited unto lost sinners.

Hebrews 12:22-24

Chapter 99 - The Superiority of Christianity

"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly; the Church of the firstborn, which are written in Heaven; and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:22-24). In these verses the apostle completes the last great contrast which he draws between Judaism and Christianity, in which he displays the immeasurable superiority of the latter over the former. Though there may not be in them much of personal interest to some of our readers, yet we feel it incumbent upon us to give the same careful attention to this passage as we have to the previous sections of this epistle.

The central design of the apostle in verses 18-24 was to convince the believing Hebrews of the pre-eminence of the new covenant above the old, that is, of the Gospel-economy over the Legal. To this end he first directed attention to the awful phenomena which attended the institution of Judaism, and now he sets before them the attractive features which characterizes Christianity. Everything connected with the giving of the Law was fearful and terrifying, but all that marks the Evangelical system is blessed and winsome. The manifestation of the Divine presence at Sinai though vivid and truly magnificent, was awe-inspiring, but the revelation of His love and grace in the Gospel prompts to peace and joy. Those pertained to things of the earth, these concern Heaven itself; those were addressed to the senses of the body, these call into exercise the higher faculties of the soul.

When going over verses 18-21 we sought to make clear the figurative meaning of their contents. Though there be in them an allusion to historical facts, yet it should be obvious that it is not with their literal signification the apostle was chiefly concerned. As this may not be fully apparent to some of our readers, we must labor the

point a little—rendered the more necessary by the gross and carnal ideas entertained by some Bible students. Surely it is quite plain to any unbiased mind that when he said, "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire" (verse 18) the apostle had reference to something else than a mountain in Arabia. There would be neither force nor even sense in telling Christians "Ye are not come to mount Sinai"—why even of the Hebrew believers it is improbable that any of them had ever seen it.

If, then, the words "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched" refer not to any material mount, then they must intimate that order of things which was formally inaugurated at Sinai, the moral features of which were suitably symbolized and strikingly adumbrated by the physical phenomena which attended the giving of the Law. This we sought to show in the course of the two preceding articles. Now the same principle of interpretation holds good and must be applied to the terms of the passage upon which we are now entering. "But ye are come unto mount Zion" no more has reference to a natural mountain than "We have an altar" (Heb. 13:10) means that Christians have a tangible and visible altar. Whatever future the earthly Zion may yet have, it is the antitypical, the spiritual, the Heavenly Zion, which is here in view.

One of the hardest tasks which sometimes confronts the careful and honest expositor of Holy Writ is to determine when its language is to be understood literally and when it is to be regarded as figurative. Nor is this always to be settled so easily as many suppose: the controversy upon the meaning of our Lord's words at the institution of the holy "Supper," "This is My body" shows otherwise. It had been a simple matter for Him to say "This (bread) represents My body," but He did not—why, is best known to Himself. Nor does this example stand by any means alone: much of Christ's language was of a figurative character, and more than once His own apostles failed to understand His purport—see Matthew 16:5-7; Mark 7:14-18; John 4:31-34 and John 21:22, 23.

No, it is by no means always an easy matter to determine when the language of Scripture is to be regarded literally, and when it is to be understood figuratively. In previous generations perhaps there was a tendency to "spiritualize" too much: whether that be so or no, certainly the pendulum has now swung to the opposite extreme. How very often do we hear it said, "The language of

Scripture means just what it says, and says just what it means". Many believe that such a declaration is very honoring to God's Word, and suppose that anything to the contrary savors strongly of "Modernism." But, surely, a little reflection will soon indicate that such a statement needs qualifying, for there is not a little of the language of Scripture which must be understood other than literally.

To say nothing about many poetic expressions in the Psalms (such as "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures"), and symbolic language in the Prophets (like "then will I sprinkle clean water upon you... I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh"), take such a saying of our Lord's as this: "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children or lands, for My sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children and lands, with persecutions" (Mark 10:29, 30)—the impossibility of literalizing such a promise appears, for example, in a man's receiving or having a hundred mothers. Now if that statement is not to be interpreted literally, why should an outcry be raised if the writer presents good reasons for interpreting other verses figuratively?

After reading the above, some may be inclined to say, "All of this is very bewildering and confusing." Our reply is, Then you must have sat under very superficial preaching. Any well-instructed scribe would have taught you that there is great variety used in the language of Holy Writ, and often much care and pains are required in order to ascertain its precise character. That is one reason why God has graciously provided "teachers" (Eph. 4:11) for His people. True, the path of duty is so plainly defined for us that the wayfaring man (though a fool) need not err therein; but that does not alter the fact that in order to ascertain the exact significance of many particular expressions of Scripture, much prayer, and comparing passage with passage, is called for. The Bible is not a lazy man's book, and the Holy Spirit has designedly put not a little therein to stain the pride of men.

Now much help is obtained upon this difficulty by recognizing that many of the things which pertain to the new covenant are expressed in language taken from the old, the antitype being presented under the phraseology of the type. For instance, when Christ announced the free intercourse between Heaven and

earth which was to result from His mediation, He described it to Nathanael in the words of Jacob's vision: "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John 1:51)—not that the Lord Jesus was ever to present the appearance of a ladder for that purpose, such as the patriarch saw in his dream, but that spiritually there would be a like medium of communication established and the agency of a like intercourse maintained. In a similar manner, the death of Christ is frequently spoken of under the terms of the Levitical sacrifices, while the application of His atonement to the soul is called the "sprinkling of His blood on the conscience."

Not until we clearly perceive that most of that which pertains to the new economy is exhibited to us under the images of the old, are we in the position to understand much of the language found in the Prophets, and many of the expressions employed by our Lord and His apostles. Thus, Christ is spoken of as "our Passover" (1 Cor. 5:7) and as Priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 6:20). Paradise is described as "Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22). The N.T. saints are referred to as "the children of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7) as "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), as "the Circumcision" (Phil. 3:3), as "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Pet. 2:9), and that "Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all" (Gal. 4:26). Such terminology as this should amply prepare us for "ye are come unto mount Sion," and should remove all uncertainty as to what is denoted thereby.

"But ye are come unto Mount Sion." In these words the apostle commences the second member of the comparison between Judaism and Christianity, which completes the foundation on which he bases the great exhortation found in verses 25-29. In the former member (verses 18-21) he had described the state of the Israelitish people (and the Church in it) as they existed under the Legal economy, taken from the terror-producing character of the giving of the Law and the nature of its demands: "they could not endure that which was commanded... and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake." But now the apostle contrasted the blessed and glorious state into which believers have been called by the Gospel, thereby making manifest how incomparably more excellent was the new covenant in itself than the old, and, how infinitely more beneficial are its privileges unto those whom Divine

grace gives a part therein. No less than eight of these privileges are here enumerated—always the number of a new beginning.

"That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him" (Eph. 1:10). These words throw light on the passage now before us: all the spiritual things of grace and glory, both in heaven and in earth, have been headed up in Christ, so that they all now center in Him. By His mediatorial work the Lord Jesus has repaired the great breach which the sin of Adam entailed. Before sin entered the world there was perfect harmony between Heaven and earth, man and angels uniting in hymning their glorious Creator: together they formed one spiritual society of worshippers. But upon the fall, that spiritual union was broken, and not only did the human race (in their federal head) become alienated from God Himself, but they became alienated from the holy spirits which surround His throne. But the last Adam has restored the disruption which the first Adam's sin produced, and in reconciling His people to God, He has also brought them back into fellowship with the angelic hosts.

Now because God has gathered together in one, recapitulated or headed up, "all things in Christ both which are in heaven and which are in earth," when we savingly "come" to Christ, we at the same time, "come" to all that God has made to center in Him; or, in other words, we obtain an interest or right in all that is headed up in Him. Let the reader seek to grasp clearly this fact: it is because believers have been brought to Christ that they "are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels!" By their initiation into the Gospel state, Christians are also inducted into and given access unto all these privileges. Christ and His mediation are specifically mentioned at the close of the various privileges here listed (verse 24), to teach us it is on that account we are interested in them and as the reason for our being so interested.

Yes, it is to Christ and Him alone (though not, of course, to the exclusion of the Father and His eternal love or the Holy Spirit and His gracious operations) that the Christian owes every blessing: his standing before God, his new creation state, his induction into the society of the holy, his eternal inheritance. It was by Christ that he was delivered from the condemnation and curse of the law, with

the unspeakable terror it caused him. And it is by Christ that he has been brought to the antitypical Sion and the heavenly Jerusalem. Not by anything he has done or will do are such inestimable blessings made his. Observe how jealously the Spirit of Truth has guarded this very point, in using the passive and not the active voice: the verb is "ye are come" and not "ye have come." The same fact is emphasized again in 1 Peter 2:25—"ye were as sheep going astray; but are (not "have") now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls"—because of what the Spirit wrought in us, we being entirely passive.

"But ye are come unto Mount Sion." We need hardly say that this language looks back to the "Zion" of the O.T., the variation in spelling being due to the difference between the Hebrew and Greek. It is in fact to the O.T. we must turn for light upon our present verse, and, as usual, the initial reference is the one which supplies us with the needed key. The first time that "Zion" is mentioned there is in 2 Samuel 5:6, 7, "And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites the inhabitants of the land... thinking David cannot come in hither. Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion: the same is the city of David." The deeper significance of this appears when we carefully ponder its setting: Zion was captured by David when Israel had been thoroughly tried and found completely wanting. It occurred at a notable crisis in the history of the nation, namely, after the priesthood had been deplorably corrupted (1 Sam. 2:22, 25) and after the king of their choice (Saul) had reduced himself (1 Sam. 28:7) and them (1 Sam. 31:1, 7) to the lowest degradation.

It was, then, at a time when Israel's fortunes were at a low ebb, when they were thoroughly disheartened, and when (because of their great wickedness) they had the least reason to expect it, that God graciously intervened. Just when Saul and Jonathan had been slain in battle, when the Philistines triumphed and Israel had fled before them in dismay, the Lord brought forth the man of His choice. David, whose name means the "Beloved." Up to this time the hill of Zion had been a continual menace to Israel, but now David wrested it out of the hand of the Jebusites and made it the stronghold of Jerusalem. On one of its eminences the temple was erected, which was the dwelling place of Jehovah in the midst of His people. "Zion," then, stands for the highest revelation of Divine

grace in the O.T. times.

Zion lay to the south-west of Jerusalem, being the oldest and highest part of that ancient city. It was outside of the city itself and separate from it, though in Scripture frequently identified with it. Mount Zion had two heads or peaks: Moriah on which the temple was erected, the seat of the worship of God; and the other, whereon the palace of David was built, the royal residence of the kings of Judah—a striking figure of the priestly and kingly offices meeting in Christ. Zion, then, was situated in the best part of the world—Canaan, the land which flowed with milk and honey; in the best part of that land—in Judah's portion; in the best part of his heritage—Jerusalem; and in the best part of that metropolis—the highest point, the "city of David." Let the interested reader carefully ponder the following passages and observe the precious things said of Zion: Psalm 48:2, 3; 50:2; 132: 13, 14; 133:3.

"Zion is, First, the place of God's habitation, where He dwells forever: Psalm 9:11; 76:2. Second, it is the seat of the throne, reign and kingdom of Christ: Psalm 2:6; Isaiah 24:23. Third, it is the object of Divine promises innumerable: Psalm 125:1; 128:5, of Christ Himself: Isaiah 59:20. Fourth, thence did the Gospel proceed and the law of Christ come forth: Isaiah 40:9, Micah 4:2. Fifth, it was the object of God's especial love, and the place of the birth of His elect: Psalm 87:2, 5. Sixth, the joy of the whole earth: Psalm 48:2. Seventh, salvation and all blessings came forth out of Zion: Psalm 14:7; 110:2; 128:5. Now these things were not spoken of nor accomplished towards that Mount Zion which was in Jerusalem absolutely, but only as it was typical of believers under the Gospel; so the meaning of the apostle is, that by the Gospel believers do come to that state wherein they have an interest in and a right to all the blessed and glorious things that are spoken in the Scriptures concerning and to Zion. All the privileges ascribed, all the promises made to it, are theirs. Zion is the place of God's especial gracious residence, of the throne of Christ in His reign, the object of all promises. This is the first privilege of believers under the Gospel. They come to Mount Zion, they are interested in the promises of God recorded in the Scriptures made to Zion; in all the love and care of God expressed towards it, in all the spiritual glories assigned to it. The things spoken of it were never accomplished in the earthly Zion, but only typically; spiritually, and in their reality, they belong to

believers under the new testament" (John Owen).

The contrasts between Sinai and Sion were very marked. The former was located in one of the dreariest and driest places on earth, a "howling desert"; the other was situated in the midst of that land which flowed with milk and honey. The one was ugly, barren, forbidding; the other was "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth." Sinai was enveloped in "blackness and darkness," while Sion signified "sunny" or "shone upon." God came down on Sinai for only a brief moment, but He dwells in Sion "forever." On the former He appeared in terrible majesty; in the other He is manifested in grace and blessing. At Sinai the typical mediator trembled and quaked; on Sion Christ is crowned with glory and honor.

"But ye are come to Mount Sion." By this, then, we understand, First, that in being brought to Christ, the believer comes to the antitypical, the spiritual, Sion. Second, more specifically, we understand by this expression that believers are come to the Throne of Grace. Just as, originally, the historical Sion was a menace to Israel, so while we were under the curse of the law God's throne was one of judgment. But, just as David (the "Beloved") secured Sion for Israel and it became the place of blessing, where God abode in grace, so as the result of Christ's work the Throne of Heaven has become the Throne of Grace, He being Himself seated thereon. Third, in its wider scope, it signifies that believers have a right or title to all the good and glorious things spoken of and to Sion in the O.T.

"And unto the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," by which we understand Heaven itself, of which the earthly Jerusalem—the seat and center of the worship of God—was the emblem. From earliest times the saints were taught by the Holy Spirit to contemplate the future blessedness of the righteous under the image of a splendid "City," reared on permanent foundations. Of Abraham it is declared, "He looked for a city which hath foundation, whose Builder and Maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). The force of that statement is best perceived in the light of the previous verse: "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." Abraham was given to realize that Canaan was but a figure of his everlasting heritage, and therefore did he look forward

to (verse 10), "seek" (verse 14), and "desire a better Country, that is, a heavenly" (verse 14). The eternal Abode of the blessed is there called both a "City" and a "Country."

Many are the allusions to this "City" in the Psalms and the Prophets: we single out a few of the more prominent ones. "There is a river (The Spirit), the streams (His graces) whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High" (Ps. 46:4). "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness" (Ps. 48:1). "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God" (Ps. 87:3). "He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation" (Ps. 107:7). "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks" (Isa. 26:1). It is to be noted that in several passages the "City" is mentioned with particular reference to "Zion," for we can only have access to God via the Throne of Grace: John 14:6.

The "City of the living God" intimates the nearness of the saints to God, for Jerusalem was adjacent to Zion—their homes and dwellings were near to His. This figure of the "city" is also found in "Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19)—see too Revelation 3:12. It is designated "the heavenly Jerusalem" in contrast from the earthly, the "Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all" (Gal. 4:26). It is referred to again in Hebrews 13:14. A "city" is a place of permanent residence, in contrast from the moving tent of the wilderness. In Bible times a "city" was a place of safety, being surrounded by strong and high walls; so in Heaven we shall be eternally secure from sin and Satan, death and every enemy. A city is well stocked with provisions: so in Heaven nothing is lacking which is good and blessed.

"But ye are come unto . . . the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." "The apostle herein prefers the privileges of the Gospel not only above what the people were made partakers of at Sinai in the wilderness, but also above all that they afterwards enjoyed in Jerusalem in the land of Canaan. In the glory and privileges of that city the Hebrews greatly boasted. But the apostle casts that city in the state wherein it then was, into the same condition with Mount Sinai in Arabia, that is, under bondage, as indeed it then was (Gal. 4:25); and he opposeth thereunto that

‘Jerusalem which is above,’ that is, this heavenly Jerusalem. This the second privilege of the Gospel-state, wherein all the remaining promises of the O.T. are transferred and made over to believers: whatever is spoken of the city of God or of Jerusalem that is spiritual, that contains in it the love or favor of God, it is all made theirs; faith can lay a claim to it all.

"Believers are so ‘come’ to this city, as to be inhabitants, free denizens, possessors of it, to whom all the rights, privileges, and immunities of it do belong; and what is spoken of it in the Scripture is a ground of faith to them, and a spring of consolation. For they may with consolation make application of what is so spoken to themselves in every condition. A ‘city’ is the only place of rest, peace, safety and honor, among men in this world: to all these in the spiritual sense we are brought by the Gospel. Whilst men are under the law they are at Sinai—in a wilderness where is none of these things; the souls of sinners can find no place of rest or safety under the law. But we have all these things by the Gospel: rest in Christ, peace with God, order in the communion of faith, safety in Divine protection, and honor in our relation to God in Christ" (John Owen).

Hebrews 12:22-24

Chapter 100 - The Superiority of Christianity

"But ye are come unto" etc. (verse 22). These words do not, in fact cannot, mean, that in some mystical sense believers are "in spirit" projected into the future, to something which will only be actualized in the future. The Greek verb has a specific significance in this Epistle, as may be seen by a careful reference to Hebrews 4:16, 7:25, 11:6: "to come unto" here means to approach as worshippers. In the verses now before us we are shown the high dignity and honor of that spiritual worship which is the privilege of Christians under the Gospel dispensation. When they meet together in the name of the Lord Jesus, as His people, and with a due observance of His holy institutions, they "are come unto," have access to, the eight privileges here enumerated: they draw nigh by faith to Heaven itself, to the antitypical holy of holies. But this is possible only to spiritual worshippers.

They who are strangers to experimental spirituality soon grow weary even of the outward form of worship, unless their eyes are entertained with an imposing ritual and their ears regaled by appealing music. This is the secret of the pomp and pageantry of Romanism—now, alas, being more and more imitated by professing Protestants; it is to attract and charm religious worldlings. Ritualists quite obscure the simplicity and beauty of true Gospel worship. Man in his natural estate is far too carnal to be pleased with a worship in which there is nothing calculated to fire the imagination and intoxicate the senses by means of tangible objects. But they who worship in spirit and in truth can draw nigh to God more joyously in a barn, and mingle their praises with the songs of Heaven, than if they were in a cathedral.

How vast is the difference between that spiritual adoration which issues from renewed hearts and that "form of godliness" which is associated with altars and candles, choirs and surpliced ministers! Only that is acceptable to God which is produced by the Holy Spirit through sinners washed in the blood of the Lamb. Under

grace-magnifying and Christ-exalting preaching, the spiritual senses of real Christians are exercised; as they behold the Savior's glories in the glass of the Gospel, as they hear His voice, they have an inward impression of His presence, they taste afresh of His goodness, and His name is to them as ointment poured forth, perfuming their spirits. In this joyous frame, their hearts are drawn Heavenwards, and their songs of praise mingle with those of the holy angels and the spirits of just men made perfect.

"But ye are come unto Mount Sion." David, after having taken Mount Zion from the Jebusites, made it the place of his residence, so that it became "the city of the great king." There he reigned and ruled, there he issued his laws, and thence he extended the sway of his peaceful scepter over the whole of the holy land. From that circumstance, Mount Zion became the great type of the kingdom of God, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head and Sovereign. As David ruling upon Mount Zion in the palace built there as his royal seat, issuing his commands which were obeyed all over the land, so our blessed Redeemer has been exalted according to God's promise "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion" (Ps. 2:6 and cf. Hebrews 2:9); and there sitting as King in Sion, issues His mandates and sways His peaceful scepter over the hearts of His obedient people.

"And unto the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." Most of the older writers understood these terms to refer to the Church, but we think this is a mistake, for the Church is referred to, separately, in a later clause. As pointed out in the preceding article, we regard this language as signifying Heaven itself, as the residence of God and the eternal abode of His people. "The living God" is the true and only God, the Triune Jehovah, the Fountain of all life, the One who is "from everlasting to everlasting," without beginning or end: this title is given to each of the eternal Three—Matthew 16:16, 1 Timothy 4:10, 2 Corinthians 6:16, cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16. As "Zion" was the seat of David's throne, so "Jerusalem" was the dwelling place of Jehovah in the midst of His covenant people. "Jerusalem" signifies "the Vision of Peace," and in Heaven the "sons of peace" (Luke 10:6) will behold the glory of God in the face of the Prince of peace.

"And to an innumerable company of angels." This is the third great privilege enjoyed by the worshippers under the Christian

economy: having mentioned the place to which Divine grace has brought believers, the Holy Spirit now described the inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem. The angels, who are worshippers of God and His Christ, are perhaps mentioned first because they are in closer proximity to the Throne, because they are the original denizens of Heaven, and because they are greatly in the majority. The reference is, of course, to the holy angels who kept their first estate and sinned not when some of their fellows apostatized. They are "the elect angels" (1 Tim. 5:21), and although they have not been redeemed by the atoning blood of the Lamb, it appears highly probable that they were confirmed in their standing by the incarnation of the Son, for God has united in Christ both elect men and elect angels (Eph. 1:10), that He might be "the Head of all principality and power" (Col. 2:10).

"Ye are come unto . . . an innumerable company of angels." This sets before us a further contrast between that which characterizes Christianity, and what obtained under the Mosaic economy—that is, so far as the Israelitish nation as a whole was concerned. It is clear from several passages that "angels" were connected with the giving of the Law, when Judaism was formally instituted. We read, "the Lord came from Sinai and rose up from Seir unto them; He shined from mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints: from His right hand went a fiery law for them" (Deut. 33:2): and again, "The chariots of God are twenty thousands, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai" (Ps. 68:17). But while many "thousands" of the heavenly hosts attended Jehovah upon Sinai, this was very different from the "innumerable company" with which we are connected, namely the "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" of Revelation 5:11. And even to the many thousands of angels at Sinai the Nation did not "come": instead, they were fenced off at the foot of the mount.

Redeemed sinners who have fellowship with the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit, are of one spirit with all the heavenly hosts, for there is a union of sentiment between them. Christians have been brought into a state of amity and friendship with the holy angels: they are members of the same family (Eph. 3:15), are united under the same Head (Col. 2:10), and joined together in the same worship (Heb. 1:6; Revelation 5:9-14). We are "come unto" them by a spiritual relation, entering into association with them, sharing the

benefits of their kind offices, for "are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb. 1:14). The angels are "fellow servants" with believers "that have the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 19:10). Wondrous fact is this that sinners of the earth, while here in this world, have communication with the angels in Heaven, for they are constantly engaged in the same worship of God in Christ as we are: Thus there is perfect oneness of accord between us.

As we pointed out in the preceding chapter, the Church's spiritual union with the holy angels—being united together in one spiritual society and family—is due to the atoning work of Christ, who by putting away the sins of His people has restored the breach made by Adam's fall and "reconciled all things unto Himself" (Col. 1:20). Hence we believe that in the verse now before us there is not only a contrast drawn between Judaism and Christianity, but that its ultimate reference is to the immense difference brought in between the offense of the first Adam and the righteousness of the last Adam. Upon the transgression of Adam we read "So He drove out the man: and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24). There God made His "angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire" (Heb. 1:7) to execute His vengeance against us; but now these same angels are our associates in worship and service.

God is "the Lord of hosts" (Ps. 46:7), myriads of holy celestial creatures being in an attendance upon Him—"an innumerable company of angels:" how this should help us to realize the majesty and grandeur of that Kingdom into which Divine grace has brought us. In this expression we may also discern a word to encourage our trembling hearts in connection with our wrestling against the "hosts of wicked spirits" (Eph. 6:12): numerous as are the forces of Satan assailing us, an "innumerable company of angels" are defending us! This was the blessed truth by which Elisha comforted his fearing servant "they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kings 6:16, 17). "When the thought of Satan and his legions brings fear, we ought to comfort ourselves with the assurance that more in number and greater in power are the loving and watchful angels, who for Christ's sake regard us with the deepest interest and affection" (A. Saphir).

Before turning to the next item a word should be said in refutation of the blasphemous error of Romanists concerning our relation to the angels. They teach that we are "come unto" the angels with our prayers, which is one of their empty superstitions—there is not a word in Scriptures to countenance such an idea. Though it be true that the angels are superior to us in dignity and power, yet in communion with God we are their equals—"fellow-servant", (Rev. 22:9), and, as Owen pointed out, "Nothing can be more groundless than that fellow-servants should worship one another"—the worshipping of angels is condemned in Colossians 2:18, Revelation 22:8, 9. Well did Owen also point out, "It is the highest madness for any one to pretend himself to be the head of the church, as the pope does, unless he assume also to himself to be the head of all the angels in Heaven," for we belong to the same holy society.

"To the general assembly." This expression occasions some difficulty, for in the first place it is not quite clear as to what the Spirit specifically alludes unto. In the second place, the Greek word (*pangueris*, a compound one) occurs nowhere else in the N.T., so that we are not able to obtain any help from its usage in other passages. In the third place, it is not very easy to decide whether this clause is to be linked with the one immediately preceding or with the one following it. In its classical usage the Greek word was employed in connection with a public convocation, when all the people were gathered together to celebrate a public festival or solemnity. Most of the commentators link this word with what follows: "To the general assembly and church of the firstborn," understanding the reference to be unto the ("general") union of believing Jews and believing Gentiles in one Body. Personally, we think this is a mistake.

First, such language would be tautological, for if the "general assembly" points to the middle wall of partition being broken down, and converted Jews and Gentiles being joined together in one Body, that would be "the Church." Second, the denomination "church of the firstborn" takes in the totality of God's elect and redeemed people of all ages. Third, there is no "and" between the "innumerable company of angels" and the "general assembly," as there is in every other instance in these verses where a new object is introduced. Personally, we regard this third expression as in apposition (the placing together of two nouns, one of which explains

the other) to the former, thus: "unto an innumerable company of angels—the general assembly." There are various ranks and orders among the angels: principalities and powers, thrones and dominions, seraphim and cherubim, and the "general assembly" of them would be the solemn convocation of all the angelic hosts before the throne of God—compare "A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him: thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the judgment (a special convocation) was set, and the books were opened" (Dan. 7:10).

No doubt this amplifying expression (of the "innumerable company of angels") also emphasizes another contrast between the privileges of Christianity and that which obtained under Judaism. Perhaps the contrastive allusion is a double one. First, from the general assembly of Israel at Sinai, when the whole of the nation was then formally assembled together—in fear and trembling. Second, to the general assembly of all the male Israelites three times in the year at the solemn feasts of the O.T. Church (Ex. 34:23, Deuteronomy 16:16) which was called "the great congregation" (Ps. 22:25, 35:18, etc.)—in joy and praise. But each of these were on earth, by men in the flesh; whereas Christians, in their worship, unite with all the holy hosts of Heaven in blessing and adoring the Triune God.

"And Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven": that is, to the entire company of God's redeemed. "This is that church whereunto all the promises do belong; the church built on the rock, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail; the spouse, the body of Christ, the temple of God, His habitation forever. This is the church which Christ loved and gave Himself for, which He washed in His own blood, 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 (Eph. 5:25-27). This is the church out of which none can be saved, and whereof no one member shall be lost" (John Owen).

This is the only place in the N.T. where the election of grace is designated "the Church of the firstborn ones" (plural number in the Greek). Why so here? For at least three reasons. First, so as to identify the Church with Christ as the "Heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2).

The prominent idea associated with the "firstborn" in Scripture is not that of priority, but rather excellency, dignity, dominion, and right to the inheritance. This is clear from "Reuben, thou art my firstborn,... the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power" (Gen. 49:3); and again "I will make Him My firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth" (Ps. 89:27). For the "firstborn" and the "inheritance" see Genesis 27:19, 28, 29 and cf. Hebrews 12:16; Deuteronomy 21:16; 1 Chronicles 5:1. Second, this title intimates the Church's glory is superior to that of the celestial spirits: redeemed sinners and not fallen angels are God's "firstborn ones." Third, this points a further contrast from Judaism: Israel was God's "firstborn" (Ex. 4:22) among the nations of the earth; but the Church is His "firstborn" among the inhabitants of Heaven!

The Church is raised to the highest created dignity: superior privileges and a nobler dignity of son-ship pertain to its members than to the holy angels. This is solely due to their union with Christ, the original "Firstborn": Psalm 89:26, 27; Romans 8:29; Hebrews 1:6. Christians have been made "kings and priests unto God" (Rev. 1:6), which compromises the whole right of the inheritance. The entire election of grace, by God's gratuitous adoption, are not only members of His family, but "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17), and thus given an inalienable title to the heavenly inheritance. This was equally true of the saints of all generations from the foundation of the world, yet a much clearer and fuller revelation thereof has been made under this Christian economy: "which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5).

"Which are written in Heaven," announcing that they are genuine Christians—in contrast from mere professors, whose names are recorded only upon the church-scrolls of earth. Just as the registering of men's names on the rolls of corporations, etc., assures them of their right to the privileges thereof (for example, to vote—which we believe is something that no child of God should do), so our names being written in Heaven is the guaranty of our title to the celestial heritage. It was to this Christ referred when He said, "Rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). The apostle Paul also speaks of those "whose names are in the book of life" (Phil. 4:3): that Book of Life (cf. Revelation 3:5 and 13:8) is

none other than the roll of God's elect, in His eternal immutable designation of them unto grace and glory. "Written in Heaven" points another contrast from Judaism: the names of Jews (as such) were only written upon the synagogue scrolls.

"And to God the Judge of all." The reference here is not (as some recent writers have supposed) unto the person of Christ, but rather unto God the Father in His rectoral office as the high Governor of all. Does this seem to spoil the harmony of the passage? had we not much preferred it to read "and to God our Father"? No, coming to "God the Judge of all" in nowise conflicts with the other privileges mentioned: it is a vastly different thing to be brought before a judge to be tried and sentenced as a criminal, from having a favorable access to him as our occasions and needs may require. Such is the meaning here: we are come not only to the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the Church, but also the supreme Head of the heavenly society—the Author and End of it.

"And to God the Judge of all," that is, the Majesty of Heaven itself. It was God as Judge who appointed Christ to death, and it was God as Judge who accepted His sacrifice and raised Him from the dead. To God as "Judge" believers have been reconciled and by Him they were justified (Rom. 8:33). Concerning Christ our Exemplar, we read "when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23). The apostle reminded the saints that "it is a righteous thing for God (as "Judge") to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you" (2 Thess. 1:6). Now it was as Judge that God ascended His awful tribunal at Sinai, and that the people could not endure: but Christians draw nigh to Him with holy boldness because His law has nothing against them—the requirements of His justice were fully met by Christ. How great is the privilege of that state which enables poor sinners, called by the Gospel, to approach the Judge of all upon His "bench" or throne without fear! Only by faith is this possible.

"And to the spirits of just men made perfect." It is blessed to note that this comes immediately after mention of "the Judge of all"—to show us the saints had nothing to fear from Him, "for there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ" (Rom. 8:1). The reference is to the O.T. believers, who have passed through death: that N.T. saints are "come" to them is clear from

Ephesians 2:19. Of course that "made perfect" is relative and not absolute, for their resurrection and full glorification is yet future. As Owen defined it: First, they had reached the end of the race wherein they had been engaged, with all the duties and difficulties, temptations and tribulations connected therewith. Second, they were completely delivered from sin and sorrow, labor and trouble, which in this life they had been exposed to. Third, they had now entered their rest and reward and were, according to their present capacity, in the immediate presence of God and perfectly happy.

"And to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant:" His personal name is used here because it is in this character He saves His people from their sins—compare our exposition of 9:15-17. Here again a contrast is drawn from that which obtained under the old covenant. Moses was the middle person between Israel and God: chosen by the people (Ex. 20:19, etc.) and appointed by Him to declare His mind unto them; unto him they were all baptized (1 Cor. 10:2). But Moses was merely a man, a fallen descendant of Adam: he delivered God's law to the people, but was incapable of magnifying and making it honorable by a perfect personal obedience. Nor was he that "surety" of the covenant unto God for the people, as Christ was; he did not confirm the covenant by offering himself as a sacrifice to God, nor could he give the people an interest in heavenly privileges. How far short he came of Christ!

By being brought unto "Sion," Christians are come to all the mercy, grace and glory prepared in the new covenant and presented in the promises of it. Herein lies the supreme blessedness and eternal security of the Church, that its members are taken into such a covenant that they have a personal interest in the Mediator of it, who is able to save them unto the uttermost. This is the very substance and essence of Christian faith, that it has to do with the Mediator of the new covenant, by whom alone we obtain deliverance from the old covenant and the curse with which it is accompanied. It is both the privilege and wisdom of faith to make use of this "Mediator" in all our dealings with God: He it is who offers to God our prayers and praises and brings down the favor of God upon His people.

"And to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." The blood of Christ is referred to thus in allusion unto the various sprinklings of blood Divinely instituted under the old covenant, the three most signal instances of which are recorded

in Exodus 12:22; 24:6-8; Leviticus 16:14, the principal reference here being to Exodus 24, where the old covenant was thus ratified. All of those instances were eminent types of the redemption, justification and sanctification of the Church by the blood of Christ. The specific thing denoted by the "sprinkling" (in contrast from its "shedding") is the application to believers of its virtues and benefits. The more the Christian exercises repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, the more will he experience the peace-speaking power of that precious blood in his conscience. The blood of Christ "speaketh" to God as a powerful Advocate: urging the fulfillment of the Mediator's part of the everlasting covenant, His perfect satisfaction to Divine justice, the full discharge from condemnation purchased for His people.

The contrast here is very impressive: the blood of Abel called for vengeance (Gen. 4:10), whereas the blood of Christ calls for blessing to be bestowed on those for whom it was shed. Even the blood of the wicked if unrighteously shed, calls to God for it to be recompensed. But Abel was a saint, the first martyr, and his blood cried according to the worth that was in him, for "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." If then the blood of a saint speaks so forcibly to God, how infinitely more powerfully must the blood of "the King of saints" (Rev. 15:3) plead! If the blood of a single member of Christ's Body so speaks to God, what will the blood of the Head Himself! Moreover, Abel's blood only cried to God "from the ground," where it was shed, but Christ's blood speaks in Heaven itself (Heb. 9:12).

Hebrews 12:25, 26

Chapter 101 - The Call to Hear

"See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh: for if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven" (verse 25). In these words we find the Holy Spirit moving the apostle to make a practical application unto his readers of what he had just brought before them in the previous verses. The degree or extent of the privileges enjoyed, is the measure of our responsibility: the richer the blessing God grants us, the deeper is our debt of obligation to Him. "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48): it was of this principle and fact the Hebrews were now reminded.

The apostle had just completed drawing his final contrast between Judaism and Christianity (verses 18-24), in which he had again shown the immeasurable superiority of the latter over the former, and now he uses this as a basis for an exhortation unto faith and obedience, or faithfulness and perseverance. Herein we have another example of the apostolic method of ministry: all their teaching had a practical end in view. Their aim was something more than enlightening the mind, namely, the moving of the will and ordering of the walk. Alas that there is so little of this in present-day teaching and preaching. The design of the pulpit now seems to be entertaining the people, and rarely does it go further than instructing the mind—that which searches the conscience or calls for the performance of duty, that which is solemn and unpalatable to the flesh, is, for the most part, studiously avoided. May it please the Lord to grant His servants all needed grace for deliverance from a compliance with this "speak unto us smooth things."

The grander the revelation which God is pleased to make of Himself, the more punctual the attendance and the fuller the response which He requires from us. In the verses which are now before us we find the apostle improving his argument by pointing

out the weighty implications of it. Therein he returns to his main design, which was to urge the professing Hebrews unto steadfastness in their Christian course and conflict, and to steadily resist the temptation to lapse back into Judaism. This deeply important and most necessary exhortation he had urged upon them again and again; see Hebrews 2:1, 3; 3:12, 13; 4:1; 6:4-6; 10:26-29; 12:1, 15. Therein the servant of God may learn another valuable lesson pointed to by the example of the apostle, namely, how God requires him to go over the same ground again and again where the practical duties of the Christian are concerned, and hesitate not to frequently repeat the exhortations of Holy Writ! This may not increase his popularity with men, but it will meet with the Lord's approval; and no faithful minister can have both!

"See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh." The Greek word for "see" is rendered "take heed" in Hebrews 3:12; the word for "refuse" signifies "deprecate"—do not disregard, still less reject. Now not only is this argument based upon the statement made in the preceding verses, but the motive for complying with it is to be drawn therefrom. It is because we "are not come unto the mount that might be touched and that burned with fire" (v. 18), that is, unto that order of things wherein the Divine righteousness was so vividly displayed in judicial manifestation; but because we "are come unto mount Zion," which speaks of pure grace, that we are now thus exhorted, for holiness ever becometh God's house. It is in the realization of God's wondrous grace that the Christian is ever to find his most effectual incentive unto a godly walk; see Titus 2:11, 12.

"See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh," which is the negative way of saying "Hear Him"—Heed Him, by believing and yielding obedience to what He says. This exhortation looks back to "I will raise them up a Prophet, from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in His mouth: and He shall speak unto them all that I shall command Him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto My words which He shall speak in My name, I will require it of him" (Deut. 18:18, 19); cf. Acts 3:22; 7:37. This is what the apostle now reminded the Hebrews of: take heed that ye hear Him, for if you fail to, God will consume you with His wrath. A similar charge was given by God after Christ became incarnate: "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him" (Matthew 17:5).

"This is the foundation of all Gospel faith and obedience, and the formal reason of the condemnation of all unbelievers. God hath given command unto all men to hear, that is, believe and obey His Son Jesus Christ. By virtue thereof, He hath given command unto others to preach the Gospel unto all individuals. They who believe them, believe in Christ; and they who believe in Christ through Him, believe in God (1 Pet. 1:21), so that their faith is ultimately resolved into the authority of God Himself. And so they who refuse them, who hear them not, do thereby refuse Christ Himself; and by so doing, reject the authority of God, who hath given this command to hear Him, and hath taken on Himself to require it when it is neglected; which is the condemnation of all unbelievers. This method, with respect unto faith and unbelief, is declared and established by our Savior: 'he that heareth you, heareth Me; and He that despiseth you, despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent Me:' Luke 10:16" (John Owen).

"See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh"—note carefully the present tense: not "that spoke." Christ is still speaking through His Gospel, by His Spirit, and instrumentally through His own commissioned servants, calling upon all who come under the sound of His voice to serve and obey Him. There are many ways in which we may "refuse" to hear and heed Him. First, by neglecting to read daily and diligently the Scriptures through which He speaks. Second, by failing to attend public preaching where His Word is faithfully dispensed—if so be we live in a place where this holy privilege is obtainable. Third, by failing to comply with the terms of His Gospel and yield ourselves unto His authority. Fourth, by forsaking the Narrow Way of His commandments and going back again to the world. Fifth, by abandoning the truth for error, which generally ends in total apostasy. How we need to pray for an hearing ear, that is, for a responsive heart and yielded will.

"For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth. much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven." In these words the apostle continues to emphasize the contrast which obtains between Judaism and Christianity. What we have here is an echo from the keynote struck in the opening words of our epistle: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son" (Heb.

1:1, 2). It is in the light of that statement our present verse is to be read and interpreted. The Speaker throughout is one and the same, namely, God (the Father), but the mouthpieces He employed differed greatly: under Judaism He spoke through mere men, the "prophets," but in connection with Christianity He speaks in and by His own beloved "Son."

This difference in the respective mouthpieces employed by God was in accord with and indicative of the relative importance of the two revelations given by Him. Judaism was but a religion for earth, and a temporary arrangement for the time being: accordingly, human agents were God's instruments in connection therewith. But Christianity is a revelation which concerns a heavenly calling, heavenly citizenship, a heavenly inheritance, and exhibits eternal relations and realities: appropriately, then, was the everlasting Son, "the Lord from Heaven," the One by whom its grand secrets were disclosed. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (John 1:18). The primary reference there is a dispensational one. Under Judaism God dwelt behind the veil; but under Christianity "we all with unveiled face" behold, as in a glass, "the glory of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). Under the old covenant men were unable to go in to God; but under the new covenant God has, in the person of Christ, come out to men.

But blessed and glorious as is the contrast between Judaism and Christianity, equally solemn and terrible is the contrast between the punishment meted out to those who refuse God's revelation under each. God speaks now from a higher throne than the one He assumed at Sinai: that was on earth; the one He now occupies is in Heaven. Therefore it must inevitably follow that the guilt of those who refuse to heed Him today is far greater, and their punishment must be the more intolerable. Not only do higher privileges involve increased obligations, but the failure to discharge those added obligations necessarily incurs deeper guilt and a heavier penalty. This is what the apostle presses here, as he had in "For if the word spoken by angels (at Sinai) was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" (Heb. 2:2, 3). If, then, we in any wise fear God's vengeance or value His favor how it behooves us to most seriously heed the grace proffered in the

Gospel!

Though Christianity has in it far less of what is terrifying than had Judaism and far more in it which exhibits the grace and mercy of God, nevertheless, apostasy from the one cannot be less terrible in its consequences than was apostasy from the other. There is as much to be dreaded in disregarding the authoritative voice of God now as there was then; yea, as we have pointed out, the rejection of His message through Christ involves a worse doom than despising of His word through Moses and the prophets. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?" (Heb. 10:28, 29). True, God does not now speak amid thunderings and lightnings, but rather by a tender appeal to our hearts; yet the rejection of the latter is fraught with more direful consequences than was the refusal of the former.

Alas that this weighty truth is so feebly apprehended today, and so little emphasized by the pulpit. Is it not a fact that the idea now generally prevailing is, that the God of the N.T. is far more amiable and benevolent than the God of the O.T.? How far from the truth is this: "I change not" (Mal. 3:6) is the Lord's express avowal. Moreover, it is under the new covenant (and not the old) that we find the most awe-inspiring and terror-provoking revelation of the righteous wrath of a sin-hating God. It was not through Moses or the prophets, but by the Lord Jesus that the everlasting fires of Hell were most vividly depicted: He it was who spoke the plainest and the most frequently of that fearful place wherein there is "wailing and gnashing of teeth." If Christ was the One to most fully reveal God's love, He was also the One who most fully declared His wrath.

"They escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth." No, even though they had enjoyed such unparalleled privileges. They had been brought out of the house of bondage, delivered from the enemy at the Red Sea, ate of the heavenly manna and drank of the water from the smitten rock; yet we are told "But with many of them God was not well-pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness" (1 Cor. 10:5). The apostle had already reminded the Hebrews that it was of them God had declared, "They do always err in their heart, and they have not known My ways. So I swear in My wrath, They shall not enter into My rest" (Heb. 3:10, 11). And this

was because "they refused Him that spake" to them. They were disobedient at Sinai, where, so far from submitting to the Divine authority to have "no other gods," they made and worshipped the golden calf. They were unbelieving at Kadesh Barnea, when they listened to the scepticism of the ten spies.

"Much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven." Again we say, how greatly at variance with this is the idea which now obtains so generally. The great majority of professing Christians suppose there is much less danger of those bearing the name of the Lord being severely dealt with under the milder regime of Christianity, than there was for renegades in the days of Moses. But our text says, "much more shall not we escape!" Though it be true that Christianity is essentially a system of grace, nevertheless the requirements of holiness and the claims of justice are not thereby set aside. The despisers of grace must be and will be as surely punished as were the despisers of Law; yea, "much more" so because their sin of refusal is more heinous. It is "the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16) which the despisers of the Gospel—its invitations and its requirements—will have to reckon with: so far as mount Sion excels mount Sinai so will the punishment of Christ-scorners exceed that of those who despised Moses.

Ere passing on to our next verse we must anticipate a "difficulty" which our passage is likely to raise in the minds of some readers: How are we to harmonize the eternal security of the saints with this "much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven?" Alas, that such a question needs answering: those who frame it betray a lamentable ignorance of what the "security of saints" consists of. God has never promised any man to preserve him in the path of self-will and self-pleasing. Those who reach Heaven are they who follow (though stumbling by and with many falls) the only path which leads there, namely, the "Narrow Way" of self-denial. Or, to put it in another way, the only ones who escape the everlasting buntings are they who heed Him that speaketh from Heaven, for "He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him" (Heb. 5:9).

The writer believes firmly in the blessed truth of "the eternal security of the saints," but by no means all who profess to be Christians are "saints." This raises the question, how may I know whether or not I am a saint? The answer is, By impartially

examining myself in the light of Holy Writ and ascertaining whether or no I possess the character and conduct of a "saint." The Lord Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27). A "saint" or "sheep" of Christ, then is one who hears HIS voice above all the siren voices of the world, above all the clamorings of the flesh, and gives evidence that he does so by following Him, that is, by heeding His commandments, being regulated by His will, submitting to His Lordship. And to them, and to none other, Christ says, "And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (John 10:28).

Should it be asked, But was not the apostle addressing the "saints," "sheep," "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1) here in Hebrews 12:25? And if so, why did he present before them such an awful threat? First, these solemn words were addressed to all who come under the sound of the Gospel, and the response made by the hearer or reader serves as an admirable test. The proud and self-confident, who rely wholly upon a profession made by them years ago, ignore it to their own undoing, supposing those words have no application to them; whereas the lowly and self-distrustful lay it to heart with trembling, and are thereby preserved from the doom threatened. Second, in the preservation of His people from destruction God uses warnings and threatenings, as well as promises and assurances. He keeps His people in the Narrow Way by causing them to heed such an exhortation as this, "Be not high-minded, but fear; for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee" (Rom. 11:20, 21).

What is meant by turning away from "Him that speaketh from Heaven"? First, it describes the attitude of that large class who come under the sound of the Gospel and dislike its exacting terms: Christ is far too holy to suit their carnal hearts, His call for them "to forsake all and follow Him" pleases not their corrupt nature; so He is "despised and rejected" by them. Second, it depicts the conduct of the stony-ground hearers, who under the emotional appeals of high-pressure evangelists "receive the Word with joy," yet have "no root" in themselves, and so they quickly "fall away:" the scoffings of their godless companions or the appeal of worldly pleasures are too strong for them to continue resisting. Third, it denotes the lapse of those who having "escaped the pollutions of the world through the

knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ are again entangled therein and overcome" so that "the latter end is worse with them than the beginning" (2 Pet. 2:20). Fourth, it announces the apostasy of those who, under pressure of persecution, renounce the Faith.

"Whose voice then shook the earth: but now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven" (verse 26). There are some points about this verse and the one immediately following which are far from easy to elucidate, yet their main purport is not difficult to determine. In ceasing to "speak on earth" and in now "speaking from Heaven" God gave therein intimation that the old covenant had been supplanted by the new: that He had done with Judaism and established the "better thing" in its place. This was what the pious Hebrews found so hard to perceive, for Judaism had been instituted by God Himself. Nevertheless, He only designed it to fulfill a temporary purpose "until the time of reformation" (Heb. 9:10), and that time had now arrived. It was to demonstrate and establish this important fact that God moved His servant to write this Epistle.

Once more we would call attention to the method employed: Paul did not simply press his apostolic authority, though that had been sufficient of itself; instead, he referred his readers to the written Word of God, quoting from Haggai—in this too he has left an admirable example for all ministers of the Gospel to follow: the words of God Himself are far more weighty than any of ours. At every vital stage of his argument the apostle had referred the Hebrews to the O.T. Scriptures. When he affirmed that Christ was superior to the heavenly hosts, he quoted, "Let all the angels of God worship Him" (Heb. 1:6). When he warned of the danger of apostacy, he referred them to Psalm 95 (Heb. 3:7-11). When he insisted that Christ's priesthood excelled Aaron's, he cited, "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 7:17). When he declared that the old covenant was an imperfect and temporary one, he reminded them that Jeremiah had foretold the "new covenant" (Heb. 8:8-10).

When he dwelt upon Christ coming to earth with the express purpose of supplanting all the Levitical sacrifices by offering Himself unto God, the apostle showed that Psalm 40 had fore-announced (Heb. 10:5-7) this very truth. When he called upon the Hebrews to walk by faith, he quoted Habakkuk 2:4, and then

devoted the whole of the 11th chapter to illustrate the fact that all of the O.T. saints had so walked. When he admonished them for fainting under the chastening rod of God, he bade them remember the exhortation of Proverbs 3:11 (Heb. 12:5). When he would prove to them the inferiority of Judaism to Christianity, he dwelt upon the Exodus record of the terrifying phenomena which accompanied the appearing of the Lord at Sinai, where He entered into covenant with their fathers (Heb. 12:18-21). And now that he affirmed that God no longer spake to them "on earth," but rather "from Heaven," he appeals again to their own Scriptures to show this very change had been Divinely predicted.

What an amazing knowledge of the Scriptures Paul possessed! and what a splendid use he made of it! He did not entertain his hearers and readers with anecdotes or by relating some of the sensational experiences through which God had brought him, still less did he descend to "pleasantries" and jokes in order to amuse them. No, he constantly brought them face to face with the Holy Word of the thrice Holy God. And that, by grace, is the unvarying policy we have sought to follow in this magazine: not only do we sedulously avoid any cheapening of the glorious Gospel of Christ, but we endeavor to furnish a proof text for every statement we make; for we ask no one to believe any doctrine or perform any duty on our mere say-so. Some may complain that there is "too much repetition" in our articles, or that they are "too introspective," or "too Calvinistic," but their quarrel is not with us, but with Him whose Word we expound and enforce.

"Whose voice then shook the earth: but now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven" (verse 26). The simplest and surest way of discovering the meaning of this verse and the force of citing Haggai 2:6, is to keep in mind the particular design which the apostle had before him. That was twofold: to enforce the exhortation he had just given in the previous verse, and to continue emphasizing and demonstrating the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. We will consider its terms, then, from each of these viewpoints. First, Paul emphasizes the terribleness of turning away from God in Christ: if He who "shook" the earth is to be feared, much more so is He who "shakes" Heaven! Then let us beware of ignoring His voice: by inattention, by unbelief, by disobedience, by apostasy.

"Whose voice then shook the earth" is a figurative reference to God's omnipotence, for His "voice" here has reference to the mighty power of God in operation: let the reader carefully compare Psalm 29:3-9, where he will find the wondrous effects of Providence ascribed to the "voice" of God. In particular, the apostle here alludes to the declaration of God's authority and the putting forth of His great strength at the time the Law was given: Sinai itself was convulsed, so that "the whole mount quaked greatly" (Ex. 19:18). Yet more than the earthquake is included in the words of our text: the entire commotion involved, with all the particulars enumerated in Hebrews 12:18-21, is comprehended therein. It is designated "shook the earth" because it was all on the earth, and involved only earthly things—it did not reach to Heaven and eternal things.

"But now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also Heaven." This clause has presented a hard riddle to the commentators, and scarcely any two of them, ancient or modern, agree in the solutions they have offered. Personally, we think they created their own difficulties. First, through failing to perceive that the "but now" is to be understood in connection with the subject the apostle was then discussing, and not as something God was then promising to make good in the future. Second, through failing to give proper attention and weight to the term "promised," which is surely enough to show that the final destruction of this scene (when the doom of the wicked will be sealed) cannot be the subject of which Haggai was prophesying. Third, through a slavish adherence to literalism—recent writers especially—which caused many to miss the meaning of "the earth" and "Heaven" in this passage. But these are points of too much importance to dismiss hurriedly, so we must leave their consideration till the next article.

Hebrews 12:26, 27

Chapter 102 - The Passing of Judaism

It is exceedingly difficult, if not quite impossible, for us to form any adequate conception of the serious obstacles presented to the mind of a pious Jew, when any one sought to persuade him that Judaism had been set aside by God and that he must turn his own back upon it. No analogy or parallel exists in our own experience. It was not merely that the Hebrews were required to turn away from something which their ancestors had set up, and around which twined all their own sentiments and affections of national patriotism, but that they were called upon to abandon a religious system that had been appointed and established by Jehovah Himself. That institution, a theocracy, was unique, sharply distinguished from all the idolatrous systems of the heathen. It was God's outstanding witness in the earth. It had been signally honored and favored by Him. It had existed for no less than fifteen centuries, and even when Christ appeared, He acknowledged the temple—the center and headquarters of Judaism—as "My Father's House."

We cannot but admire the tender grace of God in the gentle and gradual way in which He "broke the news" to His people, little by little preparing their minds to receive the truth that His purpose in Judaism had been completely accomplished. Intimations were given through the prophets that the order of things with which they were connected would give place to another and better. To the same effect the Lord Jesus dropped one hint after another: as, for example, when He pointed out that the old bottles were incapable of receiving the new wine, or when He declared, not that which enters into a man defileth him (as the ceremonial law had taught!) but that which issues from the heart, or when He announced "The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father" (John 4:21; and finally, when He solemnly affirmed "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:38).

The rending of the temple veil by a Divine hand was full of deep meaning for those who had eyes to see. The word given

through Stephen that "the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts 7:48), was another clear ray of heavenly light on the same subject. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus, and the commissioning of him as an apostle to the Gentiles, intimated the direction in which the stream of Divine mercy was now flowing—it had burst the narrow banks of Judaism! The vision granted to Peter (Acts 10) and his message to Cornelius (v. 35), was a further advance along the same line. The important decision of the apostles and elders of the Church at Jerusalem in Acts 15:23-29 not to bind the ceremonial law upon the Gentile converts, was another radical step in the same direction.

Yet Jerusalem still survived, the temple was yet intact, and its services continued. Moreover, the leaders of the Nation had rejected Christ and denounced Christianity as a device of Satan. Many of the Jewish Christians were sorely puzzled and deeply exercised, for the Roman yoke had not been removed. As yet the followers of Christ were but few in number, and for the most part, poor and despised. The Hebrew believers were being hotly persecuted by their unbelieving brethren, and God had made no manifest interposition on their behalf. They were therefore almost ready to conclude that, after all, they had made a dreadful mistake in forsaking the religion of their fathers, and that the sore afflictions they were passing through were a Divine judgment upon them. It was to allay their fears, to more thoroughly instruct their minds, to establish their hearts, that God moved the apostle to write this particular epistle to them—the great theme of which is a display of the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism, and its chief design being a call to perseverance and a warning against apostasy.

But even in this epistle the apostle did not come right out and say plainly "God has discarded Judaism." No, the path of faith is never an easy one. Faith can only thrive while it fights (1 Tim. 6:12). There must be that which deeply exercises the heart if the soul is to be kept in the place of complete dependence upon God! Nevertheless, God always grants sufficient light unto a truly exercised soul to indicate the path which is to be followed; He always provides a foundation for faith to rest upon. Though He may not remove the chief obstacle (as He did not for the Hebrews while the temple still stood!) and grant a complete solution to our

difficulties, yet He graciously furnishes the humble soul sufficient help to circumvent them. Thus it was in this epistle. Though no explicit statement is made that God had done with Judaism, yet sufficient proof was furnished that He had set up something better in its place. This comes out again and again in almost every chapter, notably so in the passage now before us.

What has been pointed out in the last paragraph presents a principle and a fact which it is deeply important for true Christians to lay hold of today. Not a few of the Lord's people are now confronted with similar problems, which if not so acute as the Hebrews faced, are just as real to them: problems relating to church-fellowship, baptism, the Lord's supper, Sabbath observance. For thirty years a situation existed in Israel which produced two parties, neither of which could convince the other; and, as usual, the larger party was in the wrong. On the one hand was the long-established Judaism, which contained the great majority of the Nation; on the other hand was the handful of God's faithful servants with the few who had sufficient grace to receive their teachings and walk by faith. Had the latter been regulated by ancient custom, or by mere numbers, or by the logic of circumstances (the outward providences of God), they had missed God's will for them and had "forsaken their own mercy" (Jon. 2:8).

The little company of converted Hebrews who had left Judaism for Christ were faced with a perplexing and trying situation. No doubt in the case of many of them, their loved ones still adhered reverently and vigorously to the religion of their fathers. Nor could either party convince the other of its error by a simple and direct appeal to Holy Writ. Each side had some Scripture to support it! Nowhere in the O.T. had God expressly said that He would yet do away with Judaism, and nowhere in the N.T. had He openly declared that He had now set Judaism aside. No, dear reader, that is rarely God's way! In like manner, Christendom is now divided on various points both of doctrine and of duty, and each side is able to make out a real "case" by an appeal to Scripture, and often, neither can cite one decisive verse proving the other to be wrong. Yet one is wrong! Only by earnestly waiting upon God individually can His mind be discovered.

But why has God ordered things thus? Why are not the Scriptures so worded that there would be no room for controversy?

To try our hearts. The situation which confronted the converted Hebrews was a real test as to whether they would be followers of men or pleasers of God. The self-righteous Pharisees could appeal to a long-established system of religion in justification of their rejection of Christ; and there are those in Christendom today who vindicate their adherence to what God has never commanded and which is dishonoring to His Son, by an appeal to a long line of godly men who have believed and practiced these very things. When others seek to show that an opposite course is required by Scripture, they profess to be "unable to see" what is quite clear to simple and humble souls, and ask for some verse which expressly forbids what they are doing; which is like those who, in the face of His miracles, said, "If Thou be the Christ tell us plainly" (John 10:24).

No doubt it had made matters much easier for the Hebrews if the apostle said plainly, "God has completely finished with Judaism:" that had "settled the matter" for hesitating ones who were halting between two opinions—and poor fallen human nature loves to have things so "settled" that there may be an end to perturbation of mind and exercise of heart. Moreover, the converted Hebrews would then have had a clear proof-text which must have silenced those who differed from them—and we love to have a verse which will close the mouths of those who agree not with us, do we not? Or, God could have allowed the Romans to capture Jerusalem and destroy the temple thirty years sooner than they did: that also had "settled the matter"—yes, and left the Hebrews to walk by sight, instead of by faith! Instead, He gave them this epistle, which called for prayer, study, meditation, and for more prayer.

Let us now very briefly review the line of the apostle's argument in Hebrews 12:18 and onwards. First, he informs the believing Hebrews "Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched" and which was so "terrible" that even Moses quaked "exceedingly" (verses 18-21): no, Divine mercy had delivered them from that system. Second, Paul assures them "But ye are come unto mount Sion (verses 22-24): God had brought them unto an order of things where the Throne of Grace predominated. It is ever the Lord's way to reserve the best wine for the last. Third, the apostle reminds them that increased privileges involve additional obligations, and that failure to discharge those obligations incurs greater guilt; therefore does he urge them to take heed unto God speaking to them

in the person of Christ, warning them that failure so to do would bring down upon them the Divine wrath more surely than did the disobedience of Israel of old (verse 25).

"Whose voice then shook the earth: but now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven" (verse 26). This verse has occasioned much difficulty to the commentators, scarcely any two of them (ancient or modern) agreeing in their interpretation of it. Many of them suppose that the ultimate, if not the prime, reference in the quotation here made from Haggai relates to the final destruction of the earth and the heavens connected with it, as it is described in 2 Peter 3:10-12. But to suppose that Paul here made a declaration which concerned the then far-distant future, is not only to break the unity of this passage, but is to charge him with making a quotation which had no real relevancy to the immediate subject he was discussing. In pondering Hebrews 12:26-29 our first concern must be to trace the connection with the context.

Now in the context the apostle had been treating of two things: the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism, and what this involved concerning the responsibility of those who were the subjects of this higher and grander revelation. These same two things are still before the apostle in the closing verses of our chapter: he continued to show how immeasurably the new covenant excels the old, and he continued to enforce the pressing call which he had made in verse 25. First, he had intimated the vast difference which obtained between the mouthpieces which God employed in connection with the two revelations (verse 25): namely, "Moses" (Heb. 10:28) and "His Son" (Heb. 1:2). Second, he had shown the great disproportion between those two teachers, by pointing out the respective positions they occupied (verse 25). "Moses' seat" (Matthew 23:2) was "on earth," whereas Christ speaks as seated upon His mediatorial throne "from Heaven."

Two things were intimated by God in the different seats or positions occupied by the messengers He had employed. First, inasmuch as He now spake through the Son from Heaven, God denoted that He had finished with Judaism, which was entirely a thing of the earth. Second, that Christianity was of Divine origin, and had to do solely with celestial things. From one angle, this call in Hebrews 12:25 was very similar to that exhortation "If ye then be

risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:1, 2). Before their conversion, the affections of the Hebrews had been centred upon the temple—notice how the disciples, just before the crucifixion, came to Christ "for to show Him the buildings of the temple" (Matthew 24:1); but they were to be "thrown down!"—Christ had returned to Heaven, and thither their hearts must follow Him. Thus, the heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1), heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3:20), heavenly inheritance (1 Pet. 1:4), instead of the earthly concerns of Judaism, were now to engage the hearts and minds of the regenerate in Israel.

Next, in the verses now before us, the apostle brings out the vastly different effects produced through the two messengers. This is the central fact in verses 26, 27: the Voice "from Heaven" produced proportionately greater results than did the voice which spake "on earth." God through Christ speaks more powerfully and effectually than He did through Moses. Let us be careful not to lose sight of this general idea when pondering the details. A much greater and more far-reaching "shaking" was produced by the latter than was the case with the former. We believe that Matthew Henry was on the fight track when he said, "It is by the Gospel from heaven that God shook to pieces the civil and ecclesiastical state of the Jewish nation, and introduced a new state of the church, that cannot be removed, shall never be changed for any other on earth, but shall remain till it be made perfect in heaven." The apostle is still supplying proof that the Hebrew believers were no longer connected with Judaism, but were come to the antitypical Zion.

"Whose voice then shook the earth." Here is the connecting link with the context: the "then" referring to the instituting of Judaism. "But now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven." The "but now" is not so much a time-mark as it is an adverbial expression, relating to the theme under immediate discussion, namely, the establishment and super-excellency of Christianity. Thus, to show once more the infinitely surpassing and glorious effects of power and majesty which issued from the voice of Christ, speaking from heaven by the Gospel, and so as to give a more lively representation of the same, the apostle compares them with the greatly inferior effects that accompanied the deliverance of the Law. As the right understanding of this "But now"

has an important bearing upon all that follows, we subjoin the comments of another thereon.

"The word now does not denote the period when the promise was made, but the period to which the promise referred, which was now, opposed to then when the Law was established. It was equivalent to 'But with regard to the present period, which is the commencement of a new order of things, He has promised, saying.' This use of the word now in the apostle's writings is common: Romans 3:21; 16:26 etc." (John Brown). There is, then, an opposition of the "But now" to what occurred at the "then" at the beginning of the verse. It is to be carefully noted that Paul did not say "He hath now promised," i.e. that in the apostle's day God had announced He was going to do something in the far-distant future; instead, it is "But now He hath promised:" the "now" relating to the fulfillment of what Haggai had foretold, and not to some promise given through the apostle.

"But now He hath promised, saying." This "saying" which the apostle at once quotes from Haggai he styles a "promise," and that for at least three reasons. First, because what was but a prophecy in Haggai's day had received its actual accomplishment in the apostle's time, in connection with the establishment of Christianity. Second, because this was therefore something for faith to lay hold of, and that is what he was seeking to persuade the Hebrew believers to do. Third, to prevent any misconception on our part: had the apostle been pointing out that the prophecy of Haggai contained a yet deeper meaning and more ultimate reference, even to predicting the final destruction of this world and all its works, he had surely been very far from designating such an unparalleled Divine judgment as that, by the term "promise!" A "promise" always refers to something that is good, and never to a calamity!

"Whose voice then shook the earth: but now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven." Let us now inquire, What is denoted by this "shaking" of earth and heaven? This is a figure which is used in the O.T. quite frequently to express a great change, produced by the providences and power of God in the affairs of men. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (Ps. 46:1, 2), which is explained in "The

heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: He uttered His voice, the earth melted" (verse 6). "Thou hast made the earth to tremble: Thou hast broken it: heal the breaches thereof, for it shaketh" (Ps. 60:2): what is signified by that metaphorical language is indicated in the next verse, "Thou hast showed Thy people hard things: Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment." "Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place" (Isa. 13:13)—language which signifies a tremendous commotion among the nations—compare Joel 3:16. Such vivid imagery is common in the Prophets.

"He stretched out His hand over the sea," which is interpreted in the next sentence "He shook the kingdoms" (Isa. 23:11). "Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down" (Isa. 24:1)—words, we need hardly say, which are not to be taken literally. "At His wrath the earth shall tremble," explained in the following clause, "and the nations shall not be able to abide His indignation" (Jer. 10:10). "Arise, contend thou with the mountains: and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye O mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth" (Mic. 6:1, 2): such language is not to be understood literally, as the next clause shows "For the Lord hath a controversy with His people." "For the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (Luke 21:26). Even Mr. Darby admitted (in his "Synopsis"), "This shaking of all things—whether here (Heb. 12:26, 27) or in the analogous passage in 2 Peter—evidently goes beyond Judaism, but has peculiar application to it"—italics ours.

"Whose voice then shook the earth." The immediate reference is to Sinai at the time the law was given. But, as we have seen, that material mount was emblematic of the entire economy which was then established. Thus the "shaking" of the "earth" denoted the great outward change which took place in the days of Moses. The external state of Israel was then greatly altered. They were organized into a kingdom and church-state (Acts 7:38), into a theocracy. Yet glorious as was that change, it reached not to "heaven," that is to say, it affected not their inner man and was not concerned with spiritual and eternal relations. "The economy established at Sinai, viewed by itself, was a temporal covenant with a worldly nation, referring to temporal promises, an earthly inheritance, a worldly sanctuary, a typical priesthood, and carnal

ordinances" (J. Brown).

"But now (in relation to Christianity) He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven." The careful reader will observe that the prophet had said, "I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land" (Hag. 2:6), whereas the apostle was moved by the Holy Spirit to word it—for the sake of his emphasis—"I shake not the earth only, but also heaven," hence a shaking of both "earth" and "heaven" was here in view. "The voice in heaven produces more extensive and more permanent effects. It shakes both earth and heaven—effects a change both on the external and spiritual circumstances of those who are under it; and it effects a permanent change, which is to admit of no radical essential change forever" (J. Brown).

Though a great change had been produced in connection with the giving of the old covenant, a far greater change had been effected in the establishing of the new covenant. That had affected but one nation only, and that, merely in its external and temporal circumstances: this reaches unto God's people among all nations, and affects their spiritual and eternal interests. It was reserved for God's Son to bring this about, for in all things He must have the preeminence. A much greater commotion and convulsion in human affairs has been brought in by Immanuel, yea, it was then as though the very universe was shaken to its center. In order to the establishing of that kingdom of Christ's which shall never be moved, there were tremendous revolutions, both in connection with Judaism and the idolatrous systems of the heathen—"These that have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6) was the charge preferred against the apostles.

Now as the great change in the temporal affairs of Israel at the instituting of Judaism had been adumbrated by the quaking of Sinai, so the far greater alterations introduced by the establishing of Christianity were also shadowed forth in the various physical phenomena and angelic appearances. "At His birth a new star appeared in the heavens, which filled the generality of men with amazement, and put those who were wise to diligent inquiries about it. His birth was proclaimed by an angel from heaven, and celebrated by 'a multitude of the heavenly hosts.' In His ministry the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the shape of a dove. These things may answer that mighty work in heaven which

is here intimated. On the earth, wise men came from the east to inquire after Him; Herod and all Jerusalem were shaken at the tidings of Him. In the discharge of His work He wrought miracles in heaven and earth, sea and dry land, on the whole creation of God. Wherefore in the first coming of Christ the words had their literal accomplishment in an eminent manner.

"Take the words metaphorically for great changes, commotions and alterations in the world, and so also were they accomplished in Him and His coming. No such alteration made in the world since the creation of it as was then, and in what ensued thereon. All the 'heavens' of the world were then shaken, and after a while removed: that is, all their gods and all their worship, which had continued from time immemorial, which were the 'heavens of the people,' were first shaken, and then utterly demolished. The 'earth' also was moved, shaken and changed: for all nations were stirred up, some to inquire after Him, some to oppose Him, whereon great concussions and commotions did ensue; till all the most noble parts of it were made subject to Him.

"But, as we observed before, it is the dealing of God with the church, and the alteration which He would make in the state thereof, concerning which the apostle treats. It is therefore the 'heaven' of Mosaic worship and that Judaical church-state, with the 'earth' of their political state belonging thereunto, that are here intended. These were they that were 'shaken' at the coming of Christ, and so shaken as shortly after to be removed and taken away, for the introduction of the more heavenly worship of the Gospel, and the immovable evangelical church-state. This was the greatest commotion and alteration that God ever made in the 'heaven' and 'earth' of the church. This was far more great and glorious than the shaking of the 'earth' at the giving of the law. Wherefore, not to exclude the senses before mentioned, which are consistent with this, and may be respected in the prophecy as outward signs and indications of it, this is that which is principally intended in the words, and which is proper to the argument in hand" (John Owen).

"And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain" (verse 27). This is the apostle's inspired commentary on Haggai's prophecy. He points out that the "yet once more" denoted there had previously been a great

change wrought in Israel's fortunes, and also that now another radical alteration had been made therein. He insists that the "shaking" was in order to effect a removal of what was only transient, and that the great change was only in order that that which is unchangeable might remain—that the permanent might be fixedly established.

Hebrews 12:27

Chapter 103 - The Establishing of Christianity

The Divine incarnation was not some sudden, isolated, and unexpected event. The advent of our blessed Lord, and with it the dawn of Christianity, marked a climax and consummation. The world was prepared through long processes for the coming of the One and the preaching of the other: from Eden to Bethlehem the centuries were preparing for the appearing of Immanuel. As the processes of creation fitted the earth for man to live upon it, so all history paved the way for the birth of the God-man. The Holy Scriptures focused the Divine preparation in one race, yet all peoples shared in the process: outside of the elect nation God was at work, and all streams converged to a single center. The march of events was both slow and complicated, yet eventually the stage was fully set and a suitable background made for the appearing of the promised Savior.

"When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). This signifies much more than that the time appointed by the Father had now arrived when He would put an end to the Mosaic economy and replace the shadows and types by the substance and Antitype. It denoted that conditions were peculiarly suitable for the introduction of a new and enlarged dispensation, that everything was now ripe for the execution of God's great purpose. All the foundations had been laid. The long night of preparation had now run its course. The chrysalis was ready to burst its bonds; the fields were white unto the harvest; the olive tree was ready for the grafting of other branches into it (Rom. 11). The "fullness of time" intimates both ripeness of opportunity and consummation of need. The advent of God's Son to this earth and the proclamation of the Gospel far and wide, not only introduced a new era, it also marked the climax of the old.

In its relation to the immediate context this expression, "the fullness of time," signifies that the Church on earth had been prepared for the coming of God's Son by having now outgrown the

conditions of her childhood and minority, making her feel the irksomeness of the bonds upon her and to long for the liberty of maturity. The legal economy was merely a "schoolmaster unto Christ," and it had now served its purpose. The old economy had decayed and waxed old, and was "ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13). Aged Simeon was a representative of that godly remnant who were "waiting for the Consolation of Israel," for there was a Divinely prepared company that then "looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:25, 38). The favored Nation as a whole had lost its liberty, being under the yoke of the Romans, and seemed on the point of relinquishing its mission; the need for the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies was real and pressing.

There was a remarkable combination of circumstances tending to prepare the world for the Gospel, and a fearful climax in the world's need of redemption. The break up of old heathen faiths and the passing away of the prejudices of antiquity, disposed men for a new revelation which was spiritual, humane, non-provincial. The utter failure of Pagan religion from immorality, and of Pagan philosophy from its impotency to cure that immorality and the miseries it entailed, called loudly for some new Faith, which should be both sure and powerful. The century immediately preceding our Lord's advent was probably the most remarkable in all history. Everything was in a state of transition; old things were passing away; the fruit of the ancient order was rotting upon the tree, though without yielding the seeds of a new order. There were strange rumors afloat of coming relief, and singular hopes stirred the hearts of men that some Great One was about to appear and renovate the world.

"The fullness of time was come." First, the world had reached its climacteric of sin. History has given a faithful record of the terrible moral conditions which obtained among men in the century that immediately preceded our Lord's advent. At Rome, which was then the metropolis of the world, the Court of Caesar was steeped in luxury and licentiousness. To provide amusement for his senators six hundred gladiators fought a hand to hand conflict in the public theater. Not to be outdone, Pompey turned five hundred lions into the arena to engage an equal number of his braves, and "delicate ladies" sat applauding and gloating over the blood that flowed. Children were the property of the state, to be disposed of as was

deemed best for the public interests. The aged and infirm were banished to an island in the Tiber. Marriage was wholly a matter of sensual caprice; divorce was so frequent, it was customary for women to count them by the number of rings worn on their fingers. About two thirds of the entire civilized world were slaves, their masters having absolute power over them.

Conditions in Greece were even worse. Sensual indulgence and every species of cruelty were carried to the highest pitch. Gluttony was an art. Fornication was indulged without restraint. Parents were at liberty to expose their children to perish from cold and hunger or to be eaten up by wild beasts, such exposure being practiced frequently, and passed without punishment or censure. Wars were carried on with the utmost ferocity: if any of the vanquished escaped death, slavery of the most abject kind was the only prospect before them; and in consequence, death was considered preferable to capture. "The dark places of the earth were filled with the habitations of cruelty" (Ps. 74:20). The world had reached its climacteric of sin, and this provided a dark background from which could shine forth the Light. Oftentimes a disease cannot be treated until it "comes to a head." In view of the above conditions, the world was ready for the appearing of the great Physician.

"The fullness of time was come." The world had reached its consummation of want. It had been predicted of old that the Messiah should be "the Desire of all nations:" to this end there must be a complete exposure of the failure of all human plans for deliverance. This time had arrived when Christ was born. Never before had the abject misery and need of humanity been so apparent and so extensive. Philosophy had lost its power to satisfy men, and the old religions were dead. The Greeks and Romans stood at the head of the nations at the time our Lord appeared on earth, and the religious state of those peoples in that age is too well known to require any lengthy description of it. Polytheism and Pantheism were the popular concepts: innumerable deities were worshipped, and to those gods were attributed the most abominable characteristics. Human sacrifices were frequently offered upon their altars.

Judaism was also fully ripe for the accomplishment of Messianic prophecy. Sadduceeism had leavened the ruling classes and affected the nation with rationalism and skepticism.

Phariseeism, which represented the ideas and ideals of the popular party, was too often only formal and hypocritical, and at best was cold and hard, "binding heavy burdens" and laying on men's shoulders a load which they refused to touch with their fingers (Matthew 23:4). The nation was under the government of Rome, and was thoroughly discouraged. Was there, then, no eye to pity, no arm to save? Was God unmindful of the tragic condition of mankind? No, blessed be His name, the "fullness of time was come:" a platform was then ready on which the glories of Divine grace might be exhibited, and now arose "the Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings" (Mal. 4:2).

"The fullness of time was come." The needed preparations were completed, and the high-water mark was reached. Side by side with the preliminary movements in Israel, Divine providence had also been at work in heathendom, making ready the world for the dawn of Christianity. Political conditions were singularly favorable for the coming of the Gospel. Most of the then known earth was within the bounds of the Roman empire. Everywhere the Romans went good roads were made, along which went the soldier, and after him the merchant and scholar. In a short time commercial intercourse fused various peoples. Previously, old national distinctions had bound up religious prejudices, each country having its own gods, and any attempt to foist a foreign religion upon a nation was bitterly resented. But national barriers were now broken down by Roman prowess and international intercourse, and religious exclusiveness was greatly weakened. All of this facilitated the task of the missionaries of the Cross. The Roman roads became highways for the evangelists, and Roman law afforded them protection.

Parallel with the growth of the Roman empire was the spread of Grecian culture. The Grecian tongue was the one most extensively used as the language of learning: all educated people were supposed to understand it. This was a most suitable medium by which the Christian messengers could speak to a great multitude of peoples, without enduring the tedious delay of learning new languages. In Syria, Egypt, Phrygia, and Italy, as well as Greece and Asia Minor, the heralds of Christ could make themselves understood everywhere by using the common tongue employed by all teachers of that day. Moreover this language was so delicately modulated as

to surpass all other forms of speech in its capacity for expressing new ideas. It was therefore exactly what was needed for the setting forth of a new revelation to the world at large.

It was the same with Judaism. Now had arrived the time for the fulfillment of its mission: the giving to the world of the O.T. Scriptures, and the realization of the Hope which they presented. Judaism was to give birth to Christianity: out of the old soil the new order was to spring. The position of the Jews at that time wonderfully facilitated the spread of the Gospel, for they were already dispersed abroad everywhere. In the days of Augustus there were forty thousand Jews at Rome, and by the time of Tiberius double that number. The Jewish synagogues furnished a means of communication between Christian gospelers and the heathen world. A synagogue was to be found in almost every town throughout the Roman empire, and to it the evangelists first went; and thus a suitable language was provided for communicating with all peoples, and centers of work were to be found in every city.

In such a striking conjunction of favorable providences we cannot but behold and admire the controlling hand of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. They served to greatly lessen the severe shock which the displacing of the old order of things and the introduction of the new order was bound to bring, for the claims of Christ are of a very radical nature and His demands revolutionizing. Even so, the establishing of Christianity is spoken of as a shaking of "not the earth only, but also heaven" (verse 26): though such language be figurative, nevertheless it refers to that which was intensely real and drastic. Our assertion that the last clause of verse 26 is not to be understood in a material sense (as is now widely supposed), calls for some further expository remarks thereon, particularly concerning its setting here, its original, and its connection.

At verse 25 the apostle began an exhortation which was based upon what had been pointed out in verses 18-24, and which he re-enforces by additional considerations. The exhortation consists of a call to hear and heed God's message to us through Christ. God is the Author of Old and New Testaments alike: in the former He spoke through Moses and the prophets; in the latter by the Son, His final Spokesman. The manifestation which God made in Christ and the message He has given us through Him, completes the revelation of

His will. This final message was declared neither by man nor angel, but by the only begotten Son. Then let us beware of treating such a revelation in a manner ill-fitting its high character. The superior dignity of the Messenger and the supreme importance of His message must ensure severer punishment to those who despise and reject Him.

The urgency of this call for us to hear Christ is intimated by pointing out that since those who had disregarded God's message through Moses escaped not, a far worse punishment must be the portion of those who turn a deaf ear unto Him speaking through the Son (verse 25). The superiority of God's revelation by the Son to the message given through Moses was evidenced by the phenomena which attended each, and the different effects which followed their appearing: the Voice "from heaven" (by Christ) produced proportionately greater results than did the Voice which spake by Moses, "on earth." The Voice through each produced a "shaking," but that through the latter was far more extensive than that through the former (verse 26). In proof of this declaration the apostle quoted and commented upon a striking prediction found in Haggai, the pertinency and scope of which we would now consider. For a better understanding thereof we will turn to its original setting.

In chapter 1 Haggai rebukes the indifference of the Jewish remnant (who had returned to Palestine from the Babylonish captivity) for their neglect to rebuild God's house. This stirred them up to proceed therewith. In chapter 2 the prophet comforts them. The rebuilding of the temple had then proceeded far enough for it to be made manifest that in its outward glory it was far inferior to Solomon's. A great lamentation ensued, and the prophet asks, "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" (Heb. 2:3). The people greatly feared that Jehovah had deserted them, and to re-assure them Haggai declared, "Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not" (Heb. 2:4, 5); and then it was that he set before them the grand hope of the Messiah's appearing.

"For thus saith the Lord of hosts, Yet once, it is a little while and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts" (Hag. 2:6-9). Here was a message of comfort to the sorrowing remnant of the prophet's day, and from it the apostle quotes in Hebrews 12.

The first thing we would note in the above prediction is the statement "a little while and I will shake," which makes it evident that the "shaking" did not look forward to the final and universal convulsion of nature at the end of time; rather was the reference to that which preceded and was connected with the establishing of Christianity, which was comparatively an impending event in Haggai's day. Second, the "shaking" was not to occur in the material world, but in the political and religious realms, as is clear from the closing verses of this very chapter. "I will shake the heavens, and the earth" (verse 21) is at once defined as "and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen" (verse 22)—this commenced shortly afterwards, for the axe lay at the root of the Persian empire. Third, there was the express promise that the glory of the temple built in Haggai's day should exceed that of Solomon's.

That third item needs to be very carefully weighed by us, for it is of great importance. This was the chief point of comfort in Haggai's prediction. His fellows were deeply distressed (see Ezra 3:12) at the comparative meanness of the house of God which they were erecting, but he assures them it should yet possess a glory that far excelled that of Solomon's. That greater glory was not a material one, but a spiritual: it was expressly said to be the coming to it of "the Desire of all nations." It was by the appearing of the Messiah that the real "glory" would accrue unto the second temple, and that must be while it still stood! Haggai's temple was enlarged and beautified by Herod three hundred years later, but the original structure was never destroyed, so that it continued one and the same "house;" and to it Christ came! The "little while," then, of Haggai 2:6 was parallel with the "suddenly" of Malachi 3:1.

The fourth and last thing was "and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts" (Heb. 2:9). That also was spiritual: referring to the peace which Christ should make "through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20) between God and His people, and the amity which should be established between believing Jews and believing Gentiles (see Ephesians 2:14-16) in the same worship of God. This was the principal work of Christ: to put away sin (which was the cause of enmity and strife) and to bring in peace. Finally, the manner in which all this was to be effected was by a great "shaking," not only in the midst of Israel, but also among the Gentiles. Observe carefully the "yet once" of Haggai 2:6: there had been a great "shaking" when the first covenant was instituted, but there would be a still greater at the establishing of the new covenant. Thus the "yet once" signifies, first, once more; and secondly, once for all—finally.

Now from the above prophecy of Haggai Paul quotes in Hebrews 12:26. The apostle's object was a double one: to supply additional proof for the superiority of Christianity over Judaism, and to give further point to the exhortation he had made in verse 25. Evidence is here given from the O.T. to show that the voice of God speaking by Christ had produced far greater effects than His word had through Moses. The contrasts, then, between the old and new covenants, and the excelling of the latter over the former, may be summed up thus: the one was connected with Sinai, the other brings us unto Sion (verses 18-24); the one was inaugurated by Moses, the other by the Son; the one was God speaking "on earth," the other "from heaven;" the one "shook the earth," the other "heaven" itself (verse 26); the one is "removed" the other "remains" (verse 27); therefore, HEAR the Son!

How far astray, then, are those commentators who suppose that Haggai's prophecy refers to the final judgment at the last day, when the whole fabric of nature shall shake and be removed! First, such a terrifying event was altogether alien to the scope of Haggai's purpose, which was to comfort his sorrowing brethren. Second, such a prediction had been entirely irrelevant to the apostle's scope, for he was comparing not the giving of the law with the Day of Judgment, but the giving of the law with the promulgation of the Gospel by Christ Himself; for his whole design was to exhibit the preeminence of the Evangelical economy. Third, nor would such dreadful doom be designated a "promise" (Heb. 12:26). Fourth, the

apostle clearly intimated that Haggai's prophecy was now fulfilled (verse 28). Finally, there is no reason whatever why we should regard the shaking of heaven and earth here as a literal one: it was spiritual things of which the apostle was discoursing—such as issue in that unshakable kingdom which believers receive in this world.

Let us admire the striking appropriateness of Haggai's prophecy to the purpose the apostle then had in hand. Haggai's prediction concerned the person and appearing of Christ: "The Desire of all nations shall come." There it was announced that God would do greater works than He had performed in the days of Moses (Hag. 2:5-7). God shook Egypt before He gave the law, He shook Sinai at the giving of it, He shook the surrounding nations (especially in Canaan) just after it. But in "a little while" He would do greater things. The prophet's design was to fix the eyes of the Jews upon the first advent of Christ, which was their great expectation, and to assure them that their temple would then possess a glory far excelling that of Solomon's. Meanwhile, God would overthrow "the throne of kingdoms and destroy the strength of the heathen" (verse 22), as the forerunning signs of Christ's advent during the short season which intervened before His appearing.

How pertinent and well-suited, then, was Haggai's prophecy to the subject Paul was developing! That prediction had been fulfilled: Christ had come and made good its terms: conclusive proof of this is found in the changing of the verb—the prophet's "I will shake" being altered to "I shake," for the apostle regarded the "shaking" as present and not future. A "promise" had been given that a greater work of Divine power, grace and glory should be wrought at the appearing of the Messiah than what took place in connection with the exodus from Egypt and the giving of the law, and this was now accomplished. How clearly and how forcibly did this demonstrate the pre-eminency of the new covenant above the old: so far as the glory of the second temple excelled that of the first was Christianity superior to Judaism! Finally, how well did this "shaking" of heaven intimate the permanency and finality of Christianity, for the shaking was in order that the unshakable might abide (verse 27).

It now remains for us to weigh the comment which the apostle made upon this citation from Haggai: "And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken,

as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain" (verse 27). Incidentally, let it be pointed out that here we have a helpful illustration of the province and task of the teacher: in expounding God's Word he not only compares passage with passage and defines the meaning of its terms, but he also indicates what legitimate inferences and conclusions may be drawn, what its statements imply as well as directly affirm. This is exactly what the apostle does here: he argues that the word "once" (used by the prophet) not only signified "once more," but that it also denoted the setting aside of the order of things previously existing.

There is a fullness in the words of Holy Writ which can only be discovered by prolonged meditation and careful analysis. The prophecy of Haggai had said nothing expressly about the "removing" of anything, yet what was not stated explicitly was contained therein implicitly. The apostle insists that a "removing" was implied in the terms of Haggai's prediction. The very fact that God had "shaken" the Mosaic economy to its very foundations—the preaching and miracles of Christ (and later by His apostles) had caused thousands to leave it, the Lord's denunciation of the religion leaders and His exposure of their hypocrisy had undermined the confidence of the masses, while the rending of the temple veil by a Divine hand had clearly and solemnly signified the end of the Levitical system—was plain intimation that He was on the eve of setting the whole aside, and that, for the purpose of setting up something better in its place; what that something is, we must leave for our next chapter.

N.B. Had some of our twentieth century Christians been present they would have taken issue with the apostle and said, "Paul, you are taking undue liberties with the Word of God, which we cannot consent to. The Holy Spirit through Haggai spoke of a "shaking," whereas you change it to "removing." Had the apostle replied, "I am simply pointing out what the prophet's language clearly implies, drawing an obvious inference from his statement." The rejoinder would be, "We do not need to do any reasoning upon the Word. Moreover, any simple soul can see that shaking and removing are very different things, and had the prophet meant the latter he would have said so, and not used the former." An expositor of Scripture often encounters such quibbling today: it is worse than ignorance, for it deceives not a few into supposing that such slavish

adherence to the letter of Scripture (being occupied with its sound, instead of seeking its sense) is honoring the same.

Hebrews 12:28

Chapter 104 - The Kingdom of Christ

We hope that we made clear in the preceding articles the general idea contained in the citation from the O.T. which the apostle made in Hebrews 12:26, namely, that under the proclamation of the Gospel there would be a more radical and far-reaching effect produced, than was the case at the giving of the Law, thereby manifesting the superiority of the one over the other. The more specific meaning of Haggai's prediction (Heb. 2:6) was that the Jewish church and state would be dissolved, for both the ecclesiastical and civil spheres of Judaism ("heaven and earth") were "shaken." Its wider significance comprehended the convulsions which would be produced in heathendom (the "sea" of Haggai 2:6, and cf. verses 21, 22). The great design of God in the Divine incarnation was the setting up of Christ's kingdom, but before it could be properly established there had to be a mighty shaking in order that the shadows in Judaism might give place to the substance, and that sinners among the Gentiles be made spiritual.

The appearing of the Messiah introduced and necessitated a total dissolution of the entire Judaic economy: the Levitical institutions being fulfilled in Christ, they had now served their purpose. This was solemnly signified by the Divine rending of the temple veil, and forty years later by the total destruction of the temple itself. But in the meanwhile it was difficult to persuade the Hebrews that such was the case, and therefore did the apostle clinch the argument he had made in 12:18-24 and the exhortation he had given in verse 26 by quoting a proof-text from their own Scriptures. Haggai's language that the Lord would "shake the heavens" referred, as we have seen, not to the starry heavens or celestial planets, but to the Judaical constitution under the ceremonial law—called the "heavens" because they typed out heavenly things! Ultimately God would "shake" and remove all dominions, thrones and powers which were opposed to the kingdom of Christ—as, for example, He later did the Roman empire.

"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved" (verse 28). The design of the Holy Spirit in the whole of this passage (Heb. 12:18-29) was to enhance in the Hebrews' estimation the supremacy and excellency of Christ's kingdom, which His Gospel has "brought to light," and of which the believers have been given the right and assurance, for it was to make way for the establishment of Christ's kingdom that those mighty "shakings" occurred. Paul insists that God's "shakings" were in order to "remove" that which hindered the manifestation and development of Christ's kingdom. Here, then, is further proof that, so far from Haggai's prophecy looking forward to the universal convulsion of nature at the last day, it has already had its fulfillment: believers now actually obtain the fruit of that "shaking," for they "receive" the unshakable kingdom, namely the kingdom of Christ which cannot be moved. We trust this is now so plain to the reader that further effort on our part to establish the same is unnecessary.

But not only did the prophecy of Haggai announce the superiority of Christianity over Judaism and the necessary setting aside of the one for the other, but it also clearly intimated the finality of the Christian dispensation. This is plain from the words of Hebrews 12:27, "yet once more." According to modern dispensationalists Paul should have said, "yet twice more," for their view is, that just as the Mosaic dispensation was followed by the Christian, so the Christian will be succeeded by a revived and glorified Judaism in "the Millennium." But "once more" means once only, and then no more. Christianity is the final thing which God has for this earth. The last great dispensational change was made when the Gospel was given to all the world: hence Peter could say, "the end of all things is at hand" (1 Pet. 4:7), for God has now spoken His last word to mankind. Hence also John said, "It is the last hour" (1 John 2:18), which had not been true if another dispensation is to follow the one we are now in.

"And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain" (verse 27). Here the apostle explains Haggai's "Yet once it is a little while (cf. the "now" of Hebrews 12:26) and I will shake the heavens" etc. When Paul refers to the things shaken and removed "as of things that are made," he was far from adding a superfluous clause: it emphasized again the

contrast he was drawing. The phrase "as of things that are made" is elliptical, needing the added words "made" (by hands) to bring out its sense. Everything connected with Judaism was made by human hands: even the tables of stone on which were inscribed the ten commandments, God commanded Moses to "hew" (Ex. 34:1), while the tabernacle and all connected with it was to be "made" according to "the pattern" God showed him (Ex. 25:8, 9). In sharp and blessed contrast, the immaterial and spiritual things of Christianity are "not made with hands" (2 Cor. 5:1), but are "made without hands" (Col. 2:11).

"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved let us have grace whereby we may serve God." The apostle here draws an inference from what had just been pointed out concerning the shaking and removing of Judaism and the establishing of Christianity. First, here is a great privilege into which Christians have entered, namely, a spiritual state under the rule of Jesus Christ—whom God hath anointed and set as king upon His holy hill of Zion (Ps. 2:6)—here called a "kingdom." Second, the essential character of this kingdom, in contrast from all others, namely its immoveability—its finality and permanency. Third, the way of the believer's participation of it: we "receive" it. "This kingdom, then, is the rule of Christ in and over the Gospel-state of the church, which the apostle hath proved to be more excellent than that of the Law" (John Owen). This kingdom we must now consider.

At the beginning of human history God's kingdom was realized on this earth, so that there was no need to pray, "Thy kingdom come." God's kingship was established in Eden, and all the blessings that flow from subjection to His dominion were then enjoyed. The supremacy of God was gladly and spontaneously acknowledged by all His creatures. But sin entered, and a radical change ensued. Man repudiated the kingship of God, for by transgressing His commandments Adam rejected His sovereignty. By so doing, by heeding the suggestions of the Serpent, the "kingdom of Satan" (Matthew 12:26) was set up in this world. Shortly afterwards, God established His mediatorial kingdom, Abel being its first subject.

Since the Fall there have been two great empires at work on this earth: the "world" and "the kingdom of God." Those who belong to the former own not God; those who pertain to the latter, profess

subjection to Him. In O.T. times the Israelitish theocracy was the particular sphere of God's kingdom on earth, the domain where His authority was manifested in a special way (Judg. 8:23, 1 Samuel 12:12, Hosea 13:9, 10, etc.). But subjection to Him, even there, was, on the part of the Nation as a whole, but partial and brief. The time soon came when Jehovah had to say to His servant, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Sam. 8:7). Then it was that the Lord appointed human kings in Israel as His representatives, for while the Sinaitic covenant (Ex. 19:6) continued in force Jehovah remained their King—it was the "King which made a marriage feast for His Son" (Matthew 22:2)! Though Saul, David, and his successors, bore the regal character, and thus partly obscured the Divine government, yet it was not abolished (see 2 Chronicles 13:8). The throne on which Solomon sat was called "The throne of the kingdom of the Lord" (1 Chron. 28:5).

Through Israel's prophets God announced that there should yet be a more glorious display of His government than had been witnessed by their fathers of old, and promised that His dominion would take a more spiritual form in the establishing of the Messianic kingdom. This became the great theme of the later predictions of the O.T., though the nature and character of what was to come was necessarily depicted under the figures and forms of those material things with which the people were familiar and by those objects of Judaism which were most venerated by them. The setting up of the spiritual and immovable kingdom of Christ was the issue and goal of all the prophets declared: see Luke 1:69, 70 and cf. Daniel 2:44. "The Lord reigneth, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength, wherewith He hath girded Himself: the world (i.e. the "world to come" of Hebrews 2:5, the new "world" brought in by Christ) also is established, that it cannot be moved" (Ps. 93:1, which is parallel with "we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved" (Heb. 12:28).

But though it had been clearly revealed through the prophets that the Lord Messiah would be a King and have a universal empire, yet the bulk of Abraham's natural descendants entertained a grossly mistaken conception of the true design of Christ's appearing and the real nature of His kingdom, and this mistake produced a most pernicious influence upon their tempers and conduct when the

gracious purpose of His advent was fulfilled. The sense which they affixed to the Messianic prophecies was one that flattered their pride and fostered their carnality. Being ignorant of their spiritual needs and puffed up with a false persuasion of their peculiar interests in Jehovah's favor on the ground of their fleshly descent from Abraham (John 8:39, 41), the lowly life and holy teaching and claims of the Lord Jesus were bitterly opposed by them (John 8:48, 59; Luke 19:14).

Though God had made many announcements through Israel's prophets that the Messiah would occupy the regal office, yet clear intimation was given that He would be very different from the monarchs of earth (Isa. 53:2). Though the Messiah's dominion and reign had been described under material symbols, yet was it made plain that His kingdom would not be "of this world." Through Zechariah it was announced, "Behold, Thy King cometh unto thee: He is just and having salvation: lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Heb. 9:9). How different was that from the imposing splendor assumed by earth's sovereigns! what a contrast was His ass from their magnificent chariots and state-coaches! How plainly did the poverty and meanness of Christ's regal appearance intimate that His kingdom was not of a temporal kind! The Maker of heaven and earth, the Lord of angels, disdained such things as are highly esteemed among men.

The fatal mistake made by the Jews respecting the true nature of the kingdom of the Messiah lay at the foundation of all the opposition with which they treated Him, and of their own ultimate ruin. How it behooves us, then, to prayerfully seek right views of Christ's kingdom, and to resist everything which tends to secularize His holy dominion, lest by corrupting the Evangelical Economy we dishonor the blessed Redeemer, and be finally punished as the enemies of His government. As the main cause of the Jews' infidelity was their erroneous notion of a temporal kingdom of the Messiah, so the principal source of the corruption of Christianity has been the attempt made by Rome and her daughters to turn the spiritual kingdom of Christ into a temporal one, by uniting church and state and seeking to extend it by earthly means.

In John's Gospel (which gives the spiritual side of things more than do the first three Gospels, being specially written to and for believers), there is a most significant word after the account of

our Lord's regal entry into Jerusalem on the back of an ass: "These things understood not His disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of Him" (John 12:16). So prejudiced were the apostles by the erroneous teaching of the Pharisees, that even they did not rightly apprehend the nature of Christ's kingdom till after His ascension. They, too, were looking for a material kingdom, expecting it to appear in external pomp and glory; and hence they were at a complete loss to apprehend those scriptures which spoke of Christ's kingdom as of a mean and lowly appearance. Well did Matthew Henry say, "The right understanding of the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom of its powers, glories, and victories, would prevent our misinterpreting and misapplying of the Scriptures that speak of it."

Alas, how blind men still are as to what constitutes the true glory of Christ's kingdom, namely, that it is a spiritual one, advanced by spiritual means, for spiritual persons, and unto spiritual ends. "To subdue hearts, not to conquer kingdoms; to bestow the riches of His grace to poor and needy sinners, not, like Solomon, to heap up gold and silver and precious stones; to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him, not to spread ruin and desolation over countless provinces (as did Ceasar, Charlemagne, Napoleon—A.W.P.); to be surrounded with an army of martyrs, not an army of soldiers; to hold a court where paupers, not princes, are freely welcome" (J.C. Philpot). Only those favored with true spiritual discernment will be able to perceive what the real honors and glories of the Lamb consist of.

The Mediatorial King must of necessity have a kingdom: even at His birth He was proclaimed as "Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11), and the first inquiry made of Him was "where is He that is born King of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:2). Christ's Kingship and kingdom follow from a twofold cause. First, His sovereignty as God is essential to His Divine nature, being underived, absolute, eternal, and unchanging. Second, His sovereignty as Mediator is derived, being given to Him by the Father as the reward of His obedience and sufferings. It has two distinct aspects: first, in its wider and more general application it embraces all the universe; second, in its narrower and more specific administration it is restricted to the Church, the election of grace. In addition to these distinctions, it is important to note Christ never affirmed that the setting up of His

kingdom on this earth was in any way dependent upon the attitude of the Jews toward Him: no, the eternal purpose of God was never left contingent upon the conduct of worms of the dust.

"When the Jews refused Jesus as the Messiah, He did not say that the founding of the kingdom would be postponed until His second coming, but He did say the kingdom should be taken from them and given to the Gentiles!" (W. Masselink, "Why the Thousand Years?"). "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures. The Stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the Head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:42, 43). Moreover, every passage in the epistles which speak of Christ's kingdom as a present reality, refutes the theory that His kingdom has been postponed until His second advent: see Colossians 1:13, Revelation 1:9—Christ's kingdom existed in the days of John, and he was in it! Christ is now "the Prince of the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:5). He has already been "crowned with glory and honor" (Heb. 2:9).

In consequence of the entrance of sin, God has set up a kingdom in antagonism to the kingdom of Satan. It is essentially different from the kingdoms of the world, in its origin, nature, end, method of development and continuance. It is essentially a kingdom of righteousness, and its central principle is the loyalty of heart of its subjects to the King Himself. It is not a democracy, but an absolute monarchy. The special agency for the extension of it is the organized churches of Christ with their regular ministry. By His providential operations the Lord Jesus is working in every sphere and causing all the historic movements of peoples and nations, civilized and uncivilized, to further its interests and advance its growth; though at the time of such movements this is hidden from carnal sense. Its consummation shall be ushered in by the return of the King, when His servants shall be rewarded and His enemies slain.

"There is but one kingdom or spiritual realm in which Christ reigns forever, and which in the end shall be eternally glorious in the perfect glory of her King; yet in Scripture there are three distinct names used to set forth the excellencies and the blessedness of that realm in various aspects, namely, the Kingdom, the Church, and the City of God" (A. A. Hodge). Of the three terms the word "kingdom"

is the most flexible and has the widest range in its N.T. usage. It designates, first, a sphere of rule, a realm over which the government of Christ extends. It signifies, second, a reign or the exercise of royal authority. It denotes, third, the benefits or blessings which result from the benevolent exercise of Christ's regal authority. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink"—the reign of Christ does not express itself in that kind of activity; "but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17)—these are the characteristics of His realm.

That Christ's kingdom is of an altogether different nature and character from the kingdoms of this world is clear from His own teaching: "But Jesus called them to Him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister; and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45). And again, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36): observe He did not say "My kingdom is not in this world," but "not of it." It is not a provincial thing, nor a political institution; it is not regulated by territorial or material considerations, nor is it governed by carnal policy; it is not made up of unregenerate subjects, nor is it seeking mundane aggrandizement. It is purely a spiritual regime, regulated by the Truth. This is seen from the means He used at its first establishment, and His appointments for its support and enlargement—not physical force, but gracious overtures.

Some men who are fond of drawing innumerable distinctions and contrasts under the guise of "rightly dividing the Word of Truth," draw a sharp line between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ. But this is clearly confuted by "hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:5), and again "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ" (Rev. 11:15 and cf. 12:10). Its spiritual nature is plainly seen from Jehovah's statement, "they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Sam. 8:7): His throne and scepter was an invisible one. In like manner when the Jews said of Christ, "We will not have this Man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14),

they intimated that they were unwilling to surrender their hearts to His moral sway. So too when Paul said, "But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power" (1 Cor. 4:19, 20) he obviously meant, "the spiritual power thereof felt in your hearts."

The reign of Christ has a twofold application. First, He sustains the relation of a gracious Sovereign to His redeemed people, ruling them in love, maintaining their interests, supplying their needs, restraining their foes; training them for His service now and for the glory awaiting them in Heaven. Second, He is the moral Governor over the world, for however unconscious they may be of His operations, all men are controlled by Him and their schemings and actions over-ruled for His own ends. Even earth's potentates are obliged to obey His secret will: "by Me kings reign, and princes decree justice" (Prov. 8:15); "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will" (Prov. 21:1). His government over the world, yea, over the entire universe, is administered by a wisely adapted series of means, appointed and directed by Him.

It is important to recognize this twofold scope of Christ's reign. To the Father He said, "As Thou has given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him" (John 17:2). The kingdom of Christ as it is spiritual and inward is peculiar to the elect, but His kingdom as it is judicial and outward is universal. The two things are distinguished again in Psalm 2: "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion" (verse 6), and "Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession" (verse 8). Christ is not only "King of saints" (Rev. 15:3), but He is also "King of nations" (Jer. 10:7). He reigns over all mankind, and those who do not submit themselves to Him as Redeemer, shall yet stand before Him as Judge. "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel" (Ps. 2:9): this speaks of the judiciary acts of His power. Joseph in Egypt typed out the same: the power of all the land was made over to him (Gen. 41:43), but his brethren had a special claim upon his affections.

Now this kingdom of Christ, considered in its spiritual and inward aspect, believers are said to "receive," that is, they participate

in its privileges and blessings. As Christ's kingdom is "not of the world" but "heavenly" (2 Tim. 4:18), so its subjects are not of the world but heavenly. From the Divine side, they enter by means of the Spirit's quickening, for "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). From the human side, they enter when they throw down the weapons of their rebellion and take Christ's yoke upon them, for "except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). It was when we transferred our allegiance from Satan to Christ that it could be said, "The Father hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col. 1:13). They who have received the Gospel into an honest and good heart have been admitted into and made participants of the kingdom of Christ.

"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved." In seeking to define more closely the "we receiving," let us remember the threefold meaning of the term "kingdom." First, it signifies that we are admitted into that realm or sphere where Christ is owned as Supreme. Second, it signifies that we have surrendered to the reign or scepter of Christ, for Him to rule over our hearts and lives. Third, it signifies that we now participate in the blessings of Christ's government. This word "receiving" also denotes that we have this kingdom from Another: "walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12); "hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom?" (James 2:5); "Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34); all bring out this thought.

In affirming that this is a kingdom "which cannot be moved" the apostle emphasized once more the great superiority of Christianity over Judaism, and also showed wherein the kingdom of Christ differs from all the kingdoms of earth, which are subject to commotions and convulsions. This "kingdom which cannot be moved" is but another name for "those things which cannot be shaken" that "remain" of verse 27: it is the substance and reality of what was typed out under the Mosaic economy. "We have received a kingdom that shall never be moved, nor give way to any new dispensation. The canon of Scripture is now perfected, the Spirit of prophecy is ceased, the mystery of God is finished: He hath put His

last hand to it. The Gospel-church may be made more large, more prosperous, more purified from contracted pollution, but it shall never be altered for another dispensation; they who perish under the Gospel, perish without remedy" (Matthew Henry).

Hebrews 12:28, 29

Chapter 105 - The Final Warning

"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire." A brief analysis of these verses reveals the following weighty points. First, the inestimable blessing which believers have been made the recipients of: a kingdom which is eternal. Second, the obligation devolving upon them: to serve God with true veneration and pious devotedness. Third, the warning by which this is pointed: because there can be no escape from the Divine wrath which overtakes apostates. In his helpful commentary J. Brown pointed out that "to receive an immovable kingdom is but another mode of expressing what is meant by 'ye are come to mount Zion' (verse 22). It is another descriptive figurative mode of expressing that the privileges and honors under the new covenant men obtain by the faith of the truth as it is in Jesus." In support of this: "they that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion: they shall never be moved" (Ps. 125:1).

Now there is a twofold "kingdom" which believers have "received:" a kingdom of grace, which is set up in the heart of the saint, where Christ reigns as supreme Sovereign, and a kingdom of glory, prepared for us in Heaven, where we shall reign as kings with Christ forever. John Owen insisted that the former only is here intended, Ezekiel Hopkins threw the emphasis almost entirely upon the latter; personally we believe that both are included, and shall expound it accordingly, condensing the main points from each of these writers.

Christians are already possessors of the kingdom of grace, for Christ has established His dominion over them. Though He sits personally upon the Throne of heaven, yet He rules in believers by His spirit (who has received commission from Him), and also by His Word energized in them by the Spirit. The interest of believers in this kingdom is called their "receiving" it, because they have it by gift or grant from their Father: Luke 12:32. First, they receive its

doctrine, truth, and law: they own its reality and submit to its authority: Romans 6:17. Second, they receive it in the light, grace, and spiritual benefits of it: they enjoy its privileges of righteousness, peace, and joy: Romans 14:17. Third, they receive it in its dignities and securities: they are kings and priests unto God (Rev. 1:6), and so safe are they as to be "kept by the power of God through faith" (1 Pet. 1:5). Fourth, they receive it by a supernatural initiation into its spiritual mysteries (1 Cor. 4:20), the glory of which is immediate access to God and heart enjoyment of Him.

The privileges which Christians receive by their believing the Gospel are inconceivably grand. They are in the kingdom, the kingdom of God and Christ, a spiritual and heavenly kingdom; enriched with inexhaustible treasures of spiritual and celestial blessings. Christians are not to be measured by their outward appearance or worldly circumstances, but rather by the interest they have in that kingdom which it was their Father's good pleasure to give them. It is therefore their privilege and duty to conduct themselves and behave as those who have received such wondrous privileges and high dignities from God Himself: far should they be from envying poor millionaires and the godless potentates of this earth. Our portion is infinitely superior to the baubles of time and sense. Though the world knows us not, unto God we are "the excellent of the earth" (Ps. 16:3), the crown-jewels of His Son, those whom angels serve or minister unto. O for grace to conduct ourselves as the sons and daughters of the Almighty.

In what sense or senses has the believer "received" the kingdom of glory? First, by the immutable Word of Promise. To the believer the promise of God is as good security as the actual possession. The poor worldling cannot understand this, and he regards the confidence of the Christian as naught but fanaticism. But the simple trusting soul already possesses the kingdom of glory because God has infallibly assured him "in black and white" of the possession of it. It is the immutable Word of Promise which gives him the right and title to the inheritance, and therefore as it now belongs to him by right and title, he may well call it his. When God has promised anything, it is all the same to a believer whether He saith it is done or it shall be done.

Second, the believer has "received" the kingdom of glory by grace giving him the earnest and firstfruits of it. The comforts and

graces of the Spirit are referred to again and again under these figures: appropriately so, for an "earnest" is a part (an instalment) of what is agreed upon, and the "firstfruits" are a sample and pledge of the coming harvest. Now grace and glory are one and the same in essence, differing only in degree: grace is Heaven brought down into the soul, glory is the soul conducted to Heaven. Grace is glory commenced, glory is grace consummated. Probably one of the meanings of "Light is sown for the righteous" (Ps. 97:11) is, the "light" of everlasting life and bliss is now in the graces of regenerated souls as in their seed, and they shall certainly bud and blossom forth into perfect fruitage.

Third, the believer has "received" the kingdom of glory by the realisation of Faith. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Here is a spiritual grace which brings distant things near and gives to the future a present reality. Faith brings into the soul what lies altogether outside the reach of our natural senses. It is a supernatural faculty which is quite beyond the ken of the natural man. Faith beholds what the eye cannot see, it grasps that made without hands; it supplies demonstration or proof of that which the infidel scoffs at.

Fourth, the believer has "received" the kingdom of glory by the embraces of hope. In Scripture, the grace of "hope" is something far better than a vague longing for something we do not yet possess: it is a sure expectation, a definite assurance of what God has promised. Hope supplies a present anticipation of the future realization. Faith believes, hope enjoys those things which God has prepared for them that love Him. Therefore hope is called the "anchor of the soul... which entereth into that within the veil" (Heb. 6:19), for it lays hold on that glory which is there laid up for us. Hope is the taster of our comforts, and excites the same delight and complacency as the fruition itself will impart—the same in kind, though not in degree.

The particular property of this kingdom which is here emphasized by the Holy Spirit (in accordance with the thought of the context) is, that it "cannot be moved"; therein does it differ from all other kingdoms—here, as everywhere, does our blessed Redeemer have the "pre-eminence." Owen pointed out that. "No dominion ever so dreamed of eternity, as did the Roman Empire; but it hath not only been shaken, but broken to pieces and scattered like

chaff before the wind: see Daniel 2:44; 7:14, 27"—so terribly so, that today, the closest students of history are unable to agree as to its actual boundaries. But nothing like that shall ever happen to the Savior's dominion: therefore do we read of "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:11). No internal decays can ruin it; no external opposition shall overthrow it. Yet the language of our verse goes even further than that: God Himself will not remove it.

"That which is here peculiarly intended is, that it is not obnoxious unto such a shaking and removal as the church-state was under the old covenant; that is, God Himself would never make any alteration in it, nor ever introduce another church-state or worship. God hath put the last hand, the hand of His only Son, unto all revelations and institutions. No addition shall be made unto what He hath done, nor alteration in it: no other way of calling, sanctifying, ruling, and saving of the church, shall ever be appointed or admitted; for it is here called an immovable kingdom, in opposition unto that church state of the Jews which God Himself first shook, and then took away—for it was ordained only for a season" (John Owen). Here again we perceive the superiority of Christianity over Judaism: the one was mutable, the other immutable; the one was evanescent, the other eternal; the one was founded by Moses, the other is established by Him who is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

The fact that Christ's kingdom is an "everlasting" one (2 Pet. 1:11), that it shall "never be moved" (Heb. 12:28), and that "of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:33), has occasioned difficulty to some, in the light of "then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father" (1 Cor. 15:24). But the difficulty is at once removed if we bear in mind the distinctions pointed out in our last article. The sovereign dominion which Christ has over all creatures as a Divine person, is something of which He can never divest Himself. Likewise, that dominion over His own people which belongs to Him as the incarnate Son, is also eternal: He will remain forever the Head and Husband of the Church; nor can He relinquish the Mediatorial office. But that dominion to which He was exalted after His resurrection, and which extends over all principalities and powers (John 17:2, Matthew 28:18), will be relinquished when its design is

accomplished: this is clearly seen in the remaining words of 1 Corinthians 15:24, "When He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet." Thus, the "kingdom" which Christ delivers up to the Father is that rule of His over His enemies.

The immovability and eternity of Christ's kingdom holds good of it equally whether we consider it in its present grace aspect or its future glory aspect, for we have received "a kingdom which cannot be moved." The kingdom of grace is so Divinely fixed in the heart of believers that all the efforts of sin and all the attacks of Satan are unable to overthrow it: "the foundation of God standeth sure" (2 Tim. 2:19); "being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will finish it" (Phil. 1:6). It is absolutely impossible that one of Christ's sheep should perish: in the day to come He will exclaim, "Behold I and the children which God hath given Me" (Heb. 2:13). If this be true of the kingdom of grace, then much more so of the kingdom of glory, when sin shall be no more and Satan shall never again tempt the redeemed.

Now from the glorious nature of this "kingdom" the apostle proceeds to draw an inference or point a practical conclusion: "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably." As J. Brown pointed out, to "receive a kingdom" is to be invested with royalty, to be made kings and priests unto God (Rev. 1:6). Since, then, royalty is the most exalted form of human life, the most dignified honor known upon earth, how it behooves us to seek from God that aid which shall enable us to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called." Once again we are reminded of the inseparable connection between privilege and duty, and the greater the privilege the stronger the obligation to express our gratitude in a suitable and becoming manner: not merely in emotional ecstasies or fulsome words, but by obedience and worship, that we may "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."

The commentators differ considerably as to what is denoted by "let us have grace," yet it seems to us, its meaning is quite simple and obvious. Its signification may be ascertained by three considerations involved in what immediately follows. First, this "grace" is essential unto the serving of God "acceptably" and, as we shall see, this "service" has a principal reference to our worshipping

of Him. Second, this "grace" is the root from which proceeds "reverence and godly fear," so that it must point to something more than simple gratitude for what God has already done for us—which is how many of the writers limit it. Third, this "grace" is imperative if we are not to be consumed by Divine wrath—the "consuming fire" of verse 29. We therefore understand this expression to mean, let us persevere in the faith and duties of the Gospel, whereby we are alone enabled to offer acceptable worship to God; let us endeavor after an increase of Divine aid and succor; let us strive after a continual exercise of the grace He has given us; let us seek to bring our hearts more and more under its sanctifying power.

We believe the key to our present passage is found in Exodus 19:10, 11, 15. Under the old covenant the way and means in which Israel was to make a solemn approach unto God in worship was specifically defined: they were to reverently prepare themselves by purification from uncleanness and separation from fleshly indulgences. That was an outward adumbration of the spiritual purity which God now requires from us both internally and externally. Because God has revealed Himself in Christ in a far more glorious manner to us than He manifested Himself before Israel at Sinai, we ought to earnestly endeavor after a more eminent preparation of heart and sanctification of our whole persons in all our approaches to the Most High. There must be in us the spiritual counterpart of what was shadowed out in them ceremonially. The fear of God was wrought in Israel by the terrors of His law: though our fear be of another kind, it ought to be none the less real and effectual in us to its proper ends.

The great end in view is, that "we may serve God acceptably." In this particular epistle the Greek word used here signifies that service unto God which consists in His worship, in prayer and praise, and the observance of all the institutions of Divine worship. For example, "in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience" (Heb. 9:9); and again, "We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle" (Heb. 13:10); while in 10:2 the word is actually rendered "worshippers." Nor is this meaning of the Greek word peculiar to the Hebrews epistle: "She was a widow of about four score and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with

fastings and prayers night and day" (Luke 2:37); "who change the truth of God into a lie, and worship and serve the creature more than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25). The specific reference, then, is had unto the worship of God according to the Gospel, as superseding the institutions under the old economy. Needless to say, such worship cannot proceed from any who are not walking in Gospel obedience.

Now it is in order to our being so fitted for the Divine service that we may worship God "acceptably," that the exhortation comes, "let us have grace." There is a double reference: that our persons may be acceptable, and that our worship may be pleasing in His sight. An intimation is hereby given that there may be a performance of the duties of Divine worship when neither the persons who perform them, nor the duties themselves, are accepted by Him. So it was with Cain and his sacrifice, as it is with all hypocrites always. The principal things required unto this acceptance are, first, that the persons of the worshippers be accepted in the Beloved. Second, that the actual performance of worship must, in all the duties of it, be in strict accord with what God (and none other) has appointed. Third, that our spiritual graces be in actual exercise, for it is in and by this, in the discharge of all our religious duties, that we give glory unto God. How can our worship be pleasing unto Him if we be in a backslidden state?

That which is here specifically singled out as necessary unto our worship being acceptable is, that we serve God "with reverence and godly fear." As John Owen wisely pointed out, these "may be learned best from what they are opposed unto. For they are prescribed as contrary unto some such defects and faults of Divine worship, as from which we ought to be deterred, by the consideration of the holiness and severity of God as is manifest from the next verse, 'for our God is a consuming fire.'" The sins from which we ought to be deterred by a consideration of these Divine perfections are, First, the want of a due sense of the awe-inspiring majesty of Him with whom we have to do. God provided against this evil under the old economy by the terror wrought in the people at the giving of the Law, by the many restrictions interposed against their approaches to Him (none being allowed to enter the holy of holies), and by all the outward ceremonies appointed; and though all these are now removed, yet a deep spiritual sense of God's holiness and greatness should be retained in the mind of all who draw nigh to

Him in worship.

Second, the lack of a due sense of our own vileness, and our infinite distance from God both in nature and state, which is always required to be in us. The Lord will never accept the worship of a Pharisee: while we are puffed up with a sense of our own importance and filled with self-righteousness or self-complacency, He will not accept our approaches unto Him. And nothing is more calculated to hide pride from us and fill our hearts with a sense of our utter insignificance as a sight and realization of the ineffable purity and high sovereignty of God. When Isaiah beheld Him "high and lifted up," he exclaimed "Woe is me! for I am undone" (Isa. 6:5); when Job beheld the Almighty, he cried, "Behold, I am vile" (Job 40:4).

Third, carnal boldness in a formal performance of sacred duties, while neglecting an earnest endeavor to exercise grace in them, which is something which God abhors. O the daring impiety of worldly professors taking upon their polluted lips the ineffable name of God, and offering unto Him "the sacrifice of fools" (Ecclesiastes 5:1). What a marvel it is that He does not strike dead those blatant and presumptuous souls who vainly attempt to deceive Him with their lip service while their hearts are far from Him. It is to prevent these, and other like evils, that we are here exhorted to worship God "with reverence and godly fear," that is, with a holy abasement of soul, having our minds awed by a sense of the infinite majesty of God, our hearts humbled by a consciousness of our vileness and our creaturely nothingness.

No exhortation in this epistle is more needed by our perverse generation than this one. How this imperative requirement "with reverence and godly fear" rebukes the cheap, flippant, irreverent "worship" (?) of the day. O what unholy lightness and ungodly familiarity now marks the religion of Christendom: many address the great Deity as though they were His equals, and conduct themselves with far less decorum than they would show in the presence of an earthly monarch. The omission of bowing the head in silent prayer when we take our place in the congregation, the vulgar glancing around, the unseemingly whispering and chattering, the readiness to smile or laugh at any remarks of the preacher's which may be wrested, are all so many instances of this glaring and growing evil. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the

saints, and to be had in reverence of all about Him" (Ps. 89:7).

The Greek word for "reverence" is rendered "shamefacedness" in 1 Timothy 2:9. This, in extraordinary instances, is called a "blushing," a "being ashamed," a "confusion of face" (Ezra 9:6; Daniel 9:7); yet, the essence of it, ought always to accompany us in the whole worship of God. "Godly fear" is a holy awe of the soul when engaged in sacred duties, and this from a consideration of the great danger there is of our sinful miscarriages in the worship of God, and of His severity against such heinous offenses. God will not be mocked. A serious soul is hereby moved unto watchfulness and diligence not to provoke so great, so holy, so jealous a God, by a neglect of that reverence and godly fear which He requires in His service, and which is due unto Him on account of His glorious perfections. If the seraphim veil their faces before Him (Isa. 6:2). how much more should we do so!

"For our God is a consuming fire" (verse 29). This is the reason given why we must serve God with reverence and fear. The words are taken from Deuteronomy 4:24, where they are used to deter Israel from idolatry, for that is a sin God will not tolerate. The same description of God is here applied by the apostle unto those lacking grace to worship Him with the humility and awe which He demands. If we are graceless in our persons, and devoid of reverence in our worship, God will deal with us accordingly. As a fire consumes combustible matter cast into it, so God will destroy sinners. The title "our God" denotes a covenant relationship, yet though Christians are firmly assured of their interest in the everlasting covenant, God requires them to have holy apprehensions of His majesty and terror: see 2 Corinthians 5:10, 11.

The twin graces of love and fear, fear and love, should be jointly active in the believer, and it is in preserving a balance between them that his spiritual health largely consists. So it is here: observe the remarkable conjunction: "our God," in covenant relationship, our Father; and yet "a consuming fire," to be trembled at! The first is to prevent despair from considering God's ineffable purity and inflexible justice; the latter is to check a presumptuous irreverence unto which a one-sided occupation with His grace and love might embolden us. Thus, the principal exhortation "let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably" is urged by two widely different motives: because we have "received a kingdom"

and because God is a "consuming fire." Carnal reason would ask, If we have received a kingdom which cannot be moved, why should we fear? But if God be such "a consuming fire" how can we ever expect such a kingdom, since we are but a stubble? But the Spirit-taught have no difficulty in perceiving why the apostle joined together these two things.

The Christian's interest in His favor, is no warrant for casting off a solemn fear of God: though He has laid down His enmity against him, He has not cast off His majesty and sovereignty over him. "Even those who stand highest in the love and favor of God, and have the fullest assurance thereof and of their interest in Him as their God, ought, notwithstanding, to fear Him as a sin-avenging God and a consuming fire" (Ezek. Hopkins, 1680). Though God has taken His redeemed into intimate nearness to Himself, yet He requires that they always retain a due apprehension of the majesty of His person, the holiness of His nature, the severity of His justice, and the ardent jealousy of His worship. If we truly dread falling under the guilt of this awful sin of irreverence, our minds will be influenced unto godly fear. The grace of fear is in nowise inconsistent with or an impediment to a spirit of adoption, holy boldness, or godly rejoicing: see Psalm 2:11, Matthew 28:8, Philippians 2:12.

"Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably," for without it there will be neither "reverence" nor "godly fear." Without Divine aid and unction we cannot serve God at all, for He accounts not that worship which is offered by graceless persons. Without grace in actual operation we cannot serve God acceptably, for it is in the exercise of faith and fear, love and awe, that the very life and soul of spiritual worship consists. O how earnestly do we need to seek an increase of Divine "grace" (2 Cor. 9:8; 12:9), and keep it operative in all duties of the worship of God: that in view of His awful wrath, we may have a dread of displeasing Him; in view of His majesty our hearts may be humbled; and in view of His love, we may seek to honor, please and adore Him. "Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread" (Isa. 8:13 and cf. Matthew 10:28).

Hebrews 13:1

Chapter 106 - Brotherly Love

Most of the commentators regard the final chapter of Hebrews as an appendix or postscript, containing sundry exhortations which have no direct relation to the body of the epistle. Personally, we regard it as a serious mistake, due to lack of perspicuity, to ignore the organic connection between the central theme of the apostle and the various duties which he here inculcates; rather do we agree with Owen that in these closing verses there is exhibited an exemplification of "that Divine wisdom wherewith he was actuated in writing of the whole, which the apostle Peter refers to in 2 Peter 3:15" The more an anointed mind meditates on this fact, with the faith and reverence which the Holy Scriptures call for, the more will the Divine inspiration of this portion be revealed. It is a great pity that so many writers become slack when they reach the final chapter of an epistle, seeming to imagine that its contents are of less importance and value than those of the earlier ones.

Unless we carefully bear in mind the order which the apostle was moved by the Holy Spirit to follow in this treatise, we shall fail to learn some most vital and valuable lessons concerning the proper method and manner of setting forth the Truth of God before the souls of men. Not only is the teacher of God's Word to hold fast the system of doctrine contained therein (introducing no speculations of his own), to preserve a due balance of Truth (not allowing personal preference to make him a hobbyist), but in order for his ministry to be most acceptable to God and profitable to his hearers or readers he must adhere strictly to the order of Scripture; for if the context and connections of a passage be ignored, there is great danger of perverting it, for its proper emphasis is then lost and the chain of Truth is broken. Let preachers especially attend closely to the remarks which follow.

A careful reading through of our epistle at a single sitting will reveal the fact that throughout the first twelve chapters not a single moral or ecclesiastical duty is inculcated. It is true that here

and there the apostle breaks in upon the orderly development of his thesis, by urging an exhortation unto obedience to God and perseverance in the faith, or by interspersing a solemn warning against the fatal consequences of apostasy; nevertheless, never once does he formally press upon the Hebrews any of the duties enjoined by the second table of the Law—those were reserved for his closing words. The course followed by the apostle was, first, to set forth the glorious person, offices, and work of Christ, and then, having laid a firm foundation for faith and obedience, to exhort unto evangelical and moral duties. As we deem this a most essential consideration we subjoin a paragraph from that master exegete, John Owen.

"He prescribes by his own example, as he also doth in most of his other epistles, the true order and method of preaching the Gospel; that is, first, to declare the mysteries of it, with the grace of God therein, and then to improve it unto practical duties of obedience. And they will be mistaken, who in this work propose unto themselves any other method; and those most of all, who think one part of it enough without the other. For as the declaration of spiritual truths, without showing how they are the vital quickening form of obedience, and without the application of them thereunto, tends only unto that knowledge which puffeth up, but doth not edify; so the pressing of moral duties, without a due declaration of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, which alone enables us unto them, and renders them acceptable unto God, with their necessary dependence thereon, is but to deceive the souls of men, and lead them out of the way and off from the Gospel."

The Divine mysteries unfolded and the great doctrines expounded in the Holy Scriptures are not mere abstractions addressed to the intellect, devoid of valuable fruits and effects: where they are truly received into the soul and there mixed with faith, they issue, first, in the heart being spiritually molded thereby and drawn out God-wards, and second, they issue in practical results man-ward. If the Gospel makes known the infinite love and amazing grace of God in Christ, it also directs unto the performance of spiritual and moral duties. So far from the Gospel freeing believers from the duties required by the Law, it lays upon us additional obligations, directs to their right performance, and supplies new and powerful motives to their discharge.

So much, then, for the general relation of the contents of

Hebrews 13 to what has preceded it; now for the more specific connection. So far from there being a radical break between Hebrews 12 and 13 the closing verses of the former and the opening ones of the latter are closely linked together. There the apostle had mentioned the principal duties which believers are to perform God-wards, namely, to "hear" (verse 25) and to "serve Him acceptably" (verse 28); here, he tabulates those duties which are to be performed man-wards. He begins with what is really the sum and substance of all the rest, brotherly love: first, the loving of God with all our heart, and then our neighbor as ourselves. Adolph Saphir pointed out another link of connection which is not so evident at first sight: having just reminded the Hebrews that "things that are made" shall be shaken and removed (Heb. 12:27), he now exhorts them to "let that abide which is of God, which is eternal, even love."

"Let brotherly love continue" (13:1). The first application in the case of the Hebrews would be, See to it that your having become Christians does not make you behave in a less kindly manner unto your brethren according to the flesh, the Jews. True, they are occasioning great provocation by their enmity and persecution, yet this does not warrant your retaliating in a like spirit, rather does it provide opportunity for the exercise and manifestation of Divine grace. Remember the example left by your Master: the Jews treated Him most vilely, yet He bore patiently their revilings; yea continued to seek their good—then do you follow His steps. Most blessedly did the writer of this epistle emulate his Lord, and practice what he here inculcated: see Romans 9:1-3 and 10:1.

This lower application of our text holds good for any of us who may, in our measure, be circumstanced similarly to the Hebrews. Since yielding ourselves to the claims of the Lord Jesus, our relations and friends may have turned against us, and, stirred up by Satan, are now opposing, annoying, ill-treating us. In such a case the word comes to us "Let brotherly love continue." Avenge not yourself: answer not railing with railing: but exercise a spirit of true benevolence, desiring and seeking only their good. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:20, 21).

"Let brotherly love continue." The higher reference is, of course, to that special and spiritual affection which is to be

cultivated between and among God's children. "He calls love brotherly, not only to teach us that we ought to be mutually united together by a peculiar and inward feeling of love, but also that we may remember that we cannot be Christians without loving the brethren, for he speaks of the love which the Household of Faith ought to cultivate one towards another, as the Lord has bound them closely together by the common bond of adoption" (John Calvin). Matthew Henry well pointed out, "the spirit of Christianity is a spirit of love." The fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22). Faith worketh by love (Gal. 5:6). "Everyone that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him" (1 John 5:1). Love to the brethren is both the first indication and fruit of the Christian life (Acts 16:33) and the final aim and result of Divine grace (2 Pet. 1:7).

It is to be noted that these Hebrew believers were not exhorted "let us have brotherly love," but "let brotherly love continue." Thus the apostle's language clearly supposes that they already had love for each other, that he approvingly notices the same, and then calls upon them for a continuance of it. Like his Master, Paul combines exhortation with commendation: let all His servants do so wherever possible. He had already reminded them "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6:10); and "Ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used" (Heb. 10:32, 33). But the apostle felt there was danger of their brotherly love decaying, for there were disputes among them concerning the ceremonies of the Mosaic law, and wrangling over religious differences bodes ill for the health of spiritual affection. He therefore puts them on their guard, and bids them live and love as "brethren."

"A love hath its foundation in relation. Where there is relation, there is love, or there ought so to be; and where there is no relation, there can be no love, properly so called. Hence it is here mentioned with respect unto a brotherhood... This brotherhood is religious: all believers have one Father (Matthew 23:8,9), one elder Brother (Rom. 8:29), who is not ashamed to call them brethren (Heb. 2:11); have one spirit, and are called in one hope of calling (Eph. 4:4), which being a spirit of adoption interesteth them all in

the same family (Eph. 3:14, 15)"—John Owen. Brotherly love we would define as that gracious bond which knits together the hearts of God's children; or more definitely, it is that spiritual and affectionate solicitude which Christians have toward each other, manifested by a desiring and endeavoring after their highest mutual interests.

This duty was enjoined upon His disciples by the Lord Jesus: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). It was to this word of Christ that His apostle referred in "Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in Him and in you" (1 John 2:7, 8 and cf. 3:11). Some have been puzzled by his "I write no new commandment unto you... Again, a new commandment I write unto you," yet the seeming ambiguity is easily explained. When a statute is renewed under another administration of government it is counted a "new" one. So it is in this case. That which was required by the Law (Lev. 19:18) is repeated by the Gospel (John 15:12), so that absolutely speaking it is not a new, but an old commandment. Yet relatively, it is "new," because enforced by new motives (1 John 3:16) and a new Pattern (1 John 4:10, 11). Thus, "Let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10), because the latter have peculiar claims upon our affections, being created in the same image, professing the same faith, and having the same infirmities.

The maintenance of brotherly love tends in various ways to the spiritual blessing of the Church, the honor of the Gospel, and the comfort of believers. The exercise thereof is the best testimony to the world of the genuineness of our profession. The cultivation and manifestation of Christian affection between the people of God is a far more weighty argument with unbelievers than any apologetics. Believers should conduct themselves toward each other in such a way that no button or pin is needed to label them as brethren in Christ. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). It should be made quite evident that their hearts are knit together by a bond more intimate, spiritual, and enduring than any which mere nature can produce. Their deportment unto each other should be such as not only to mark

them as fellow disciples, but as Christ says, "My disciples"—reflecting His love!

The exercise of brotherly love is not only a testimony unto the world, but it is also an evidence to Christians themselves of their regeneration: "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14). There should be a word of comfort here for those poor saints whose souls are cast down. At present they cannot "read their title clear to mansions in the sky," and are afraid to cry "Abba, Father" lest they be guilty of presumption. But here is a door of hope opened to Christ's little ones: you may, dear reader, be afraid to affirm that you love God, but do you not love His people? If you do, you must have been born again, and have in you the same spiritual nature which is in them. But do I love them? Well, do you relish their company, admire what you see of Christ in them, wish them well, pray for them, and seek their good? If so, you certainly love them.

But not only is the exercise of Christian love a testimony unto the world of our Christian discipleship, and a sure evidence of our own regeneration, but it is also that which delights God Himself. Of course it does! It is the product of His own grace: the immediate fruit of His Spirit. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1) is what the Lord Himself declares. This also comes out very sweetly in Revelation 3. There we find one of the epistles addressed to the seven churches which are in Asia, namely, the Philadelphian, the church of "brotherly love," for that is the meaning of the word "Philadelphia," and in that epistle there are no censures or rebukes: there was that there which refreshed the heart of the Lord!

But our text refers not so much to the existence and exercise of brotherly love, as it does to its maintenance: "Let brotherly love continue" or "abide constant" as some render it, for the word includes the idea of enduring in the face of difficulties and temptations. That which is enjoined is perseverance in a pure and unselfish affection toward fellow-Christians. Brotherly love is a tender plant which requires much attention: if it be not watched and watered, it quickly wilts. It is an exotic, for it is not a native of the soil of fallen human nature—"hateful and hating one another" (Titus 3:3) is a solemn description of what we were in our unregenerate state. Yes, brotherly love is a very tender plant and quickly affected

by the cold air of unkindness, easily nipped by the frost of harsh words. If it is to thrive, it must needs be carefully protected and diligently cultivated.

"Let brotherly love continue:" what a needful word is this! It was so at the beginning, and therefore did the Lord God make it a fundamental in man's duty: "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." O what strife and bloodshed, suffering and sorrow had been avoided, had this commandment been universally heeded. But alas, sin has domineered and dominated, and where sin is regnant love is dormant. If we wish to obtain a better idea of what sin is then contrast it with its opposite—God. Now God is spirit (John 4:24), God is light (1 John 1:5), God is love (1 John 4:8); whereas sin is fleshly, sin is darkness, sin is hatred. But if we have enlisted under the banner of Christ we are called unto a warfare against sin: against fleshliness, against hatred. Then "let brotherly love continue."

Yes, a most needful exhortation is this: not only because hatred so largely sways the world, but also because of the state of Christendom. Two hundred and fifty years ago John Owen wrote, "It (brotherly love) is, as unto its luster and splendor, retired to Heaven, abiding in its power and efficacious exercise only in some comers of the earth. Envy, wrath, selfishness, love of the world, with coldness in all the concerns of religion, have possessed the place of it. And in vain shall men wrangle and contend about their differences in faith and worship, pretending to design the advancement of religion by an imposition of their persuasions on others: unless this holy love be again re-introduced among all those who profess the name of Christ, all the concerns of religion will more and more run into ruin. The very name of a brotherhood amongst Christians is a matter of scorn and reproach, and all the consequents of such a relation are despised."

Nor are things any better today. O how little is brotherly love in evidence, generally speaking, among professing Christians. Is not that tragic word of Christ receiving its prophetic fulfillment: "because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12). But, my reader, Christ's love has not changed, nor should ours: "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). Alas, have not all of us reason to hang our heads in shame! Such an exhortation as this is most needful today when there is such a wide tendency to value light

more highly than love, to esteem an understanding of the mysteries of Faith above the drawing out our affections unto each other. Here is a searching question which each of us should honestly face: Is my love for the brethren keeping pace with my growing (intellectual) knowledge of the Truth?

"Let brotherly love continue." What a humbling word is this! One had thought that those bound together by such intimate ties, fellow-members of the Body of Christ, would spontaneously love each other, and make it their constant aim to promote their interests. Ah, my reader, the Holy Spirit deemed it requisite to call upon us to perform this duty. What sort of creatures are we that still require to be thus exhorted! How this ought to hide pride from us: surely we have little cause for self-complacency when we need bidding to love one another! "Hateful and hating one another" (Titus 3:3): true, that was in our unregenerate days, nevertheless the root of that "hatred" still remains in the believer, and unless it be judged and mortified will greatly hinder the maintenance and exercise of Christian affection.

"Let brotherly love continue." What a solemn word is this! Is the reader startled by that adjective?—a needful and humbling one, but scarcely a "solemn." Ah, have we forgotten the context? Look at the verse which immediately precedes, and remember that when this epistle was first written there were no chapter-breaks: 12:29 and 13:1 read consecutively, without any hiatus—"our God is a consuming fire: let brotherly love continue!" The fact these two verses are placed in immediate juxtaposition strikes a most solemn note. Go back in your mind to the first pair of brothers who ever walked this earth: did "brotherly love continue" with them? Far otherwise: Cain hated and murdered his brother. And did not he find our God to be "a consuming fire"? Most assuredly he did, as his own words testify, "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Gen. 4:13)—the wrath of God burned in his conscience, and he had a fearful foretaste of Hell before he went there.

But it may be objected to what has just been said, The case of Cain and Abel is scarcely a pertinent and appropriate one, for they were merely natural brothers where as the text relates primarily to those who are brethren spiritually. True, but the natural frequently adumbrates the spiritual, and there is much in Genesis 4 which each Christian needs to take to heart. However, let us pass on down the

course of human history a few centuries. Were not Abraham and Lot brethren spiritually? They were: then did brotherly love continue between them? It did not: strife arose between their herdsmen, and they separated (Gen. 13). Lot preferred the well-watered plains and a home in Sodom to fellowship with the father of the faithful. And what was the sequel? Did he find that "our God is a consuming fire"? Witness the destruction of all his property in that city when God rained down fire and brimstone from heaven!—another solemn warning is that for us.

"Let brotherly love continue." But what a gracious word is this! Consider its implications: are they not similar to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:1, 2)? That means we are to conduct ourselves not according to the dictates of the flesh, but according to the requirements of grace. If grace has been shown toward me, then surely I ought to be gracious to others. But that is not always easy: not only has the root of "hatred" been left in me, but the "flesh" still remains in my brethren! and there will be much in them to test and try my love, otherwise there would be no need for this exhortation "forbearing one another in love." God has wisely so ordered this that our love might rise above the mere amiability of nature. We are not merely to govern our tempers, act courteously, be pleasant to one another, but bear with infirmities and be ready to forgive a slight: "Love suffereth long, and is kind" (1 Cor. 13:4).

"Let brotherly love continue." What a comprehensive word is this! Had we the ability to fully open it and space to bring out all that is included, it would be necessary to quote a large percentage of the precepts of Scripture. If brotherly love is to continue then we must exhort one another daily, provoke unto good works, minister to each other in many different ways. It includes far more than dwelling together in peace and harmony, though unless that be present, other things cannot follow. It also involves a godly concern for each other: see Leviticus 19:17 and 1 John 5:2. It also embraces our praying definitely for each other. Another practical form of it is to write helpful spiritual letters to those now at a distance from us: you once enjoyed sweet converse together, but Providence has divided your paths: well, keep in touch via the post! "Let brotherly love continue."

"Let brotherly love continue." What a forcible word is this, by which we mean, it should drive all of us to our knees! We are just as dependent upon the Holy Spirit to call forth love into action as we are our faith: not only toward God, but toward each other—"The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God" (2 Thess. 3:5). Observe the forcible emphasis Christ placed upon this precept in His paschal discourse: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another" (John 13:34). Ah, but the Savior did not deem that enough: "This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12): why that repetition? Nor did that suffice: "These things I command you, that ye love one another" (John 15:17). In an earlier paragraph we reminded the reader that the Philadelphian church is the church of "Brotherly love." Have you observed the central exhortation in the epistle addressed to that church: "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown"? (Rev. 3:11).

"Let brotherly love continue." What a Divine word is this. The love which is here enjoined is a holy and spiritual one, made possible "because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5). For until then there is naught but hatred. Love for the brethren is a love for the image of God stamped upon their souls: "every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him" (1 John 5:1). No man can love another for the grace that is in his heart, unless grace be in his own heart. It is natural to love those who are kind and generous to us; it is supernatural to love those who are faithful and holy in their dealings with us.

"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on LOVE, which is the bond of perfectness" (Col. 3:12-14).

Hebrews 13:1-3

Chapter 107 - Brotherly Love

Brotherly love is that spiritual benevolence and affectionate solicitude which Christians have one toward another, desiring and seeking their highest interests. The varied characteristics of it are beautifully delineated in 1 Corinthians 13. In the opening verse of Hebrews 13 the apostle exhorts unto the maintenance of the same, "Let brotherly love continue." Negatively, that means, Let us be constantly on our guard against those things which are likely to interrupt its flow. Positively, it signifies, Let us be diligent in employing those means which are calculated to keep it in a healthy state. It is along these two lines that our responsibility here is to be discharged, and therefore it is of first importance that due heed be given thereto. We therefore propose to point out some of the main hindrances and obstacles to the continuance of brotherly love, and then mention some of the aids and helps to the furtherance of the same. May the blessed Spirit direct the writer's thoughts and give the reader to lay to heart whatever is of Himself.

The root hindrance to the exercise of brotherly love is self-love—to be so occupied with number one that the interests of others are lost sight of. In Proverbs 30:15 we read, "The horseleech hath two daughters crying Give, give." This repulsive creature has two forks in her tongue, which she employs for gorging herself in the blood of her unhappy victim. Spiritually the "horseleech" represents self-love and her two daughters are self-righteousness, and self-pity. As the horseleech is never satisfied, often continuing to gorge itself until it bursts, so self-love is never contented, crying "Give, give." All the blessings and mercies of God are perverted by making them to minister unto self. Now the antidote for this evil spirit is for the heart to be engaged with the example which Christ has left us. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister unto others. He pleased not Himself, but ever "went about doing good." He was tireless in relieving distress and seeking the welfare of all with whom He came into contact. Then "Let this mind be in you, which

was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). If brotherly love is to continue self must be denied.

Inseparably connected with self-love is pride, and the fostering of pride is fatal to the cultivation of brotherly affection. The majority, if not all, of the petty grievances among Christians, are to be traced back to this evil root. "Love suffereth long," but pride is terribly impatient. "Love envieth not," but pride is intensely jealous. "Love seeketh not her own," but pride ever desires gratification. "Love seeketh not her own," but pride demands constant attention from others. "Love beareth all things," but pride is resentful of the slightest injury. "Love endureth all things," but pride is offended if a brother fails to greet him on the street. Pride must be mortified if brotherly love is to flourish. Therefore the first injunction of Christ to those who come unto Him for rest is, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart."

Another great enemy to brotherly love is a sectarian spirit, and this evil is far more widespread than many suppose. Our readers would be surprised if they knew how often a sample copy of this magazine is despised by those who have a reputation for being stalwarts in the Faith and as possessing a relish for spiritual things, yet because this paper is not issued by their denomination or "circle of fellowship" it is at once relegated to the waste-paper basket. Alas, how frequently is a spirit of partisanship mistaken for brotherly love: so long as a person "believes our doctrines" and is willing to "join our church," he is received with open arms. On the other hand, no matter how sound in the faith a man may be, nor how godly his walk, if he refuses to affiliate himself with some particular group of professing Christians, he is looked upon with suspicion and given the cold shoulder. But such things ought not to be: they betray a very low state of spirituality.

We are far from advocating the entering into familiar fellowship with every one who claims to be a Christian—Scripture warns us to "lay hands suddenly on no man" (1 Tim. 5:22), for all is not gold that glitters; and perhaps there never was a day in which empty profession abounded so much as it does now. Yet there is a happy medium between being taken in by every impostor who comes along, and refusing to believe that there are any genuine saints left upon earth. Surely a tree may be known by its fruits. When we meet with one in whom we can discern the image of

Christ, whether that one be a member of our party or not, there should our affections be fixed. "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7): it is our bounden duty to love all whom Christ loves, It is utterly vain that we boast of our orthodoxy or of the "light" we have, if brotherly love be not shown by us to the feeblest member of Christ's body who crosses our path.

There are many other things which are serious obstacles to the maintenance of brotherly love, yet we must not do more than barely mention them: the love of the world; failure to mortify the lusts of the flesh in our souls; being unduly wrapt up in the members of our own family, so that those related to us by the blood of Christ have not that place in our affections which they ought; ignorance of the directions in which it should be exercised and of the proper duties which it calls for; forgetfulness of the foundation of it, which is a mutual interest in the grace of God, that we are fellow-members of the Household of Faith; a readiness to listen to idle gossip, which in most instances, is a "giving place to the Devil," who accuses the brethren day and night. But there is one other serious hindrance to the continuance of brotherly love which we will notice in a little more detail, namely, impatience.

By impatience we mean a lack of forbearance. True brotherly love is a reflection of God's love for us, and He loves His people not for their native attractiveness, but for Christ's sake; and therefore does He love them in spite of their ugliness and vileness. God is "longsuffering to us-ward" (2 Pet. 3:9), bearing with our crookedness, pardoning our iniquities, healing our diseases, and His word to us is, "Be ye therefore followers (emulators) of God, as dear children, and walk in love" (Eph. 5:1, 2). We are to love the saints for what we can see of Christ in them; yes, love them, and for that reason—in spite of all their ignorance, perverseness, ill-temper, obstinacy, fretfulness. It is the image of God in them not their wealth, amiability, social position—which is the magnet that attracts a renewed heart toward them.

"Forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2). False love is glad of any specious excuse for throwing off the garb that sits so loosely and uncomfortably upon it. Ahitophel was glad of a pretext to forsake David, whom he hated in his heart, although with his mouth he continued to show much love. "Forbearing one another in

love:" that love which a little silence or neglect can destroy never came from God, that love which a few blasts of malice from the lips of a new acquaintance will wither, is not worth possessing! Remember, dear brother, God suffers our love for one another to be tried and tested—as He does our faith—or there would be no need for this exhortation "forbearing one another in love." The most spiritual Christian on earth is full of infirmities, and the best way of enduring them is to frequently and honestly remind yourself that you also are full of faults and failings.

John Owen pointed out that there are certain occasions (in addition to the causes we have mentioned above) of the decay and loss of brotherly love. "1. Differences in opinion and practice about things in religion (unless these be of a vital nature they should not be allowed to affect our love for each other, A.W.P.). 2. Un-suitableness of natural tempers and inclinations. 3. Readiness to receive a sense of appearing provocations. 4. Different and sometimes inconsistent secular interests. 5. An abuse of spiritual gifts, by pride on the one hand, or envy on the other. 6. Attempts for domination, inconsistent in a fraternity; which are all to be watched against."

We sincerely trust that the reader is not becoming weary of our lengthy exposition of Hebrews 13:1: the subject of which it treats is of such deep practical importance that we feel one more aspect of it requires to be considered. We shall therefore elaborate a little on some of the sub-headings which Owen mentioned under the means of its preservation. First, "An endeavor to grow and thrive in the principle of it, or the power of adopting grace." The three principal graces—faith, hope, love—can only thrive in a healthy soul. Just so far as personal piety wanes will brotherly love deteriorate. If close personal communion with Christ be neglected, then there can be no real spiritual fellowship with His people. Unless, then, my heart be kept warm in the love of God, affection toward my brethren is sure to decay. Second, "A deep sense of the weight or moment of this duty, from the especial instruction and command of Christ." Only as the heart is deeply impressed by the vital importance of the maintenance of brotherly love will serious and constant efforts be made thereunto.

Third, "Of the trial which is connected thereunto, of the sincerity of our grace and the truth of our sanctification, for 'by this we know we have passed from death unto life.'" This is indeed a

weighty consideration: if Christians were more concerned to obtain proof of their regeneration, they would devote far closer attention to the cultivation of brotherly love, which is one of the chief evidences of the new birth (1 John 3:14). If I am at outs with my brethren and am unconcerned about their temporal and eternal interests, then I have no right to regard myself as a child of God. Fourth, "A due consideration of the use, yea, the necessity of this duty to the glory of God, and edification of the church." The greater concern we really have for the manifestative glory of God in this world, the more zealous shall we be in seeking to promote the same by the increase of brotherly love in our self and among the saints: the glory of God and the welfare of His people are inseparably bound together.

Fifth, "Of that breach of union, loss of peace, discord and confusion, which must and will ensue on the neglect of it." Serious indeed are the consequences of a decay of brotherly love, yea, fatal if the disease be not arrested. Therefore does it behoove each of us to honestly and seriously face the question, How far is my lack of brotherly love contributing unto the spiritual decline in Christendom today? Sixth, "Constant watchfulness against all those vicious habits of mind, in self-love, love of the world, which are apt to impair it." If that be faithfully attended to, it will prove one of the most effectual of all the means for the cultivation of this grace. Seventh, "Diligent heed that it be not impaired in its vital acts: such as are patience, forbearance, readiness to forgive, unaptness to believe evil, without which no other duties of it will be long continued. Eighth, fervent prayer for supplies of grace enabling thereunto."

After the opening exhortation of Hebrews 13—which is fundamental to the discharge of all mutual Christian duties—the Holy Spirit through the apostle proceeds to point out some of the ways in which the existence and continuance of brotherly love are to be evidenced. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers" (verse 2). Here is the first instance given, among sundry particulars, in which the greatest of all the Christian graces is to be exemplified. The duty which is inculcated is that of Christian hospitality. That which was commanded under the old covenant is repeated under the new: "But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:34 and cf.

Deuteronomy 10:19, etc.). The Greek word for "entertain" is rendered "lodge" in Acts 10:18, 23, and Acts 28:7.

There was a special urgency for pressing this duty by the apostles, arising from the persecution of the Lord's people in different places, which resulted in their being driven from their own homes and forced to seek a refuge abroad. "At that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1)—some traveled as far as "Phenice and Cyprus and Antioch" (Acts 11:19). Therein did they obey the direction of Christ's that "when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another" (Matthew 10:23), removing to other parts where, for the present, peace obtained; for the providence of God so directs things it is very rare that persecution prevails universally—hence some places of quiet retirement are generally available, at least for a season. Yet this being forced to leave their own habitations required them to seek refuge among strangers, and this it is which gives point to our present exhortation.

Moreover "at that time there were sundry persons, especially of the converted Hebrews, who went up and down from one city, yea, one nation, unto another, on their own charges, to preach the Gospel. They went forth for the sake of Christ, taking nothing of the Gentiles unto whom they preached (3 John 7); and these were only brethren, and not officers of any church. The reception, entertainment, and assistance of these when they came unto any church or place as strangers, the apostle celebrates and highly commends in his well-beloved Gaius (3 John 5, 6). Such as these, when they came to them as strangers, the apostle recommends unto the love and charity of the Hebrews in a peculiar manner. And he who is not ready to receive and entertain such persons, will manifest how little concern he hath in the Gospel or the glory of Christ Himself" (John Owen).

Though circumstances have altered (for the moment, for none can say how soon the restraining hand of God may be partly withdrawn and His enemies allowed to shed the blood of His people once more—such is even now the case in some parts of the earth), yet the principle of this injunction is still binding on all who bear the name of Christ. Not only are our hearts, but our homes as well, to be opened unto such as are really needy: "distributing to the necessity

of saints; given to hospitality" (Rom. 12:13). An eminent and spiritual scholar points out that "the original word hath respect not so much to the exercise of the duty itself, as to the disposition, readiness, and frame of mind which is required in it and to it. Hence the Syriac renders it 'the love of strangers,' and that properly; but it is of such a love as is effectual, and whose proper exercise consists in the entertainment of them, which is the proper effect of love towards them."

In Eastern countries, where they traveled almost barefoot, the washing of the feet (1 Tim. 5:10), as well as the setting before them of food and giving lodgment for the night, would be included. The word for "strangers" is not found in the Greek: literally it reads "of hospitality not be forgetful"—be not unmindful of, grow not slack in, the discharge of this duty. It is to be observed that one of the necessary qualifications of a bishop is that he must be "a lover of hospitality" (Titus 1:8). Just as worldings delight in entertaining their relatives and friends, so the Lord's people should be eager and alert to render loving hospitality to homeless or stranded Christians, and as 1 Peter 4:9 says "use hospitality one to another without grudging." The same applies, of course, to entertaining in our homes traveling servants of God—rather than sending them to some hotel to mingle with the ungodly.

"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (verse 2). The second clause is to be regarded as supplying a motive for the discharge of this duty of Christian hospitality. Needless to say these added words do not signify that we may expect, literally, to receive a similar honor, but it is mentioned for the purpose of supplying encouragement. The apostle here reminds us that in former days some had been richly rewarded for their diligent observance of this duty, for they had been granted the holy privilege of receiving angels under the appearance of men. How this consideration enforces our exhortation is apparent: had there not been a readiness of mind unto this, a spirit of real hospitality in their hearts, they had neglected the opportunity with which Divine grace so highly favored them. Let us, then, seek to cultivate the virtue of generosity: "the liberal deviseth liberal things" (Isa. 32:8).

"For thereby some have entertained angels unawares." The special reference, no doubt, is unto the cases of Abraham (Gen.

18:1-3) and of Lot (Gen. 19:1-3). We say "special reference" for the use of the plural "some" is sufficient to bar us from ascribing it to them alone, exclusively of all others. It is quite likely that in those ancient times, when God so much used the ministry of angels unto His saints, that others of them shared the same holy privilege. The real point for us in this allusion is that the Lord will be no man's debtor, that He honors those who honor Him—whether they honor Him directly, or indirectly in the persons of His people. "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints and do minister" (Heb. 6:10). This too is recorded for our encouragement and when we have discharged the duty (as opportunity afforded—for God accepts the will for the deed!), if in indigent circumstances we may plead this before Him.

The Scriptures are full of examples where the Spirit has joined together duty and privilege, obedience and reward. Whenever we comply with such commands, we may count upon God recompensing those who exercised kindness unto His people. The cases of Rebekah (Gen. 24:18, 19, 22), of Potiphar (Gen. 39:5), of the Egyptian midwives (Ex. 2:17, 20), of Rahab (Josh. 6:25), of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:15, 23), of the woman of Shunem (2 Kings 4:8), of the inhabitants of Melita (Acts 28:2, 8, 9), all illustrate this. The resulting gains will more than repay any expense we incur in befriending the saints. Beautifully did Calvin point out that "not merely angels, but Christ Himself, is received by us, when we receive the poor of the flock in His name." Solemn beyond words is the warning of Matthew 25:41-43; but inexpressibly blessed is Matthew 25:34-36.

Compassion for the afflicted is the next thing exhorted unto: "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them" (verse 3). Love to the brethren is to manifest itself in sympathy for sufferers. Most reprehensible and un-Christlike is that selfish callousness which says, I have troubles enough of my own without concerning myself over those of other people. Putting it on its lowest ground, such a spirit ministers no relief: the most effectual method of getting away from our own sorrows is to seek out and relieve others in distress. But nothing has a more beneficial tendency to counteract our innate selfishness than a compliance with such exhortations as the one here before us: to be occupied with the severer afflictions

which some of our brethren are experiencing will free our minds from the lighter trials we may be passing through.

"Remember them that are in bonds." The immediate reference is unto those who had been deprived of their liberty for Christ's sake, who had been cast into prison. The "remember" signifies far more than to merely think of them, including all the duties which their situation called for. It means, first, feel for them, take to heart their case, have compassion toward them. Our great High Priest is touched with the feeling of their infirmities (Heb. 4:15), and so must we be. At best their food was coarse, their beds hard, and the ties which bound them to their families had been rudely sundered. Often they lay cruelly fettered, in a dark and damp dungeon. They felt their situation, their confinement, their separation from wife and children; then identify yourself with them and have a feeling sense of what they suffer. "Remember," too, that but for the sovereignty of God, and His restraining hand, you would be in the same condition as they!

But more: "remember" them in your prayers. Intercede for them, seeking on their behalf grace from God, that they may meekly acquiesce to His providential dealings, that their sufferings may be sanctified to their souls, that the Most High will so overrule things that this Satanic opposition against some of His saints may yet issue in the extension of His kingdom. Finally, do unto them as you would wish them to do unto you were you in their place. If you can obtain permission, visit them (Matthew 25:36), endeavor to comfort them, so far as practicable relieve their sufferings; and leave no stone unturned to seek their lawful release. Divine providence so regulates things that, as a rule, while some of the saints are in prison, others of them still enjoy their liberty—thus allowing an opportunity for the practical exercise of Christian sympathy.

"And them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body" (verse 3). There is probably a double reference here: first, to those who were not actually in prison, but who had been severely flogged, or were in sore straits because heavy fines had been imposed on them. Second, to the wives and children of those who had been imprisoned, and who would suffer keen adversity now that the breadwinners were removed from them. Such have a very real claim upon the sympathy of those who had escaped the persecutions of the foes of the Gospel. If you are not in a financial

position to do much for them, then acquaint some of your richer brethren with their case and endeavor to stir them up to supply their needs. "As being yourselves also in the body" is a reminder that it may be your turn next to experience such opposition.

John Owen, who lived in particularly stormy times (the days of Bunyan), said, "Whilst God is pleased to give grace and courage unto some to suffer for the Gospel unto bonds, and to others to perform this duty towards them, the church will be no loser by suffering. When some are tried as unto their constancy in bonds, others are tried as unto their sincerity in the discharge of the duties required of them. And usually more fail in neglect of their duty towards sufferers, and so fall from their profession, than do so fail under and on the account of their sufferings." That the apostle Paul practiced what he preached is clear from "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" (2 Cor. 11:29). For illustrations of the discharge of these duties see Genesis 14:14, Nehemiah 1:4, Job 29:15, 16, Jeremiah 38:7, etc. For solemn warnings read Job 19:14-16, Proverbs 21:13, Matthew 25:43, James 2:13.

We need hardly say that the principles of verse 3 are of general application at all times and to all cases of suffering Christians. The same is summed up in "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). The sentiment of this verse has been beautifully expressed in the lines of that hymn so precious in its hallowed memories:

"Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.
We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear."

The Lord grant unto both writer and reader more of His grace so that we shall "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15).

Hebrews 13:4

Chapter 108 - Marriage

From a prescription of duties towards others, the apostle next proceeds to give directions unto those which concern ourselves, wherein our own persons and walking are concerned. He does this in a prohibition of the two most radical and comprehensive lusts of corrupt nature, namely, uncleanness and covetousness: the first respecting the persons of men in a peculiar manner, the other their conversation or conduct. Acts of moral uncleanness are distinguishable from all other sins which are perpetrated in external acts, in that they are immediately against a man's self and his own person (see 1 Corinthians 6:18), and therefore is chastity enforced under the means for preserving the same, that is, marriage; while the antidote for covetousness is given, namely, a spirit of contentment. The connection between Hebrews 13:4-6 and 13:1-3 is obvious: unless uncleanness and covetousness be mortified there can be no real love exercised unto the brethren.

As God hath knit the bones and sinews together for the strengthening of our bodies, so He has ordained the joining of man and woman together in wedlock for the strengthening of their lives, for "two are better than one" (Ecclesiastes 4:9); and therefore when God made the woman for the man He said, "I will make him a help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18), showing that man is advantaged by having a wife. That such does not actually prove to be the case in all instances is, for the most part at least, to be attributed unto departure from the Divine precepts thereon. As this is a subject of such vital moment, we deem it expedient to present a fairly comprehensive outline of the teaching of Holy Writ upon it, especially for the benefit of our young readers; though we trust we shall be enabled to include that which will be helpful to older ones too.

It is perhaps a trite remark, yet none the less weighty for having been uttered so often, that with the one exception of personal conversion, marriage is the most momentous of all earthly events in the life of a man or woman. It forms a bond of union which binds

them until death. It brings them into such intimate relations that they must either sweeten or embitter each other's existence. It entails circumstances and consequences which are not less far-reaching than the endless ages of eternity. How essential it is, then, that we should have the blessing of Heaven upon such a solemn yet precious undertaking; and in order to this, how absolutely necessary it is that we be subject to God and to His Word thereon. Far, far better to remain single unto the end of our days, than to enter into the marriage state without the Divine benediction upon it. The records of history and the facts of observation bear abundant testimony to the truth of that remark.

Even those who look no further than the temporal happiness of individuals and the welfare of existing society, are not insensible to the great importance of our domestic relations, which the strongest affections of nature secure, and which even our wants and weaknesses cement. We can form no conception of social virtue or felicity, yea, no conception of human society itself, which has not its foundation in the family. No matter how excellent the constitution and laws of a country may be, or how vast its resources and prosperity, there is no sure basis for social order, or public as well as private virtue, until it be laid in the wise regulation of its families. After all, a nation is but the aggregate of its families, and unless there be good husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, there cannot possibly be good citizens. Therefore the present decay of home life and family discipline threaten the stability of our nation today far more severely than does any foreign hostility.

But the Scriptural view of the relative duties of the members of a Christian household, portrays the prevailing effects in a most alarming manner, as being dishonoring to God, disastrous to the spiritual condition of the churches, and as raising up a most serious obstacle in the way of evangelical progress. Sad beyond words is it to see that professing Christians are themselves largely responsible for the lowering of marital standards, the general disregard of domestic relations, and the rapid disappearance of family discipline. As, then, marriage is the basis of the home or family, it is incumbent on the writer to summon his readers to a serious and prayerful consideration of the revealed will of God on this vital theme. Though we can hardly hope to arrest the awful disease which is now

eating out the very vitals of our nation, yet if God is pleased to bless this article to a few individuals our labor will not be in vain.

We will begin by pointing out the excellency of wedlock: "Marriage is honorable:" says our text, and it is so first of all because God Himself has placed special honor upon it. All other ordinances or institutions (except the Sabbath) were appointed of God by the medium of men or angels (Acts 7:35), but marriage was ordained immediately by the Lord Himself—no man or angel brought the first wife to her husband (Gen. 2:22). Thus marriage had more Divine honor put upon it than had all the other Divine institutions, because it was directly solemnized by God Himself. Again; this was the first ordinance God instituted, yea, the first thing He did after man and woman were created, and that, while they were still in their unfallen state. Moreover, the place where their marriage occurred shows the honorableness of this institution: whereas all other institutions (save the Sabbath) were instituted outside of paradise, marriage was solemnized in Eden itself!—intimating how happy they are that marry in the Lord.

"God's crowning creative act was the making of woman. At the close of each creative day it is formally recorded that 'God saw what He had made, that it was good.' But when Adam was made, it is explicitly recorded that 'God saw it was not good that the man should be alone.' As to man the creative work lacked completeness, until, as all animals and even plants had their mates, there should be found for Adam also an help, meet for him—his counterpart and companion. Not till this want was met did God see the work of the last creative day also to be good.

"This is the first great Scripture lesson on family life, and it should be well learned... The Divine institution of marriage teaches that the ideal state of both man and woman is not in separation but in union, that each is meant and fitted for the other; and that God's ideal is such union, based on a pure and holy love, enduring for life, exclusive of all rivalry or other partnership, and incapable of alienation or unfaithfulness because it is a union in the Lord—a holy wedlock of soul and spirit in mutual sympathy and affection" (A.T. Pierson).

As God the Father honored the institution of marriage, so also did God the Son. First, by His being "born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). Second, by His miracles, for the first supernatural sign that He

wrought was at the marriage of Cana in Galilee (John 2:9), where He turned the water into wine, thereby intimating that if Christ be present at your wedding (i.e., if you "marry in the Lord") your life shall be a joyous or blessed one. Third, by His parables, for He compared the kingdom of God unto a marriage (Matthew 22:2) and holiness to a "wedding garment" (Matthew 22:11). So also in His teaching: when the Pharisees sought to ensnare Him on the subject of divorce, He set His imprimatur on the original constitution, adding "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matthew 19:4-6).

The institution of marriage has been still further honored by the Holy Spirit, for He has used it as a figure of the union which exists between Christ and the Church. "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (Eph. 5:31, 32). The relation which obtains between the Redeemer and the redeemed is likened, again and again, unto that which exists between a wedded man and woman: Christ is the "Husband" (Isa. 54:5), the Church is the "Wife" (Rev. 21:9). "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you" (Jer. 3:14). Thus, each person of the blessed Trinity has set His seal upon the honorableness of the marriage state.

There is no doubt that in true marriage each party helps the other equally, and in view of what has been pointed out above, any who venture to hold or teach any other doctrine or philosophy join issue with the Most High. This does not lay down a hard and fast rule that every man and woman is obliged to enter into matrimony: there may be good and wise reasons for abiding alone, adequate motives for remaining in the single state—physical and moral, domestic and social. Nevertheless, a single life should be regarded as abnormal and exceptional, rather than ideal. Any teaching that leads men and women to think of the marriage bond as the sign of bondage, and the sacrifice of all independence, to construe wifeness and motherhood as drudgery and interference with woman's higher destiny, any public sentiment to cultivate celibacy as more desirable and honorable, or to substitute anything else for marriage and home, not only invades God's ordinance, but opens the door to nameless crimes and threatens the very foundations of society.

Now it is clear that marriage must have particular reasons for the appointment of it. Three are given in Scripture. First, for the propagation of children. This is its obvious and normal purpose: "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him: male and female created He them" (Gen. 1:27)—not both males or both females, but one male and one female; and to make the design of this unmistakably plain God said, "Be fruitful and multiply." For this reason marriage is called "matrimony," which signifies motherage, because it results in virgins becoming mothers. Therefore it is desirable that marriage be entered into at an early age, before the prime of life be passed: twice in Scripture we read of "the wife of thy youth" (Prov. 5:18; Malachi 2:15). We have pointed out that the propagation of children is the "normal" end of marriage; yet there are special seasons of acute "distress" when 1 Corinthians 7:29 holds good.

Second, marriage is designed as a preventive of immorality: "To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (1 Cor. 7:2). If any were exempted it might be supposed that kings would be given dispensation—because of the lack of a successor to the throne should his wife be barren; yet the king is expressly forbidden a plurality of wives (Deut. 17:17), showing that the endangering of a monarchy is not sufficient to countervail the sin of adultery. For this cause a whore is termed a "strange woman" (Prov. 2:16), showing that she should be a stranger to us; and children born out of marriage are called "bastards," which (under the Law) were excluded from the congregation of the Lord (Deut. 23:2).

The third purpose of marriage is for the avoiding of the inconveniences of solitude, signified in the "it is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18: as though the Lord had said, This life would be irksome and miserable for man if no wife be given him for a companion: "Woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up" (Ecclesiastes 4:10). Someone has said, "like a turtle which has lost his mate, like one leg when the other is cut off, like one wing when the other is clipped, so had man been if woman had not been given to him." Therefore for mutual society and comfort God united man and woman that the cares and fears of this life might be eased by the cheer and help of each other.

Let us next consider the choice of our mate. First, the one

selected for our life's partner must be outside those degrees of near kinship prohibited by the Divine law: Leviticus 18:6-17. Second, the Christian must wed a fellow Christian. From earliest times God has commanded that "the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be numbered among the nations" (Num. 23:9). His law unto Israel in connection with the Canaanites, was, "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them: thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son" (Deut. 7:3 and cf. Joshua 23:12). How much more, then, must God require the separation of those who are His people by a spiritual and heavenly tie than those who occupied only a fleshly and earthly relation to Him. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14) is the clarion order to His saints of this dispensation. Partnership of any kind of one who is born again with one in a state of nature is here prohibited, as is evident from the terms used in the next verse—"fellowship, communion, concord, part, agreement."

There are but two families in this world: the children of God and the children of the Devil (1 John 3:10). If, then, a daughter of God marries a son of the Evil one she becomes a daughter-in-law to Satan! If a son of God marries a daughter of Satan, he becomes a son-in-law to the Devil! By such an infamous step an affinity is formed between one belonging to the most High and one belonging to His arch-enemy. "Strong language!" yes, but not too strong. O the dishonor done to Christ by such a union; O the bitter reaping from such a sowing. In every case it is the poor believer who suffers. Read the inspired histories of Samson, Solomon, and Ahab, and see what followed their unholy alliances in wedlock. As well might an athlete attach to himself a heavy weight and then expect to win a race, as for one to progress spiritually after marrying a worldling.

Should any Christian reader be inclined or expect to become betrothed, the first question for him or her to carefully weigh in the Lord's presence is, Will this union be with an unbeliever? For if you are really cognizant of and heart and soul be impressed with the tremendous difference which God, in His grace, has put between you and those who are—however attractive in the flesh—yet in their sins, then you should have no difficulty in rejecting every suggestion and proposal of making common cause with such. You are "the righteousness of God" in Christ, but unbelievers are "unrighteous"; you are "light in the Lord," but they are darkness; you have been

translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, but unbelievers are under the power of Belial; you are a son of peace, whereas all unbelievers are "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3); therefore "be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean; and I will receive you" (2 Cor. 6:17).

The danger of forming such an alliance is before marriage, or even betrothal, neither of which could be seriously entertained by any real Christian unless the sweetness of fellowship with the Lord had been lost. The affections must first be withdrawn from Christ before we can find delight in social intimacy with those who are alienated from God, and whose interests are confined to this world. The child of God who is "keeping his heart with all diligence" will not, cannot, have a joy in intimacies with the unregenerate. Alas, how often is the seeking or the accepting of close friendship with unbelievers the first step to open departure from Christ. The path which the Christian is called upon to tread is indeed a narrow one, but if he attempts to widen it, or leave it for a broader road, it must be in contravention of the Word of God, and to his or her own irreparable damage and loss.

Third, "married . . . only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39) goes much further than prohibiting an unbeliever for a mate. Even among the children of God there are many who would not be suitable to each other in such a tie. A pretty face is an attraction, but O how vain to be governed in such a serious undertaking by such a trifle. Earthly goods and social position have their value here, yet how base and degrading to suffer them to control such a solemn undertaking. O what watchfulness and prayerfulness is needed in the regulation of our affections! Who fully understands the temperament that will match mine? that will be able to bear patiently with my faults, be a corrective to my tendencies, and a real help in my desire to live for Christ in this world? How many make a fair show at the start, but turn out wretchedly. Who can shield me from a host of evils which beset the unwary, but God my Father?

"A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband" (Prov. 12:4): a pious and competent wife is the most valuable of all God's temporal blessings: she is the special gift of His grace. "A prudent wife is from the Lord" (Prov. 19:14), and He requires to be definitely and diligently sought unto: see Genesis 24:12. It is not sufficient to have the approval of trusted friends and parents,

valuable and even needful as that (generally) is for our happiness; for though they are concerned for our welfare, yet their wisdom is not sufficiently far-reaching. The One who appointed the ordinance must needs be given the first place in it if we are to have His blessing on it. Now prayer is never intended to be a substitute for the proper discharge of our responsibilities: we are ever required to use care and discretion, and must never act hurriedly and rashly. Our better judgment is to regulate our emotion: in the body the head is placed over the heart, and not the heart over the head!

"Whoso findeth a wife (a real one) findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord" (Prov. 18:22): "findeth" implies a definite quest. To direct us therein the Holy Spirit has supplied two rules or qualifications. First, godliness, because our partner must be like Christ's Spouse, pure and holy. Second, fitness, "a help, meet for him" (Gen. 2:18), showing that a wife cannot be a "help" unless she be "meet," and for that she must have much in common with her mate. If her husband be a laboring man, it would be madness for him to choose a lazy woman; if he be a learned man, a woman with no love of knowledge would be quite unsuited. Marriage is called a "yoke," and two cannot pull together if all the burden is to fall upon one—as it would if one weak and sickly was the partner chosen.

Now for the benefit of our younger readers, let us point out some of the marks by which a godly and fit mate may be identified. First, the reputation: a good man commonly has a good name (Prov. 22:1), none can accuse him of open sins. Second, the countenance: our looks reveal our characters, and therefore Scripture speaks of "proud looks" and "wanton looks,"—"the show of their countenance doth witness against them" (Isa. 3:9). Third, the speech, for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh:" "the heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips" (Prov. 16:23); "She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness" (Prov. 31:26). Fourth, the apparel: a modest woman is known by the modesty of her attire. If the clothing be vulgar or showy the heart is vain. Fifth, the company kept: birds of a feather flock together—a person may be known by his or her associates.

A word of warning is, perhaps, not quite needless. No matter how carefully and prayerfully one's partner be selected, he will not find marriage a perfect thing. Not that God did not make it perfect,

but man has fallen since, and the fall has marred everything. The apple may still be sweet, but it has a worm inside. The rose has not lost its fragrance, but thorns grow with it. Willingly or unwillingly, everywhere we must read the ruin which sin has brought in. Then let us not dream of those faultless people which a diseased fancy can picture and novelists portray. The most godly men and women have their failings; and though such be easy to bear when there is genuine love, yet they have to be borne.

A few brief remarks now on the home-life of the wedded couple. Light and help will be obtained here if it be borne in mind that marriage pictures forth the relation between Christ and His Church. This, then, involves three things. First, the attitude and actions of husband and wife are to be regulated by love, for that is the cementing tie between Lord Jesus and His Spouse: a holy love, sacrificial love, an enduring love which naught can sever. There is nothing like love to make the wheels of home life run smoothly. The husband sustains to his mate the same relation as does the Redeemer to the redeemed, and hence the exhortation, "Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church" (Eph. 5:25): with a hearty and constant love, ever seeking her good, ministering to her needs, protecting and providing for her, bearing with her infirmities: thus "giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered" (1 Pet. 3:7).

Second, the headship of the husband. "The head of the woman is the man" (1 Cor. 11:3); "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church" (Eph. 5:23). Unless this Divine appointment be duly heeded there is sure to be confusion. The household must have a leader, and God has committed its rule unto the husband, holding him responsible for its orderly management; and serious will be the loss if he shirks his duty and turns the reins of government over to his wife. But this does not mean that Scripture gives him license to be a domestic tyrant, treating his wife as a servant: his dominion is to be exercised in love toward the one who is his consort. "Likewise ye husbands dwell with them" (1 Pet. 3:7): seek their society after the day's labor is over. That Divine injunction plainly condemns those who leave their wives and go abroad on the pretext of a "call from God."

Third, the subjection of the wife. "Wives submit yourselves

unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (Eph. 5:22): there is only one exception to be made in the application of this rule, namely when he commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands. "For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands" (1 Pet. 3:5): alas, how little of this spiritual "adornment" is evident today! "Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, so long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement" (1 Pet. 3:6): willing and loving subjection to the husband, out of respect for the authority of God, is what characterizes the daughters of Sarah. Where the wife refuses to submit to her husband, the children are sure to defy their parents—sow the wind, reap the whirlwind.

We have space for only one other matter, which it is deeply important for young husbands to heed. "Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house" (Prov. 24:27). The point here is that the husband is not to think of owning his own house before he can afford it. As Matthew Henry says, "This is a rule of providence in the management of household affairs. We must prefer necessities before luxuries, and not lay that out for show which should be expended for the support of the family." Alas, in this degenerate age so many young couples want to start where their parents ended, and then feel they must imitate their godless neighbors in various extravagancies. Never go into debt or purchase on the "credit system:" "Owe no man anything" (Rom. 13:8)!

And now for a final word on our text. "Marriage is honorable in all" who are called thereunto, no class of persons being precluded. This clearly gives the lie to the pernicious teaching of Rome concerning the celibacy of the clergy, as does also 1 Timothy 3:2, etc. "And the bed undefiled" not only signifies fidelity to the marriage vow (1 Thess. 4:4), but that the conjugal act of intercourse is not polluting: in their unfallen state Adam and Eve were bidden to "multiply;" yet moderation and sobriety is to obtain here, as in all things. We do not believe in what is termed "birth control," but we do earnestly urge self-control, especially by the husband, "But whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." This is a most solemn warning against unfaithfulness: those who live and die impenitently in these sins will eternally perish (Eph. 5:5).

Hebrews 13:5

Chapter 109 - Covetousness

In this chapter of Hebrews the apostle makes a practical application of the theme of the epistle. Having set forth at length the amazing grace of God toward His believing people by the provision He has made for them in the Mediator and Surety of the covenant, having shown that they now have in Christ the substance of all that was shadowed forth in the ceremonial law, the tabernacle, and the priesthood of Israel, we now have pressed upon us the responsibilities and obligations which devolve upon those who are the favored recipients of those spiritual blessings. First, that which is fundamental to the discharge of all Christian duties is exhorted unto: the continuance of brotherly love (verse 1). Second, instances are given in which this chief spiritual grace is to be exemplified: in Christian hospitality (verse 2), and in compassion for the afflicted (verse 3). Third, prohibitions are made against the two most radical lusts of fallen nature: moral uncleanness (verse 4) and covetousness (verse 5), for the indulgence of these is fatal to the exercise of brotherly love.

Having in our last article dealt at length with the merciful provision which God has made for the avoidance of moral uncleanness—the ordinance of marriage—we now turn to the second great sin which is here dehorted against, namely, covetousness. "Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have" (v. 5). Here is an evil and its remedy set before us side by side, as was the case in the previous verse, though there the remedy is given before that which it counteracts. We will follow the order of the our present text and consider first the vice which is here forbidden, before we contemplate the virtue which is enjoined: yet it will be helpful to keep them both in mind, for the latter casts light upon the former, enabling us to determine its exact nature as nothing else will.

"Let your conversation be without covetousness." The Greek word which is here rendered "covetousness" is literally "lover of

silver," and the R.V. renders our text "Be ye free from the love of money." Now while it be true that the love of money or worldly possessions is one of the principal forms of covetousness, yet we are satisfied that the translation of the A.V. is to be preferred here. The scope of the Greek verb is much wider than a lusting after material riches. This appears from the only other verse in the N.T. where this word occurs, namely, 1 Timothy 3:3, in a passage which describes the qualifications of a bishop: "Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous." The very fact that a previous clause specifies "not greedy of filthy lucre" makes it clear that "not covetous" includes more than "not a lover of money."

A comment or two also requires to be made upon the term "conversation." This word is limited today unto our speech with one another, but three hundred years ago, when the A.V. was made, it had a much more comprehensive meaning. Its latitude can be gathered from its employment in the Scriptures. For example, in 1 Peter 3:2 we read, "while they behold your chaste conversation:" note "behold" was not "hear!" The term then has reference to behavior or deportment: "But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Pet. 1:15). It is not to be restricted to that which is external, but includes both character and conduct. The Syriac renders our word "mind," probably because both covetousness and contentment are mental states. "Let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27): this obviously means, Let your affections and actions correspond to the revelation of Divine grace you have received; conduct yourself in such a manner that those around will be impressed by the principles, motives, and sentiments which govern you.

So it is here in our text: let not covetousness rule your heart nor regulate your life. But exactly what is "covetousness"? It is the opposite of contentment, a being dissatisfied with our present lot and portion. It is an over-eager desire for the things of this world. It is a lusting after what God has forbidden or withheld from us, for we may crave, wrongly, after things which are not evil or injurious in themselves. All abnormal and irregular desires, all unholy and inordinate thoughts and affections, are comprehended by this term. To covet is to think upon and hanker after anything which my acquirement of would result in injury to my neighbor. "We may

desire that part of a man's property which he is in-dined to dispose of, if we mean to obtain it on equitable terms; but when he chooses to keep, we must not covet. The poor man may desire moderate relief from the rich, but he must not covet his affluence, or repine even though he does not relieve him" (Thomas Scott).

Now some sins are more easily detected than others, and for the most part condemned by those professing godliness. But covetousness is only too often winked at, and some covetous persons are regarded as very respectable people. Many professing Christians look upon covetousness as quite a trifling matter, while the world applauds it as legitimate ambition, as business shrewdness, as prudence, etc. All sorts of excuses are made for this sin and plausible pretenses argued in its favor. It is indeed a very subtle sin, which few are conscious of. In one of his sermons Spurgeon mentions a prominent man who had a great many people come to him to make confession, and this man observed that while different ones acknowledged all sorts of outrageous crimes, he never had one who confessed to covetousness. Few suspect that this is one of the prevailing iniquities of their hearts, rather are they inclined to regard this vice as a virtue.

But the Holy Scriptures are very explicit on this subject. The Divine law expressly declares, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's (Ex. 20:17). "The covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth" (Ps. 10:3). To His disciples Christ said, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). The votaries of Mammon are linked with "drunkards and adulterers," and such are excluded from the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10). The covetous are branded with the most detestable character of idolaters (Col. 3:5)—no doubt this is because they who are ruled by this lust adore their gold and put their trust in it, making a god of it. How we need to pray, "Incline mine heart unto Thy testimonies, and not to covetousness" (Ps. 119:36).

God's Word also sets before us some fearfully solemn examples of the judgments which fell upon covetous souls. The fall of our first parents originated in covetousness, lusting after that which God had forbidden. Thus the very frontispiece of Holy Writ

exhibits the frightfulness of this sin. See what covetousness did for Balaam: he "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Pet. 2:15)—the honors and wealth which Balak promised were too attractive for him to resist. See what covetousness did for Achan, who lusted after the forbidden silver and gold: he and his whole family were stoned to death (Josh. 7). Look at Gehazi: lusting after the money his master had refused, and in consequence, he and his seed were smitten with leprosy (2 Kings 5). Consider the awful case of Judas, who for thirty pieces of silver sold the Lord of glory. Remember the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). In view of these warnings shall we call this worst of iniquities "a little sin"? Surely it is something to be trembled at!

Covetousness is an inordinate desire of the heart after the creature; which is a fruit of man's apostasy from the Lord. No longer finding in God the supreme object of his soul's delight and confidence, fallen man loves and trusts in the creature (mere things) rather than the Creator. This takes on many forms: men lust after honors, wealth, pleasures, knowledge, for Scripture speaks of "the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Eph. 2:3), and of "filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2 Cor. 7:1). It is the very nature of the depraved heart to hanker after that which God has forbidden and to crave after what is evil, though this spirit may be developed more strongly in some than in others; at any rate, a larger measure of restraining grace is granted to one than to another. These irregular desires and inordinate thoughts are the firstborn of our corrupt nature, the first risings of indwelling sin, the beginnings of all transgressions committed by us.

"Thou shalt not covet" (Ex. 20:17). "The commandment requires moderation in respect of all worldly goods, submission to God, acquiescence in His will, love to His commandments, and a reliance on Him for the daily supply of all our wants as He sees good. This is right and reasonable, fit for God to command and profitable for man to obey, the very temper and felicity of Heaven itself. But it is so contrary to the desires of our hearts by nature, and so superior to the actual attainments of the best Christians on earth, that it is very difficult to persuade them that God requires such perfection, and still more difficult to satisfy them that it is indispensable to the happiness of rational creatures, and most difficult of all to convince them that everything inconsistent with

this or short of it is sin; that it deserves the wrath of God, and cannot be taken away, except by the mercy of God through the atonement of Christ" (T. Scott).

The most common form of this sin is, of course, the love of money, the lusting after more and more of material riches. This is evident in getting, keeping, and spending. First, in getting. To acquire wealth becomes the dominant passion of the soul. An insatiable greed possesses the heart. This exists in varying degrees in different persons, and is demonstrated in numerous ways. That we may be quite practical let us mention one or two. Often this is manifested in a greedy and grasping effort after inequitable profits and by paying an unjustly small wage to employees, the chief design of its perpetrators being to amass fortunes for their descendants. Yet often these very men hold prominent positions in the churches and "make long prayers," while devouring widows' houses and grinding the face of the poor. Alas, how the Gospel is dishonored and the sanctuary defiled by such sanctimonious wretches.

Again. Recently we read a faithful article wherein the writer took to task the lies and deceptions practiced by many shopkeepers and their assistants in palming off upon the public various forms of merchandise by misrepresenting their quality and value; the writer concluding with a solemn emphasis upon "all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (Rev. 21:8). As he finished reading the same, this writer asked himself the question, And how far is a greedy and grasping public to blame? Who is largely responsible for this commercial dishonesty? Who tempt the tradesmen to mark their wares as "great bargains," "prices much reduced?" Is it not the covetous purchasers? How many today are possessed with an insatiable craving after "bargains," buying things "cheap," without any conscientious consideration of the real worth of the article: it is that which fosters so much fraud. Let the Christian buy only what he needs, and when he needs it, and so far as possible only from upright traders, and then he will be more willing to pay according to the value received.

Second, covetousness evidences itself in keeping. There is a miserliness which clings to money as a drowning man to a log. There is a hoarding up for self which is entirely reprehensible. "There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother; yet is there no end of all his labor; neither is his

eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labor and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail" (Ecclesiastes 4:8). Yes, there are those who are utterly unconcerned about their eternal interests, and labor day in and day out, year after year, in order to add to what they have already accumulated, and who begrudge purchasing for themselves the bare necessities of life. They continue to amass money utterly regardless of Christ's cause on earth or the poor and needy among their fellow-men. There are still those the language of whose actions is, "I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease; eat, drink, be merry" (Luke 12:18, 19).

Third, covetousness also manifests itself in spending. If there be those who are niggardly, there are others who are wastrels. If there be those who condemn the miser for his stinginess, often they are guilty in turn of wreckless prodigality. That which ought to be saved for a rainy day, is used to gratify a desire which covets some unnecessary object. But let us not be misunderstood on these points. Neither the possession nor the retention of wealth is wrong in itself, providing it be acquired honestly and preserved with a justifiable motive. God is the One who "giveth thee power to get wealth" (Deut. 8:18), and therefore is His goodness to be acknowledged when He is pleased to prosper us in basket and in store. Yet even then we need the exhortation, "If riches increase, set not thine heart upon them" (Ps. 62:10).

"Not slothful in business" (Rom. 12:11) is a Divine exhortation. So also there is a prudence and thrift which is legitimate, as is clear from, "There is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty" (Prov. 11:24). So also it is a bounden duty to make provision for those who are dependent upon us: "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8). It is easy to swing to the opposite extreme and become fanatical, and under the guise of trusting God, tempt Him. To lay up for a rainy day is quite permissible: see Proverbs 6:6-8. Neither idleness nor extravagance are to be condoned. Those who through indolence or prodigality waste their substance and fail in business cannot be too severely censured, for they not only impoverish

themselves but injure others, becoming the pests of society and a public burden.

Yet how difficult it is to strike the happy mean: to be provident without being prodigal, to be "not slothful in business" and yet not bury ourselves in it, to be thrifty without being miserly, to use this world and yet not abuse it. How appropriate is the prayer, "Remove from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:8, 9). Romans 7:7 shows that it is only as the Spirit applies the Law in power to the conscience that we are taught to see the evil and feel the danger of covetousness; as, at the same time, it serves to check an avaricious disposition and curb inordinate fondness for the creature. That which most effectually strikes at our innate selfishness is the love of God shed abroad in the heart. A generous heart and a liberal hand should ever characterize the Christian.

A few words next upon the heinousness of covetousness. This evil lust blinds the understanding and corrupts the judgment, so that it regards light as darkness, and darkness as light. "If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great and because mine hand had gotten much... This also was an iniquity to be punished by the judge, for I should have denied the God that is above" (Job 31:24, 25, 28)—how little this is realized by the guilty one! It is an insatiable lust, for when covetousness rules, the heart is never satisfied: "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase" (Ecclesiastes 5:10). It is a devouring sin: "the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word" (Matthew 13:22).

So terrible is this sin and so great is its power that, one who is governed by it will trample upon the claims of justice, as Ahab did in seizing the vineyard of Naboth (1 Kings 21); he will disregard the call of charity, as David did in taking the wife of Uriah (2 Sam. 11); he will stoop to the most fearful lies, as did Ananias and Sapphira; he will defy the express commandment of God, as Achan did; he will sell Christ, as Judas did. This is the mother sin, for "the love of money is the root of all evil." It is a gnawing and fatal sin: "But they that will be (are determined to be) rich fall into temptation and a

snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition... which while some have coveted after they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:9, 10).

It is the working of this evil lust which lies at the root of very much of the fearful Sabbath-desecration that is now so rife. It is the greed of gold which causes the ra

the Sunday editions of the newspaper. How the nations of Christendom are heaping up to themselves "wrath against the Day of Wrath!" God will not be mocked with impugny. Those who believe the Scriptures must perforce expect that soon a far worse war than the last is likely to be sent as a scourge from Heaven upon the present Sabbath profaners.

It was the spirit of covetousness which prompted Israel of old to disregard the fourth commandment. "In those days saw I in Jerusalem some treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold in the Sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem" (Nehemiah 13:15, 16). Because of their Sabbath profanation, the sore judgment of God fell upon the nation. "Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath" (Nehemiah 13:17, 18): "Hallow My Sabbaths and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God. Notwithstanding, the children rebelled against Me: they walked not in My statutes neither kept My judgments to do them, which if a man do, he shall even live in them: they polluted My Sabbaths: then I said, I will pour out My fury upon them" (Ezek. 20:20, 21).

Thus, not only is covetousness a fearful sin in itself, but it is also the prolific mother of other evils. In the poor, it works envy, discontent, and fraud; in the rich, pride, luxury, and avarice. This vile lust unfits for the performing of holy duties, preventing the exercise of those graces which are necessary thereto. It exposes to

manifold temptations, whereby we are rendered an easy prey to many spiritual enemies. The more we yield to this evil spirit, the more do we conduct ourselves as though we desired our portion in this world, and look no further than present things, contrary to "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (2 Cor. 4:18). It tends to cast contempt on the mercies which are ours and quenches the spirit of thanksgiving. It turns the heart away from God: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:23).

Let us now go deeper and solemnly observe the comprehensiveness of God's searching law, "Thou shalt not covet" (Ex. 20:17). Light is cast upon those words by, "I had not known sin, but by the Law; for I had not known lust ('concupiscence,' margin) except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet or "lust" (Rom. 7:7) —"concupiscence" is an evil desire, an inordinate affection, a secret lusting after something. What the apostle means is, I had never discovered my inward depravity unless the Spirit had enlightened my understanding, convicted my conscience, and made me feel the corruptions of my heart. Man ever looks on the outward appearance—and as a Pharisee of the Pharisees Paul's actions fully conformed to the Law—but when the Spirit quickens a soul, he is made to realize that God requires "Truth in the inward parts" (Ps. 51:6) and cries "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10).

"Thou shalt not covet." That which is here forbidden is concupiscence, or those imaginations, thoughts, and desires, which precede the consent of the will. Herein we may perceive the exalted holiness of the Divine Law—far transcending all human codes—requiring inward purity. Herein, too, we may recognize one of the fundamental errors of Romanists, who, following the Pelagians, deny that these lustings are sinful until they are yielded to, and who affirm that evil imaginations only become sinful when the mind definitely assents to them. But the holy Law of God condemns that which instigates unto what is forbidden, condemns that which inclines toward what is unholy, and denounces that which inflames with cupidity. All irregular desires are forbidden. Corrupt imaginations and unlawful inclinations that precede the consent of the will are evil, being the seeds of all other sins.

Again we say, Herein God's Law differs from and is

immeasurably superior to all of man's laws, for it takes note of and prohibits all the hidden desires and secret lustings of the heart. It is this tenth commandment which, above all others, discovers unto us our depravity and shows how very far short we come of that perfection which the Law requires. There is first an evil thought in the mind causing us to think of something which is not ours. This is followed by a longing after or wishing for it. There is then an inward delight by way of anticipating the pleasure that object will give; and then, unless restraining grace intervenes, the outward act of sin is committed—see James 1:14, 15. The first evil thought is involuntary, due to the mind's being turned from good to evil, even though that evil be simply lusting after a new but unnecessary hat! The longing is caused by the heart's being enticed by the delight promised. Then the consent of the will is gained, and the mind plans how to gain the coveted object.

This concupiscence or evil lusting of the heart is called "the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7:23). It is what the older theologians term "original sin," being the fountain of evil within, corrupting all our faculties. Discontent with our lot, envy of our neighbors, yea, even the very "thought of foolishness is SIN" (Prov. 24:9). How high is the standard set before us: "Let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor; and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord" (Zech. 8:17). Does the third commandment interdict any blasphemous oath upon the lips? then the tenth prohibits any risings of the heart against God. Does the fourth commandment interdict all unnecessary work on the Sabbath? then the tenth condemns our saying "what a weariness is it." Does the eighth commandment interdict every act of theft? then the tenth prohibits our desiring anything which is our neighbor's.

But it is not until after a person is regenerate that he takes notice of the inward motions of sin and takes cognizance of the state of his heart. Then Satan will seek to persuade that he is not responsible for involuntary thoughts (which come unbidden), that evil desires are beyond our control—infirmities which are excusable. But God says to him "Keep thine heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23), and makes him realize that every lusting after what He has forbidden or withheld is a species of self-will. Therefore we are accountable to judge the first inclination toward evil and resist the very earliest solicitations. The

fact that we discover so much within that is contrary to God's holy requirements should deeply humble us, and cause us to live more and more out of self and upon Christ.

Hebrews 13:5, 6

Chapter 110 - Contentment

Discontent, though few appear to realize it, is sinful, a grievous offense against the Most High. It is an impugning of His wisdom, a denial of His goodness, a rising up of my will against His. To murmur at our lot is to take issue with God's sovereignty, quarrelling as it does with His providence, and therefore, is a being guilty of high treason against the King of the universe. Since God orders all the circumstances of human life, then every person ought to be entirely satisfied with the state and situation in which he is placed. One has no more excuse to grumble at his lot than has another. This truth Paul instructed Timothy to press upon others: "Let as many servants as are under the yoke, count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed" (1 Tim. 6:1).

"The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isa. 57:20, 21). The ungodly are total strangers to real contentment. No matter how much they have, they are ever lusting after more. But God exhorts His people, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have" (Heb. 13:5). As it is their bounden duty to avoid the vice of covetousness, so it is their personal responsibility to cultivate the virtue of contentment; and failure at either point is culpable. The contentment here exhorted unto is something other than a fatalistic indifference: it is a holy composure of mind, a resting in the Lord, a being pleased with what pleases Him—satisfied with the portion He has allotted. Anything short of this is evil.

Discontent is contrary to our prayers, and therefore must be most reprehensible. When we truly pray, we desire God to give or withhold, to bestow or take away, according as will be most for His glory and our highest good. Realizing that we know not what is best, we leave it with God. In real prayer we submit our understandings to

the Divine wisdom, our wills to His good pleasure. But to be dissatisfied with our lot and complain at our portion is to exercise the very opposite spirit, indicating an unwillingness to be at God's disposal, and leaning to our own understanding as though we knew better than He what was most conducive to our present and future well being. This is a tempting of God and a grieving of His Holy Spirit, and has a strong tendency to provoke Him to fight against us (Isa. 63:10).

When God does fight against us because of this sin, He often gives us what we were discontented for the want of, but accompanies the same with some sore affliction. For example, Rachel was in a most discontented frame when she said to Jacob "Give me children, else I die" (Gen. 30:1). The sequel is very solemn: she had children, and died in childbirth: see Genesis 35:16-18. Again, we are told that Israel "lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul" (Ps. 106:14, 15). These cases need to be taken to heart by us, for they are recorded for our learning and warning. God takes note of the discontent of our hearts as well as the murmuring of our lips. "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20) is the standard which He has set before us.

Not only is discontent a grievous sin against God, but it unfits the Christian for the discharge of holy duties, preventing the exercise of those graces which are necessary in order thereunto. It silences the lips of supplication, for how can a murmurer pray? It destroys the spirit of submission, for complaining is a "fretting against the Lord." It quenches faith, hope and love. Discontent is the very essence of ingratitude, and therefore it stifles the voice of thanksgiving. There cannot be any rest of soul until we quietly resign our persons and portions to God's good pleasure. Discontent corrodes the strings of the heart, and therefore it arrests all happy endeavor.

Discontent is usually over temporal matters, and this is a sad intimation that material things are sought after more eagerly than are spiritual things. It argues a lack of confidence in the care of our heavenly Father to provide for us the things which are needed. "Christian, let me ask thee this question, Didst thou give thyself to Christ for temporal, or for eternal comforts? Didst thou enter upon

religion to save thine estate, or thy soul? Oh, why then shouldest thou be so sad, when thine eternal happiness is so safe? For shame, live like a child of God, an heir of Heaven, and let the world know, that thy hopes and happiness are in a better world; that thou art denied those acorns which thy Father giveth to His hogs, yet thou hast the children's bread, and expectest thine inheritance when thou comest to age" (G. Swinnock, 1650). What cause have we all to be deeply humbled over our sinful repinings, to hang our heads with shame, and penitently confess the same unto God!

Yet notwithstanding both the sinfulness and injuriousness of discontent, many raise various objections to excuse the same. Some will plead their personal temperament in self-vindication, alleging that their natural temper makes them uneasy and anxious, so that they are quite unable to submit themselves unto the disposing providence of God. But, my dear reader, the corruption of our nature and its proneness to sin is no excuse for, but rather an aggravation of it, showing how much our hearts are opposed unto God. The more we yield to our natural inclinations, the more power they obtain over us. In such a case as the above we ought rather to be the more importunate with God, begging Him for His grace to restrain the inordinancy of our affections, to subdue our fears, and work in us willingness to acquiesce to His sovereign pleasure.

Others attempt to justify their discontent and uneasy frame of spirit by alleging that the injuries which others have done them ought to be resented, and that not to manifest discontent under them would be to encourage such people unto further insults and trampling upon them. To this it may be replied that while we complain of injuries done to us by men, and are prone to meditate revenge against them, we do not consider the great dishonor that we bring to God, and how much we provoke Him. It is written, "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:15). Remember that "What glory is it if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: Because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, reviled not again" (1 Pet. 2:20-23).

Others seek to excuse their discontent by dwelling upon the magnitude of their trials, saying that their burden is insupportable, so that they are pressed out of measure, above their strength. Even so, none of our afflictions are as great as our sins; and the more we complain, the heavier do we make our burden. Others point to the altogether unexpectedness of their trouble, that it came upon them when they were quite unprepared, and that it is therefore more than flesh and blood can endure. But the Christian should daily expect afflictions in this world, at least so far as not to be unprovided for or think it strange he should be exercised by them (1 Pet. 4:12). With some the drastic change from affluence to poverty is so great they argue that it is impossible to bear up under it. But does not God say, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Cor. 12:9)?

Yet no excuses are to be allowed to set aside or modify this Divine injunction, "Be content with such things as ye have." But before proceeding further let it be pointed out that contentment is not incompatible with honest effort to enlarge the provision of earthly things for ourselves and those dependent upon us, for God has given us six days out of seven to be industrious. Idleness must not be allowed to cloak itself under the guise of this grace: contentment and indolence are two vastly different things. "This contentment does not consist in a slothful neglect of the business of life, nor of a real nor pretended apathy to worldly interests. It is substantially a satisfaction with God as our portion and with what He is pleased to appoint for us. It is opposed to covetousness or the inordinate desire of wealth, and to unbelieving anxiety—dissatisfaction with what is present, distrust as to what is future" (John Brown).

Contentment is a tranquility of soul, a being satisfied with what God has apportioned. It is the opposite of a grasping spirit which is never appeased, with distrustful anxiety, with petulant murmurings. "It is a gracious disposedness of mind, arising solely from trust in and satisfaction with God alone, against all other things whatever appear to be evil" (John Owen). It is our duty to have the scales of our heart so equally poised in all God's dealings with us as that they rise not in prosperity, nor sink in adversity. As the tree bendeth this way or that with the wind, yet still keeps its place, so we should yield according to the gales of Divine providence, yet still remaining steadfast and retaining our piety. The more composure of

mind we preserve, the more shall we, on the one hand, "rejoice with trembling" (Ps. 2:11), and on the other, "faint not" when the chastening rod falls upon us.

As this spiritual grace of contentment is so glorifying to God, and so beneficial to ourselves, we will endeavor to mention some of the chief aids thereto. First, a realization of God's goodness. A deep and fixed sense of His benevolence greatly tends to quieten the heart when outward circumstances are trying to us. If I have formed the habit of meditating daily upon God's fatherly care—and surely I am constantly surrounded by proofs and tokens thereof—then I shall be less apt to chafe and fret when His providences cross my will. Has He not assured me that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28)? What more then can I ask? O to rest in His love. Surely He is entitled to my confidence in His paternal solicitude. Remember that each murmur implies unthankfulness. Complaining is the basest of ingratitude. If the Lord provides for the ravens, will He overlook the needs of any of His children? O ye of little faith!

Second, a steady realization of God's omniscience. A deep and fixed sense of His un-searchable wisdom is well calculated to allay our fears and compose our minds when everything appears to be going wrong with our circumstances. Settle it in your mind once for all, dear friend, that "the high and lofty One" makes no mistakes. His understanding is infinite, and His resources are without measure. He knows far better than we do what is for our well being and what will best promote our ultimate interests. Then let me not be found pitting my puny reason against the ways of the all-wise Jehovah. It is naught but pride and self-will which complains at His dealings with me. As another has said, "Now if one creature can and ought to be governed by another that is more wise than himself—as the client by his learned counsel, the patient by his skillful physician—much more should we be satisfied with the unerring dispositions of God." Remember that complaining never relieves a single woe or lightens a single burden; it is therefore most irrational.

Third, a steady realization of God's supremacy. A deep and fixed sense of His absolute sovereignty, His indisputable right to do as He pleases in the ordering of all our affairs, should do much to subdue the spirit of rebellion and silence our foolish and wicked murmurings. It is not the Almighty's pleasure to give unto all alike,

but rather that some should have more and others less: "The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes" (1 Sam. 2:7, 8). Then quarrel not with the Most High because He distributes His gifts and favors unequally; but rather seek grace that thy will may be brought into subjection to His. It is written "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee" (Isa. 26:3). Consider how many lack some of the good things which thou enjoyest. "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker.... Shall the clay say to Him that fashioneth it, What maketh Thou?" (Isa. 45:9).

Fourth, a steady realization of our ill-deserts. A deep and fixed sense of our utter unworthiness must do much to still our repinings when we are tempted to complain of the absence of those things our hearts covet. If we live under an habitual sense of our unworthiness, it will greatly reconcile us to deprivations. If we daily remind ourselves that we have forfeited all good and deserve all ill at the hands of God, then we shall heartily acknowledge "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed" (Lam. 3:22). Nothing will more quickly compose the mind in the face of adversity and nothing will so prevent the heart being puffed up by prosperity, than the realization that "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies" (Gen. 32:10) of God. Just so far as we really preserve a sense of our ill-deserts will we meekly submit to the allotments of Divine providence. Every Christian cordially assents to the truth "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Ps. 103:10), then why complain if God withholds from us what He grants to others?

Fifth, weanedness from the world. The more dead we are to the things of time and sense, the less our hearts will crave them, and the smaller will be our disappointment when we do not have them. This world is the great impediment to the heavenly life, being the bait of the flesh and the snare of Satan by which he turns souls from God. The lighter we hold the world's attractions, the more indifferent we are to either poverty or wealth, the greater will be our contentment. God has promised to supply all our needs, therefore "having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:8). Superfluities are hindrances and not helps. "Better is little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith" (Prov.

15:16). Remember that the contented man is the only one who enjoys what he has. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2).

Sixth, fellowship with God. The more we cultivate communion with Him and are occupied with His perfections, the less shall we lust after the baubles which have such a hold upon the ungodly. Walking with God produces a peace and joy such as this poor world can neither give nor take away. "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased" (Ps. 4:6, 7). Walking in the way of God's commands is a real antidote to discontent: "Great peace have they which love Thy law, and nothing shall offend them" (Ps. 119:165). Seventh, remembrance of what Christ suffered. "For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Heb. 12:3). When tempted to complain at your lot, meditate upon Him who when here had not where to lay His head, who was constantly misunderstood by friends and hated by innumerable enemies. Contemplation of the cross of Christ is a wonderful composer of an agitated mind and a querulous spirit.

"Be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Here is an enforcement of what has just gone before, a reason for the duties enjoined, a motive supplied for the performance of them. One of the Divine promises is quoted, which if it be duly appropriated by us, we shall be dissuaded from covetousness and persuaded to contentment. Resting on this Divine assurance will both moderate our desires and alleviate our fears. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" is a guarantee of God's continual provision and protection, and this rebukes all inordinate desires and condemns all anxious fears. The evils are closely connected, for in most instances covetousness, in the Christian, is rooted in a fear of want; while discontent generally arises from a suspicion that our present portion will prove to be inadequate for the supply of our needs. Each such disquietude is equally irrational and God-dishonoring.

Both covetousness and discontent proceed from unbelief. If I really trust God, will I have any qualms about the future or tremble at the prospect of starvation? Certainly not: the two things are

incompatible, opposites—"I will trust, and not be afraid" (Isa. 12:2). Thus the apostle's argument is clear and convincing: "Let your conversation be without covetousness; be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." The "for He hath said" is more forcible than "for God hath said:" it is the character of the One with whom we have to do that is here held up to our view. "He has said"—who has? Why, One whose power is omnipotent, whose wisdom is infinite, whose faithfulness is inviolable, whose love is unchanging. "All the efficacy, power and comfort of Divine promises arise from and are resolved into the excellencies of the Divine nature. He hath said it who is truth, and cannot deceive" (John Owen).

And what is it that He has said, which, if faith truly lays hold of, will subdue covetousness and work contentment? This, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." God's presence, God's providence, God's protection, are here assured us. If due regard be paid to these inestimable blessings, the heart will be kept in peace. What more would we have save a conscious realization of the same? O for a felt sense of His presence, for a gracious manifestation thereof to the soul. What were all the wealth, honors, pleasures of the world worth, if He should totally and finally desert us! The comfort of our soul does not depend upon outward provisions, so much as on our appropriation and enjoyment of what is contained in the Divine promises. If we rested more on them, we would crave less of this world's goods. What possible cause or ground for fear remains when God has pledged us His continual presence and assistance?

"I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." It is almost impossible to reproduce in English the emphasis of the original, in which no less than five negatives are used to increase the strength of the negation, according to the Greek idiom. Perhaps the nearest approximation is to render it, "I will never, no, never leave thee, nor ever forsake thee." In view of such assurance we should fear no want, dread no distress, nor have any trepidation about the future. At no time, under any circumstances conceivable or inconceivable, for any possible cause, will God utterly and finally forsake one of His own. Then how safe they are! how impossible for one of them to eternally perish! God has here graciously condescended to give the utmost security to the faith of believers in all their difficulties and

trials. The continued presence of God with us ensures the continued supply of every need.

"For He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." These words were first spoken by Jehovah to the successor of Moses (Josh. 1:5), whose task it was to dispossess Canaan of all the heathen nations then inhabiting it. The fact that the Holy Spirit moved the apostle to apply unto Christians this promise made to Joshua, supplies clear proof that our modern dispensationalists wrongly divide the Word of Truth. Their practice of partitioning the Scriptures and their contention that what God said under one dispensation does not apply to those living in another, is here exposed as nothing less than an effort of Satan to rob God's people of a part of their rightful and needful portion. This precious promise of God belongs as truly to me now as it did to Joshua of old. Let, then, this principle be tenaciously held by us: the Divine promises which were made upon special occasions to particular individuals are of general use for all the members of the household of faith.

What has just been affirmed is so obvious that it should require no further proof or illustration; but inasmuch as it is being repudiated in some influential quarters today, we will labor the point a little. Are not the needs of believers the same in one age as another? Is not God affected alike unto all His children?—does He not bear them the same love? If, then, He would not desert Joshua, then He will not any of us. Are not Christians now under the same everlasting Covenant of Grace as were the O.T. saints? then they have a common charter—"For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off" (Acts 2:39). Let us not forget that "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

"So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (verse 6). An inference is here drawn from the promise just quoted: a double conclusion is reached—confidence in God and courage against man. This intimates that we should make a varied and manifold use of the Divine promises. This twofold conclusion is based upon the character of the Promiser: because He is infinitely good, wise, faithful, powerful, and because He changes not, we may boldly or confidently declare with Abraham "God will provide" (Gen. 22:8),

with Jonathan "there is no restraint to the Lord" (1 Sam. 14:6), with Jehoshaphat "None is able to withstand Thee" (2 Chron. 20:6), with Paul "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

"So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." Once more the apostle confirms his argument by a Divine testimony, for he quotes from Psalm 118:6. In this citing of David's language, Christians are again taught the suitability of O.T. language unto their own case, and the permissibility of appropriating the same unto themselves: "we may boldly say" just what the Psalmist did! It was in a time of sore distress that David expressed his confidence in the Lord, at a time when it appeared that his enemies were ready to swallow him up; but contrasting the omnipotency of Jehovah from the feebleness of the creature, his heart was emboldened. The believer is weak and unstable in himself, and constantly in need of assistance, but the Lord is ever ready to take his part and render all needed aid.

"The Lord is my Helper" implies, as W. Gouge pointed out, "a willing readiness and a ready willingness to afford us all needed succor." Those whom He forsakes not, He helps—both inwardly and outwardly. Note carefully the change from "we may boldly say" to "the Lord is my Helper:" general privileges are to be appropriated by us in particular. "Man can do much: he can fine, imprison, banish, reduce to a morsel of bread, yea, torture and put to death; yet as long as God is with us and standeth for us, we may boldly say, 'I will not fear what man can do.' Why? God will not see thee utterly perish. He can give joy in sorrow, life in death" (Thomas Manton). May the Lord graciously grant both writer and reader more faith in Himself, more reliance upon His promises, more consciousness of His presence, more assurance of His help, and then we shall enjoy more deliverance from covetousness, discontent, and the fear of man.

Hebrews 13:7, 8

Chapter 111 - Motives to Fidelity

In seeking to ascertain the meaning and scope of the verses which now require our consideration due notice must be taken of their setting, and that, in turn, weighed in the light of the epistle as a whole. In the immediate context the apostle deports from covetousness and discontent, reminding his readers that God had said "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." From that Divine promise he points out two conclusions which faith will draw. First, "The Lord is my Helper." The child of God is in urgent need of an all-powerful Helper, for he has to contend with a mighty foe whose rage knows no bounds. It is a great mercy when we are made conscious of our helplessness, when our conceit is so subdued as to realize that without Divine assistance defeat is certain. What peace and comfort it brings to the heart when the believer is enabled to realize that the Lord is just as truly his "Helper" when chastening him, as when delivering from trouble!

The Second inference which faith makes from the Divine promise is, "I will not fear what man shall do unto me." If the Lord will never leave nor forsake me, then He must be "a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). O what a difference it makes to the sorely-tried soul when he can realize that God is not far away from him, but "at hand" (Phil. 4:5). Yes, even if called upon to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he will be with me, and therefore will His rod and staff comfort me (Ps. 23:4). And since the believer's Helper is none other than the Almighty, no real harm or evil can possibly befall him. Why, then, should he dread the creature? His worst enemy can do naught against him without the Lord's permission. The abiding presence of the Lord ensures the supply of every need: therefore contentment should fill the heart. The abiding presence of the Lord guarantees all-sufficient help, and therefore alarms at man's enmity should be removed.

Even in the more general exhortations of Hebrews 13 there is a tacit recognition of the peculiar circumstances of the Hebrews, and

more plainly still is this implied in the language of verse 6. The Jewish Christians were being opposed and persecuted by their unbelieving brethren, and the temptation to apostatize was very real and pressing. "The fear of man bringeth a snare" (Prov. 29:25). It did to Abraham, when he went down to Egypt, and later on to Gerar, moving him to conceal Sarah's real relation to him. It did to the whole nation of Israel when they hearkened to the report of the ten spies. It did to Peter, so much so that he denied his Master. It did to Pilate, for when the Jews threatened him with "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend" (John 19:12), he unwillingly consented to Christ's crucifixion. Fearfully solemn is that word, "But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in Heaven" (Matthew 10:33).

Now it is in view of the trying situation in which the Hebrew saints were placed that we should consider our present passage. The apostle's design was to fortify them against temptations to apostatize, to encourage them unto steadfastness in the Faith, to so establish them that even though they should be called on to suffer a violent death, they would yet remain loyal to Christ. Moreover, their enemies were not only intimidating them by open oppression and threats of more dire persecution, but others under the guise of being Christian teachers, were seeking to poison their minds with errors that undermined the very foundations of the Gospel: it was to them that Paul had reference in verse 9. Hence, in verses 7, 8 the apostle also calls upon the Hebrews to maintain their profession of the Truth in opposition to the lies of these Judaizers.

"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (verses 7, 8). A number of questions are raised by the terms of our passage. Who are the rulers here mentioned? In what sense or way are they to be "remembered"? What is signified by "following" their faith? What is denoted by the "end of their conversation"? Wherein do these exhortations furnish motives unto fidelity or steadfastness? Why affirm here the Savior's immutability?

First of all it should be pointed out that the A.V. rendering of the opening clause is misleading, and quite out of harmony with the remainder of the verse. "Those which have the rule over you" is a

single word in the Greek. It is a participle of the present tense, but is frequently used as a noun, as is obviously the case here: "your rulers." That their present rulers could not be intended is quite apparent from several considerations. First, because the Hebrews were called upon to "remember," rather than submit to them. Second, because they are distinctly described as they "who have spoken unto you the Word of God." Third, because they were such as had already received "the end of their conversation" or conduct in this world. Finally, because there is a distinct precept given with respect to their attitude toward their living rulers in verse 17.

The reference is, of course, to the spiritual rulers, those who had ministered to them God's Word. The persons intended were the officers in the Church, that is, those who guided and governed its affairs. "Overseers" or "guides" is hardly definite or strong enough to bring out the force of the original term, for while it signifies to lead or go before, it also denotes one who is over others, being the word for "governor" in Matthew 2:6 and Acts 7:10. "Your leaders" would be better, though hardly as good as the word actually used in the A.V.—your rulers. Those in view were the apostles and prophets, the elders and pastors, who instructed the saints and directed the government of the churches. No doubt the apostle was more specifically alluding to such men as Stephen and James who had been beheaded by Herod (Acts 12:2), men who had sealed the Truth they proclaimed by laying down their lives for it.

"Who have spoken unto you the Word of God": that is the mark by which Christian leaders are to be identified—the men whom God has graciously called to ecclesiastical rule are gifted by Him to expound and enforce the Scriptures, for the function of their office is not legislative, but administrative. The Christian leader, though he possesses no arbitrary power, nevertheless is to bear rule, and that, according to the Scriptures. He is not called upon to invent new laws, but simply to declare the will and apply the statutes of Zion's King. There cannot be a properly ordered household unless discipline be duly maintained. Alas, if one section of those who profess to be the ministers of Christ have usurped His prerogatives, exalting themselves into ecclesiastical despots, another class have woefully failed to maintain the honor of His House, letting down the bars and inaugurating a regime of lawlessness.

"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have

spoken unto you the Word of God." By this criterion are we to test the ostensible "guides" and religious leaders of the day. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1); and never was there a time when we more urgently needed to measure men by this standard. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed" (2 John 10)—no matter how pleasing his personality, soothing his message, or numerous his followers. "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God" (John 3:34): true of Christ perfectly, but characteristic of all whom He calls to the sacred office of the ministry. To speak God's Word is the grand duty of the Christian teacher—not to indulge in philosophical or theological speculation, nor to tickle the ears of men with sensational topics of the day.

The next thing singled out for mention in connection with these spiritual rulers who had preached the Word of God, is their "faith," which the Hebrews were enjoined to "follow." There is some difference of opinion among the commentators as to exactly what is here referred to. "Faith" is a term which has a varying scope in its N.T. usage, though its different meanings are closely applied, and can usually be determined by the context. First, "Faith" is the principle of trust whereby the heart turns to God and rests upon His word, and by which we are, instrumentally, saved: "thy faith hath made thee whole" (Matthew 9:22), "by grace are ye saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8). Second, "faith" has reference to that which is to be believed, the Truth of God, the Christian Creed: "exhorting them to continue in the Faith" (Acts 14:22), "the Word of Faith which we preach" (Rom. 10:8), "contend for the Faith" (Jude 3). Third, "faith" is used to designate the fruits and works that spring from it, because it is their root: "brought us good tidings of your faith" (1 Thess. 3:6), "show me thy faith" (James 2:18), i.e., the effects of it.

The term "faith" is used in still another sense. Fourth, it signifies fidelity or faithfulness, as in the following passages: "The weightier matters of the Law: judgment, mercy, and faith" (Matthew 23:23), "the faith of God" (Rom. 3:3), "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace... faith" or "faithfulness" as in the R.V. (Gal. 5:22).

Personally we consider this last meaning of the term to be primary, though not exclusive, significance in our present verse. The reference is not only to the grace of faith which was in them, but to its whole exercise in all that they did and suffered. Amid much discouragement and bitter opposition those Christian leaders had not fainted, but held on their way. Despite temptations to apostatize they had persevered in their profession, remained loyal to Christ, continued to minister unto His people, and had glorified God by laying down their lives for the Gospel. Faithful to their Master, they were fruitful in his service to the end of their course.

The last thing here mentioned of these spiritual rulers is "the end of their conversation," which is the most difficult to define with exactitude. The Greek word here for "end" is not "telos" which signifies the finish or conclusion of a thing, but "ekbasis" which literally means "a going up out of." It is found elsewhere in the N.T. only in 1 Corinthians 10:13, where it is rendered "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." "It is not therefore merely an end that is intended; nor doth the word signify a common end, issue or event of things, but an end accompanied with a deliverance from, and so a conquest over, such difficulties and dangers as men were before exposed unto. These persons, in the whole course of their conversation, were exercised with difficulties, dangers and sufferings, all attempting to stop them in their way, or to turn them out of it. But what did it all amount to, what was the issue of their conflict? It was a blessed deliverance from all troubles, and conquest over them" (John Owen).

"The end of their conversation," then, has reference to their egress or exit from this world of sin and sorrow. It was a deliverance from all their trials, an honorable way of escape from all their difficulties and dangers, an exodus from the land of their Enemy. Yet it seems to us that the particular term used here by the Spirit is designed to carry our thoughts beyond this present scene. What was before the mind of Paul himself as he announces that the time of his departure was at hand? First, he declared, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith," and then he added "henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:7, 8). As we have said, "ekbasis" signified a "going up out

of:" thus the "end of their conversation" also meant a being taken to be forever with the Lord, a sure though future resurrection, and an unfading diadem of glory.

Corresponding to the three things said of their spiritual leaders, a threefold exhortation is given to the Hebrews. They were required to "remember" those who had spoken to them the Word of God," they were bidden to "follow" their faith, and they were enjoined to "consider" the end of their conversation. "Remember" is another word that is given a comprehensive meaning and scope in its Scriptural usage. It signifies that reverence and submission which is due a superior, as in "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). It implies the holding fast of what has been received, whether instruction, promises, or warnings: "Remember, forget not, how thou provoked the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness" (Deut. 9:7). It means to recall that which has been forgotten: "When therefore He was risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this unto them, and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said" (John 2:22). It denotes to meditate upon, as in "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness" (Deut. 8:2).

Here in our text the "remember" is used comprehensively, as comprising all those duties of respect and esteem, of love and obedience, which they owed to their departed teachers. Nor was such an exhortation needless. Human nature is very fickle, and tragic it is to mark how quickly many a faithful pastor is forgotten. Such forgetfulness is a species of ingratitude, and therefore is sinful. "Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city: yet no man remembered that same poor man" (Ecclesiastes 9:15)—God taxes them with their forgetfulness! "Remember your leaders" includes thankfulness to God for them, speaking well of them, putting into practice their teaching. More specifically it means: treasure up in heart their instructions; call to mind their counsels, warnings, exhortations; gratefully meditate upon their untiring efforts to establish you in the Faith.

"Remember your rulers." How fearfully has this precept been perverted! What terrible superstitions have been invented and perpetrated in this connection: such as religious celebrations on the anniversary of their death, the dedication of "altars" and "chapels"

unto their memory, the adoration of their bones, with the ascription of miraculous cures to them; the offering of prayers for them and to them. True, they are to be esteemed very highly in love for their works' sake (1 Thess. 5:13), both while they are with us and after God has removed them from us, but His servants are not to be "remembered" with idolatrous veneration, nor to the dividing with Christ any of those honors which belong alone unto Him. Not carnally, but spiritually are they to be remembered in what they did and taught, so that we are duly affected thereby.

It is at the point last mentioned we may perceive the pertinency of this precept to the apostle's design. His immediate purpose was to fortify them against departure from the Faith. Hence, he bids them "remember your rulers," for if you bear steadily in mind their instruction, you will at once perceive the error of the "divers and strange doctrines" which he warns against in verse 9. "The sheep follow Him: for they know His voice, And a stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers" (John 10:4, 5): that is the order—if we are heeding the true servants of Christ, we shall neither be attracted nor deceived by the emissaries of Satan. Again; a loving esteem of our teachers and a grateful remembrance of their devoted and laborious efforts to get us established in the Truth, will make us ashamed to go back on their instruction. Finally; to recall their steadfastness will be an encouragement to us when encountering opposition: they did not apostatize in the face of extreme peril—shall we spurn the example they left us.

And what is the clear implication of this to present-day preachers? Is there not here a searching word for heart and conscience? Is your ministry worthy to be stored up in the hearer's minds? Are your sermons worth remembering? The humble-minded will be ready to answer No, there is little or nothing in my simple and homely discourses deserving to be treasured up. Ah, brother preacher, it is not clever analyses of difficult passages which exhibit your mental acumen, nor lofty flights of language which display your rhetorical powers, that is of lasting worth. Rather is it that which makes sin to be more hated, God to be more feared, Christ to be more highly valued, the path of duty more clearly defined, which is what we are to aim to.

"Whose faith follow." This is the next duty we owe unto our

spiritual leaders. It is closely allied to the former: we are to so "remember" them as to be effectually influenced in our own conduct. The word for "follow" signifies to imitate: it is used again in "For yourselves know ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you" (2 Thess. 3:7). "It is such a following as wherein we are fully conformed unto, and do lively express, that which we are said to follow. So a scholar may be said to follow his master, when, having attained all his arts and sciences, he acts them in the same manner as his master did. So are we to follow the faith of these guides" (John Owen). This is the greatest honor which we can do them, and is far more pleasing to God than erecting a marble monument to their memory or dedicating some "church" unto their name.

"Whose faith follow." There are many who sit more or less regularly under the ministry of God's servants, and they approve of their doctrine, admire their courage, speak well of them, but they do not carry out their principles or emulate their example. The whole force of this second exhortation is that we are to so "remember" our leaders as to be thereby influenced unto the living of a holy life. To "follow" their faith means to ponder their trust in God and pray for an increase of your own. Recall to mind their instructions, and continue thou in the profession and practice of the doctrine they inculcated. Meditate upon their lives, and so far as their works corresponded to their words, imitate their conduct. Copy their virtues, and not their eccentricities. "No mere man, not the best of men, is to be our pattern or example absolutely, or in all things. This honor is due unto Christ alone" (John Owen).

"Whose faith follow." The appropriateness of this exhortation to the situation in which the Hebrews were is also obvious. It is a spiritual stimulus rightly to "remember" our former leaders, for it makes them, in a sense, present again with us. The faculty to recall the past is not only a Divine gift and mercy, but it entails definite responsibilities. As we recall the testimony and toil of our ministers, their loyalty to Christ and devotedness to our interests, we are to be suitably affected thereby. When encountering opposition, we should remember the much fiercer persecution others have suffered before us. When tempted to compromise and sell the Truth, we should think upon the unswerving fidelity of our fathers in the Faith. Should we ever be under heavy pressure to apostatize, we

must weigh well the fact that the principles of the faith of our former leaders were adequate to sustain their hearts, so that they met death with holy composure, and seek grace to "hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end."

Once more we would pause and notice the solemn implication of this word to those of us who are ministers of the Gospel. Next to pleasing the Lord Himself, our chief care should be to set before our flock such an example of faith and holiness, as that it will be their duty to remember and follow. This is not optional, but obligatory, for God has bidden each of His servants "be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12); and again, "In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you" (Titus 2:7, 8). Alas, how many of the present-day preachers set an example which if followed by their hearers would lead them to perdition. O for grace to let our light "so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in Heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

"Considering the end of their conversation." Here is the third part of our duty toward those whom God has placed in spiritual authority over us. It signifies to observe diligently and thoroughly, so as to have the heart suitably affected thereby. The word for "considering" occurs again only in Acts 17:23, namely, when Paul "beheld" the gods that the Athenians worshipped, so that "his spirit was stirred in him" (verse 16)! Literally, the term signifies "looking up to." The Hebrews were to recall the "conversation" of their deceased teachers, their manner of life, which was one of testimony and toil, fidelity to Christ and love for the souls of His people: a "conversation" of devoted service in the face of many discouragements and much opposition, sustained by trust in the living God; and the Hebrews were to ponder and take courage and comfort from the blessed end or issue of the same.

Thus the three parts of this exhortation are intimately related. The leaders were to be "remembered" in such a manner as to be effectually influenced by the example they had left; they were to be "followed" because their fidelity was Divinely rewarded with a victorious exit from this world. In the last clause the apostle

presented a powerful motive to stir up the saints to the discharge of the duty previously described. Consider their "end" that yours may morally resemble it: you must adhere to their doctrine and imitate their practice if you are to receive the victor's crown. "Consider what it (their "end") came to: their faith failed not, their hope did not perish, they were not disappointed, but had a blessed end of their walk and course" (John Owen). Sometimes God permits His servants today to bear witness to the sufficiency of the principles of the Gospel to support and comfort on a deathbed.

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (verse 8). We will not now attempt to sermonize upon this well-known and precious verse, but rather give a brief exposition of it. The first thing to ponder is the particular book in which this declaration is made, for that throws light on its scope and meaning. Hebrews is the epistle which treats specifically and at length with the great alteration made by God in His dealings with the Church on earth, the revolution which was introduced by the substituting of the new covenant for the old, the passing away of Judaism and the inauguration of Christianity. This had involved many changes of a radical character, a great "shaking" and "removing" (Heb. 12:27) of "that which decayeth and waxeth old, ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13). It is in view of that our present verse is to be interpreted and enjoyed. The temple is destroyed, the ceremonial law is gone, the Levitical priesthood is no more; but Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, the Mediator between God and His people, abides unchanged.

Hebrews 13:8, 9

Chapter 112 - The Heart Established

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever" (verse 8). Sir Rob. Anderson and others regarded this as a declaration of the Savior's Godhead, arguing that "The Same" is a Divine title taken from Psalm 102:27, etc. But why, it may be asked, should the apostle break his line of thought and introduce a formal affirmation of Christ's Deity in the midst of a series of exhortations? Such an interpretation destroys the unity of the passage. Moreover, there was no need for this, for the Redeemer's Godhead had been clearly and fully established in the opening chapter of the epistle. Nor was there any special reason for Paul, at this point, to insist upon the essential immutability of Christ, and that the translators of the A.V. did not so understand him is evident from their declining to add the auxiliary verb: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today," etc.

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever." These words, as was intimated in the final paragraph of the preceding article, are not to be taken absolutely, but are to be regarded relatively; that is to say, they are not to be considered by themselves alone, but in connection with the precise place they occupy in the Sacred Canon. Every statement of Scripture is positioned by Divine wisdom, and often we miss an important key to interpretation when ignoring the particular location of a passage. The verse before us illustrates the special theme of the book in which it is found. The subject of the Hebrews' letter is the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism, and here is further demonstration of the fact. Under Judaism, Aaron had been followed by Eleazer, and he, by Eli; but our great High Priest abides forever. Israel's prophets followed each other on the stage of action; but our Prophet had no successor. So too there had been a long line of kings; but Zion's King is eternal.

"The apostle speaks not of the person of Christ absolutely, but with respect unto His office and His discharge of it: he declares

who and what He is therein. He is 'the same' in His Divine person: eternal, immutable, indeficient. Being so in Himself, He is so in His office from first to last. Although diverse alterations were made in the institutions of Divine worship, and there were many degrees and parts of Divine revelation (Heb. 1:1), yet in and through them all, Jesus Christ was still the same. In every state of the church, in every condition of believers, He is the same unto them, and will be so unto the consummation of all things; He is, He ever was, all in all unto the Church. He is the Object, the Author and Finisher of faith, the Preserver and Rewarder of all them that believe, and that equally in all generations" (Condensed from John Owen).

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever." How thoughtlessly is this statement received by many! How carelessly is its setting ignored by most sermonizers! Were we to take this declaration absolutely it would involve us in inextricable difficulties. Ponder its terms for a moment. Did your Lord undergo no radical change when He became incarnate? Did He experience no great change at His resurrection? During the days of His flesh, He was "The Man of sorrows:" is He so now after His ascension?—one has but to ask the question to perceive its absurdity. This statement, then, is to be understood with certain limitations; or rather, it is to be interpreted in the light of its setting, and for that, not a novice, but an experienced expositor is required. Let us consider it, then, in connection with its context.

First, as has already been pointed out, it most blessedly illustrated the special theme of this epistle, for in contrast from so much that was mutable and transitory in Judaism, the Author of Christianity abides essentially the same in all generations. Second, verse 8 supplies an additional and most powerful motive to fidelity. Some of their spiritual guides had already passed away, and in those still left, time and change would swiftly work their sure effects; but the great Head of the Church remained, being alive for evermore. Jesus Christ was the One who had supported their deceased leaders, who had passed through their trials victoriously, and if trusted in, He would sustain them, for He was the same gracious and powerful Shepherd of the sheep. He is for you, as for them, "the same" Object of faith, "the same" all-sufficient Savior, "the same" effectual Intercessor. He is "the same" in His loving design and covenant faithfulness. Then cleave to Him with unshakeable confidence.

Third, the blessed declaration of verse 8 lays a foundation on which to base the exhortation which immediately follows. "The only way by which we can persevere in the right faith is to hold to the foundation, and not in the slightest degree depart from it, for he who holds not to Christ knows nothing but mere vanity, though he may comprehend heaven and earth" (John Calvin). The Lord Jesus is the same, therefore, be ye not unstable and fickle. Christ is the same teacher: His doctrine does not vary, His will does not fluctuate, nor His purpose alter; therefore should we remain steadfast in the Truth, shunning novelties and refusing all innovations. It is only by "holding the Head" (Col. 2:19), submitting to His will, receiving His doctrine, obeying His precepts, that we shall be fortified against false teachers and persevere unto the end.

Thus, verses 7-9 are intimately related and together form a complete hortatory passage: so far as we have light thereon, we understand them to mean: Hold fast to the testimony of your former leaders, for they proved the sufficiency of the Truth they proclaimed; Christian doctrine does not vary from day to day, for Jesus Christ is ever the same. The designation used of Him at once intimates that He is not here contemplated so much as the second Person in the Godhead, as the Mediator and Head of the Church. He is the same in His identity (Rev. 5:6), the same in His offices, the same in His efficacy, the same in His will; therefore must we refuse to be led away by those who teach anything different. The whole passage is a strong dissuasion against vacillation. The Truth is fixed; the Gospel is everlasting, therefore should we be "steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

"Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines: for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace: not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein" (verse 9). This is the point to which the apostle had been leading in the previous verses: trust in Christ, and cleave to Him according to the instruction you have received from your fathers in the Faith, and give not ear unto those who would unsettle and seduce you. "Divers doctrines" are those which differ from pure Christianity; "strange" doctrines are those which are foreign or opposed to the Gospel. To be carried "about" by such is for the mind to be unsettled thereby, producing an unsteadiness of conduct. To be

immune from this evil the heart has to be established with grace, which, because of its deep importance, calls for a careful inquiry thereinto. "Not with meats" has reference to the efforts of the Judaisers to graft the ceremonial law on to the Gospel, a thing utterly unprofitable, yea, baneful.

"Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines." It is to be duly noted that the noun is in the plural number. This is in marked and designed contrast from the revelation which God has given us. Truth is a perfect unit, but error is multiform. There is but "one faith," as there is but "one Lord" (Eph. 4:5), namely, that which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) in the revelation made of it by Christ and the apostles (Heb. 2:3, 4). Hence, when the Truth is in view, it is always "doctrine" in the singular number, as "the doctrine" (John 7:17), "the doctrine of Christ" (2 John 9) and see Romans 16:17; 1 Timothy 4:16 etc. On the other hand, where error is referred to the plural number is employed, as in "doctrines of men" (Col. 2:22), "doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). The Truth of God is one uniform system and chain of doctrine, which begins in God and ends in Him; but error is inconsistent and manifold.

"Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines." The very fact that this dehortation was not only given verbally by the apostles to the Christians of their own day, but is also preserved in the written Word of God, clearly intimates that the people of God will always have to contend against error unto the end of time. Christ Himself declared, "Take heed that no man deceive you: for many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:4, 5); and the last of His apostles wrote "try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). How unfeignedly thankful we should be that God has put into our hands an unfailing plummet by which we may measure every preacher and teacher. The doctrine of Christ changes not, and whatever proceeds not from it and accords not with it, is alien to the faith of the Church and is to be refused and rejected.

"Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines." As this dehortation concerned the Hebrew saints the reference was, of course, to the Mosaic institutions, as the remainder of our verse denotes: "for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace: not with meats, which have not profited them that have been

occupied therein." The Levitical law made distinctions of meats, and things of a like nature, which the false teachers were pressing with much zeal. It is plain from such passages as Romans 14:13-23, 1 Corinthians 8, Galatians 4, etc., that determined efforts were being made by the Enemy to corrupt the Gospel by attaching to it parts of the ceremonialism of Judaism. When Paul says "which have not profited them that have been occupied therein" he referred not to the O.T. saints who had obeyed the Mosaic precepts, but to those who heeded the errorists of his day.

The principle expressed in this dissuasion is as applicable to and as much needed by the saints of each succeeding generation as it was by those Hebrews. It is one of the marks of the Fall that man is fonder of that which is material in religion, than he is of what is spiritual; he is most prone—as history universally and sadly shows—to concentrate on trivialities rather than upon essentials. He is more concerned about the details of ordinances than he is of getting his heart established with grace. He will lend a readier ear to novel "doctrines" than to a solid exposition of the fundamentals of the Faith. He will contend zealously for things which contribute nothing to his salvation nor conduce an iota unto true holiness. And the only sure way of being delivered from this evil tendency, and of being preserved from false doctrines, is to buy the Truth and sell it not, and to have the heart established with grace.

"For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace." What is denoted by this weighty expression? First, what is it for the heart to be "established" and then how it is so established "with grace"? An established heart is the opposite from one which is "carried about," which term is used again in, "that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men" (Eph. 4:14). It is a poetic expression in allusion to sailing-ships and the impression of the wind upon them. The figure is apt, and suggestive of the nature of strange doctrines, the way in which they are spread, and their effects on the minds of men. In themselves they are light and vain, "clouds which hold no water" (Jude 12): there is nothing solid and substantial in them for the soul. Those who would impose such doctrines on others, generally do so with much bombast and blustering; unless we believe and practice such things, we are denounced as heretics and unsaved (Acts 15:1). The unlearned and

unstable are disturbed by them, carried out of their course, and are in danger of making shipwreck of their faith. Hence, an "established heart" is one which is rooted and grounded in the Truth, securely anchored in Christ, rejoicing in God.

The word "grace" is vastly comprehensive and has various meanings in its Scripture usage. Its grand, original, fundamental signification is to express the free, eternal, and sovereign layout of God toward His people, for that is the spring and source of all the gifts, benefits and blessings we receive from Him. From this infinite fountain of the uncaused favor and special love of God—which is the "good pleasure of His (immutable) will"—proceed all the acts of His grace toward, in, and upon the elect. "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9). From that blessed ocean of grace proceed our personal and unconditional election in Christ, our union unto Him, interest in Him, relation to Him, together with our being blessed in Him with all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3-6). We read of "the grace of God and the gift by grace" (Rom. 5:15): the former of which must mean the favor of God in His own heart towards us, in distinction from all the favors He bestows upon us; while the latter signifies the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, as flowing from the original grace in God.

The operations, breathings, and influences of the Holy Spirit in quickening, enlightening, revealing and applying Christ to us, so that we are put into actual enjoyment of Him and His salvation, are the outworkings of the everlasting Covenant of Grace; therefore it is all of grace. The next most common use of the term is inherent or indwelling grace, being used to designate that supernatural work which is wrought in the Christian at his regeneration, whereby he is made alive Godwards and is given a relish for spiritual things: such passages as "He giveth more grace" (James 4:6), and "grow in grace" (2 Pet. 3:18) have respect to grace in the heart. Then too the whole system of doctrine comprehended by "the Gospel" is so designated, for when Paul said to the Galatians, "Whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4) he meant they had forsaken the truth of grace. Among the less frequent uses of the term we may note that its transforming effects are themselves called "grace" (Acts 11:23); gifts for preaching beal' the

title of "grace" (2 Cor. 6:1), as do those virtues wrought in us by the Spirit (2 Cor. 12:9, 10).

"For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace." By "grace" in this verse we understand, first, the doctrine of grace, that is, the truth of God's free favor without us, in His own heart towards us, which is made known to us in the Gospel (Acts 20:24). Concerning this we read, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11) i.e. it has been revealed in His Gospel. The doctrine of grace is also styled, "wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Tim. 6:3). The doctrine of grace includes all that sacred system of theology, all the fundamentals of the everlasting Gospel of the blessed God, that grand "mystery" of His mind and will which sets forth to us the complete counsel and covenant of the Eternal Three, the record of God concerning His Son, by which He declares that "he that believeth hath everlasting life."

As the whole of the Gospel, with the great salvation contained in it, and the blessings, consolations, privileges and promises of it, were fully, freely, and impartially preached by the apostles, so it was attended with the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven to the minds and hearts of many who heard it, so that they were brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord, and to a true and actual closure with Him, by means of the Word of Truth. The doctrine of grace as proclaimed by God's accredited servants, and as clothed with the power of the Spirit, is the Divinely appointed means of turning the elect from darkness unto light, from power of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Acts 26:18). Their understandings are illumined to know from the Gospel that it is God's will to save them through the appointed Redeemer, and they are enabled to personally realize that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Second, it is most important and blessed for the heart to be "established" with inherent grace: a fact which every one born of God must more or less know and feel. Where the Holy Spirit of God dwells, there sin is known in its guilt and felt in its power, while the effects of the Fall on all the faculties of the soul are experienced. When the Spirit has revealed the super-excellency of Christ, His all-sufficiency as a Savior, His suitableness as such, this begets some

longings after Him, thirstings for Him, desires to be found in Him, and high prizings of His blood and righteousness. But many there are who, though quickened and called of God, have not yet closed in with Christ, cannot say He died for them, 'know not that their sins are pardoned. The Spirit has thus far wrought with them that they feel themselves to be vile sinners, justly deserving of the wrath of God; yet they cannot affirm that their names are written in Heaven.

They are emptied of all creature dependency and self-sufficiency. Their hearts are broken and humbled with a true and thorough sight and sense of sin. They have heard of Christ, and of His infinite tenderness and compassion, love and mercy, to sinners like themselves. The Lord the Spirit has brought them so far as to listen attentively to the preaching of the Gospel and the searching of the Scriptures. Though they may be as bruised reeds and smoking flax, incapable of expressing their wants to God, or of describing their case to others, yet they find in the preaching of Christ crucified that which suits them. Though they cannot yet confidently say of Him "who loved me and gave Himself for me," nevertheless they wait on Him in his ordinances, longing for Him to arise upon them as the Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings. And though such may be called "seekers only," "inquirers after Christ," yet they are blessed: "Blessed are all they that wait for Him" (Isa. 30:18); "let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord" (1 Chron. 16:10).

Upon such persons the Lord, in His good time, causes His light of grace to break forth more clearly, shining within them, causing their spiritual faculties to expand, and be exercised more particularly upon "the mystery of the Gospel" (Eph. 6:19) and the doctrine of grace. Thereby their spiritual "senses" (Heb. 5:14) are brought to taste the sweetness of Divine truth, to have a heart relish of it, to derive nourishment from it, to perceive its spiritual excellency. In receiving and digesting it, they are brought to find the doctrine of God's free grace to be wholesome and sustaining. By this means they are "nourished up" (1 Tim. 4:6) unto everlasting life. It is thus the Lord carries on His work in the souls of His people. At regeneration they are filled with joy in Him, and sin is but little felt within. But as the work of grace is deepened, they are made to see and feel their depravity, and their peace is clouded by increasing discoveries of their vileness, which makes way for a growing appreciation of grace.

Inherent grace, then, is a new nature or holy principle implanted by the Spirit at the new birth. It consists in spiritual perceptions, inward apprehensions, spiritual affections, in the souls of those who are born of God, whereby they are fitted for Him and Divine things, enabled to take holy delight in God, to have holy breathings after Him, to hunger and thirst after righteousness, to yearn for a consciousness of Christ's presence, to have a spiritual appetite to feed upon Him as the Bread of Life. Thus, it is most profitable for the saint to have his heart established with inherent grace, for he is the personal subject of it, and it is for this reason that God's people in general are so fond of experimental preaching—the tracing out of the work of the Spirit in their hearts—thereby enabling them to set to their seal that God is true, that He has thus far wrought in them to the praise and glory of His grace.

Nor is there any legality in this, for the work of the Spirit, in all its parts and phases, flows as freely from the Covenant of grace as does the work of Christ. Yea, we are expressly said to be "saved by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5), which is thus expressed to show that salvation depends equally upon the distinct offices which the Eternal Three are engaged in on behalf of the elect. It is helpful to converse at times with such as are experimentally acquainted with God, and His Son Jesus Christ, and who hold communion with Him by the Holy Spirit. Genuine Christian experience consists principally in this: the Spirit is pleased to open the Scriptures unto us, making them the ground of our faith, giving us to feel their power, making the experience described in them our own, revealing Christ as set forth in the Word to us, and filling our hearts with His love agreeably to what is revealed of it in the Gospel.

The people of God need to be taught and brought to an acquaintance with the real work of God within them, with His method of strengthening and comforting them, that they may learn the grounds of spiritual assurance. There is a needs be that the heart be established with grace as it respects their ascertaining for themselves that a supernatural work is actually wrought within them, that Christ is in them the hope of glory, that they "know the grace of God in truth" (Col. 1:6), and that their works are "wrought in God" (John 3:21) as Christ expressed it. Let us therefore diligently study the work of the Spirit within us, comparing it with

the written Word, and carefully distinguishing between natural and spiritual affections, moral refinements and supernatural regeneration. Nor let us forget that the grace of God within us is only discovered to us as the Spirit shines upon His own work in our souls.

It is also good for the heart to be established with the grace as it respects the doctrine of it: in the belief of the Father's everlasting love, the Son's complete salvation, and the Spirit's testimony thereof, which strengthens the faith and confirms the hope of the Christian. Confidence before God can be maintained on no other foundation than that of His grace. There are seasons when the believer's mind is filled with distress, when the guilt of sin presses heavily on his conscience, when Satan is allowed to buffet him; then it is that he is forced to cry "have respect to the Covenant" (Ps. 74:20). There are seasons when he cannot pray except with groanings that cannot be uttered, being cast down with soul burdens and conflicts, but they only serve to prove to him the deep need of his heart being established with the truth of grace.

Thus, for the heart to be "established with grace" signifies, first, the doctrine of God's free grace without us, in His own heart toward us; and second, the blessed operations of the Spirit within us. When God's free-grace salvation is brought home to the heart by the Spirit, it produces blessed fruits and consequences in the person to whom it becomes "the power of God" (Rom. 1:16). It is of vast importance to hold forth a clear profession of the doctrine of grace, and it is of incalculable worth to be able to declare a genuine work of grace wrought in the heart by the Spirit agreeably to the truth we profess. The doctrine of grace is the means, in the hands of the Spirit, of begetting faith, promoting its growth, and supporting it. Therefore there is a real need of God's everlasting love and Christ's finished redemption being preached, though they be already known, and their power felt in the heart, because our walk with God and our confidence in Him receive all their encouragement therefrom.

While it is certain that the head must be enlightened with the knowledge of Truth before the heart can experience the virtue and efficacy of it, yet our text speaks of "the heart" so as to emphasize the quickening and operative power of Divine truth, when it is embraced and maintained in the soul. It is good for the heart to be established with grace, for it promotes the believer's spiritual

growth, secures his well-being, and greatly contributes to his comfort. It is also a preservative against error, an antidote against unbelief, and a choice cordial to revive the soul in seasons of distress.

N.B. For much in the second half of this chapter we are indebted to a valuable sermon by S. E. Pierce.

Hebrews 13:10

Chapter 113 - The Christian's Altar

There is a saying that "a man usually finds what he is looking for," and there is a sense in which that principle holds good of not a little consulting of the Scriptures. Various kinds of people approach the Scriptures with the object of finding something in them which will countenance their ideas, and no matter how foolish and far-fetched those ideas may be, they generally succeed in locating that which with some degree of plausibility supports them—that is why the scoffer will often counter a quotation from God's Word with, "O you can prove anything from the Bible." It matters not to those who are determined to procure "proof" for their vagaries, that they "wrest the Scriptures" (2 Pet. 3:16) either by detaching a sentence from its context and giving it a meaning quite contrary to its setting, or by interpreting literally that which is figurative, or giving a figurative meaning to that which is literal.

Not only does practically every professedly Christian sect make a show of producing Scriptural warrant for its peculiar beliefs and practices, so that Universalists, Annihilationalists, Seventh-day Adventists, quote a list of texts in proof of their errors, but others who do not claim to be "Christian" appeal to the Bible in support of their delusions. It would probably surprise some of our readers did they know how artfully (but wickedly) Spiritists juggle with Holy Writ, appearing to adduce not a little in favor of clairvoyance, clairaudience, trance-speaking, etc., while Theosophists have the affrontery to say that reincarnation is plainly taught in the Bible; all of which goes to show how fearfully fallen man may abuse God's mercies and profane that which is most sacred.

Nor are Romanists any exception. It is commonly supposed that they have very little concern for Scripture, buttressing their superstitions by an appeal to tradition and ancient customs. It is true that the rank and file of the Papists are deprived of the Scriptures, and are satisfied with "the authority of the church," as sufficient justification for all they believe and do, but it is a big mistake to

suppose that her officers are incapable of making a Scriptural defense of their positions. The writer of this article discovered that more than a quarter of a century ago, in his first pastorate. Situated in a mining-camp in Colorado, the only other "minister" in the country was a Romish priest, with whom we got acquainted. He volunteered to give us Scripture for every Popish dogma and practice, and when we put him to the test (as we did, again and again), we were amazed and awed by the subtle manner in which he mis-"appropriated" the Word. It was then we learned the uselessness of "arguing" about Divine things.

The above thoughts have been suggested by the opening words of our present passage: "We have an altar." Most fearfully has this clause been perverted by those who have given it a meaning and put it to a use wholly foreign to the design of the Spirit in the passage from which it is taken. Deceived by the mere sound of words, the affirmation has been boldly made that not only did the Israelites in O.T. times have a literal and material altar, but that "we," Christians, also "have," by Divine appointment, "an altar," that is, a material one of wood and stone, and hence the "altar" and "high altar" in many "protestant churches." But an altar calls for a sacrifice, and hence the invention of "the mass" or "un-bloody sacrifice of the flesh and blood of Christ" offered by the priests. Many who do not go thus far, insist that the table used for the celebration of the Lord's supper should be designated "an altar," and suppose that our text authorizes them therein.

That such a conception as the one we have just mentioned is utterly groundless and erroneous may quickly be demonstrated. In the first place, whatever be signified by the "altar" in our passage, it is manifestly opposed to, set in contrast from, the visible and material altar of Judaism, so much so that they who officiated at the latter were debarred from feasting on the former. In the second place, the Jewish altar, like everything else in the tabernacle, was a shadow or type, and surely it would be placing a severe strain upon the imagination to conclude that the brazen altar of old was but a figure of a table now used in our "churches"! Third, sufficient has been advanced by the apostle in the preceding chapters to make it unmistakably plain that Christ Himself—in His person, office, and sacrificial work—is the antitype and substance of all the tabernacle types! Finally, the Spirit Himself has made it quite clear that our

"altar" is a spiritual one, and that the "sacrifice" we are to offer thereon is a spiritual one: see verse 15.

"We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle" (verse 10). In seeking to ascertain the meaning of this verse, which has needlessly perplexed and been made the occasion of much profitless controversy, it will greatly simplify the expositor's task if he bears in mind that the primary aim of the Spirit throughout this epistle is to set forth the transcendent excellency of Christ over all persons through whom God had, in times past, spoken unto men, and in the vast superiority of His office and work over all the institutions which had foreshadowed them under the old covenant. As the incarnate Son, He is infinitely above all prophets and angels (chapters 1 and 2). Moses, "the servant in the house of God" retires before the presence of Christ "the Son over His own house" (chapter 3). So in regard to all the Mosaic institutions: Christ fulfills everything which they prefigured.

This is quite an elementary truth, yet is it one of basic importance, for error at this point produces most pernicious and fatal consequences. The entire system of worship that Jehovah appointed for Israel was of a typical character, and the reality and substance of it is now found in Christ. He is "the great High Priest" of whom the priests under the law, Aaron himself not excepted, were but faint adumbrations. His very body is "the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands" (9:11). His was the sacrifice which fully and forever accomplished that which all the Levitical offerings proclaimed as necessary to redemption, but the repetition of which clearly testified they had never effected. In like manner, Christ is the grand Antitype of all the sacred vessels of the tabernacle: He is the true Brazen-altar, Laver, Golden-altar of incense, Candlestick, Table of shewbread, Mercyseat, and Ark of the Covenant.

That the Lord Jesus is Himself the antitype of "the altar of burnt offering" appears by comparing two of His own declarations: "Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?" (Matthew 23:19); "And for their sakes I sanctify Myself" (John 17:19). Both "the altar that sanctifieth the gift" and "the gift" itself meet in Him—just as both the officiating priest and the sacrifice which he offered find their fulfillment in Him. It seems strange that some able writers have quite missed the point of Matthew 23:19 when dealing with its fulfillment and

realization in the Lord Jesus. They have made "the altar" to be the wooden cross to which the Savior was nailed, and that mistake has laid the foundation for a more serious error. No, "the altar" on which "the gift" was laid pointed to the Divine dignity of Christ's glorious person, and it was that which gave infinite worth to His sacrifice. It was for this reason the Spirit dwelt at such length upon the unique glory of Christ's person in the earlier chapters of this epistle, before He opened to us His sacrificial work.

What has just been pointed out above supplies the key to many a lovely O.T. type. For instance, we are told that "Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar" (Gen. 8:20). Very blessed is that. The first act of Noah as he came forth from the ark on to the purified earth was not to build a house for himself, but to erect that which spoke of the person of Christ—for in all things He must have the pre-eminence. On that altar Noah expressed his thanksgiving by presenting his burnt offerings, teaching us that it is only by Christ we can acceptably present to God our sacrifice of praise (Heb. 13:15). And we are told that Noah's offering was "a sweet savor unto the Lord," and then we read "and God blessed Noah and his sons" (Gen. 9:1), for all blessing comes to us through Christ.

"And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him" (Gen. 12:7). That was equally blessed. This was the first act of Abraham after he had left Chaldea, and then Haran where his progress had been delayed for a season, and had now actually entered Canaan. The Lord appeared to him here, as He had first done in Ur, and made promise of the land unto him and his seed; and his response was to set up an altar. And again we read "and he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent between Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east; and there he builded an altar unto the Lord"

(Gen. 12:8). How significant! Bethel means "the house of God," while Hai signifies "a heap of ruins." It was between them that Abram pitched his tent—emblematic of the pilgrim character of the saint while in this world, and erected his altar—symbol of his dependence upon and worship of God. It was to this same altar he returned after his failure in going down into Egypt: Genesis 13:3, 4.

Of Isaac we read, "And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord" (Gen. 26:25). How beautifully that brings out another aspect of our type: here the "altar" is the place of prayer, for it is only in the name of Christ—the antitype of the altar—that we can present our petitions acceptably to God. Of Jacob we read, "And he erected there an altar, and called it God, the God of Israel" (Gen. 33:20). That was immediately after his Divine deliverance from Esau and his four hundred men—inti-mating that it is in and by Christ the believer is eternally secure. Of Moses we read, that he "built an altar, and called the name of it the Lord my Banner" (Ex. 17:15). That was after Israel's victory over the Amalekites—denoting that it is only by Christ that believers can overcome their spiritual enemies. "And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill" (Ex. 24:4)—only by Christ is the Law magnified and honored.

But it is more especially upon the brazen altar in the tabernacle that our attention needs to be concentrated. A description of it is supplied in Exodus 27:1-8, though other passages should be carefully compared. This altar occupied a place of first importance among the seven pieces of the furniture in the tabernacle, for it was not only the largest of them all—being almost big enough to hold the others—but it was placed "before the door" (Ex. 40:6), just inside the outer court (Ex. 40:33), and would thus be the first object to meet the eye of the worshipper as he entered the sacred precincts. It was made of wood, but overlaid with brass, so that it could withstand the action of fire, which was burning continually upon it (Lev. 6:13). To it the sinner came with his Divinely-appointed sacrifice, wherein the innocent was slain in the place of the guilty. At this altar the high priest officiated on the great day of atonement (Lev. 16).

The brazen altar was the way of approach to God, for it was there that the Lord promised to meet His people: "There I will meet with the children of Israel" (Ex. 29:43): how that reminds us of the Savior's declaration "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6)! This altar was really the basis of the whole Levitical system, for on it the burnt offering, meal offering, peace offering, and sin offering were presented to God. Blood was put upon its horns, sprinkled upon it,

round about it, and poured out at its base. It was the chief connecting-link between the people and Jehovah, they being so identified with it that certain parts of the offerings there presented to Him were eaten by them, and hence we read "Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" (1 Cor. 10:18).

This was an altar for all Israel—and for none else!—and their jealousy was promptly stirred if anything seemed to interfere with it. A striking illustration of this is found in Joshua 22. There we read that the two and a half tribe's whose inheritance lay on the far side of Jordan erected an altar—"a great altar to see to" (verse 10). When the other tribes heard of this, they were greatly alarmed and severely censured them, for it appeared to deny the unity of the Nation and to be a rival unto the altar for all the people. They were only satisfied when the Reubenites assured them that they had not built this altar by the Jordan to offer sacrifices thereon, but for a witness (verse 27), declaring, "God forbid that we should rebel against the Lord, and turn this day from following the Lord, to build an altar for burnt offerings, for meat offerings, or for sacrifices, besides the altar of the Lord our God that is before His tabernacle" (verse 29).

We may see again the prominent place which was given to the altar by Israel in the days of Ezra, for when they returned from the captivity, it was the first thing they set up—thus signifying they could not approach God or be connected with Him on any other ground. "Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God" (Ezra 3:2).

In view of its significance, its importance, its hallowed associations, one can readily imagine what it meant to a converted Jew to abandon the altar of Judaism. Unto his unbelieving brethren he would necessarily appear as a renegade of his fathers, an apostate from God, and a fool to himself. Their taunt would be, In turning your back upon Judaism you have lost everything: you have no altar! Why, you are worse off than the wretched Samaritans, for they do have a place and system of worship on mount Gerizim: whereas you Christians have nothing! But here the apostle turns the tables

upon them: he affirms that not only do we "have an altar," but it was one which those who still identified themselves with the temple and its services had no right to. In turning from Judaism to Christ the believing Hebrew had left the shadow for the substance, the figure for the reality; whereas those who despised and rejected Christ merely had that which was become "weak and beggarly elements" (Gal. 4:9).

The sad failure of the great mass of the Jews, under the Gospel-preaching of the apostles, to turn their affections unto things above, where Christ had passed within the veil, and their stubbornness in clinging to the tangible system at Jerusalem, was something more than a peculiarity of that nation—it exemplified the universal fondness of man for that which is material in religion, and his disrelish of that which is strictly spiritual. In Judaism there was much that was addressed to the sense, herein too lies the power and secret of Rome's success: the strength of its appeal to the natural man lies in its sensuous show. Though Christians have no visible manifestation of the Divine glory on earth to which they may draw near when they worship, they do have access to the Throne of Grace in Heaven; but it is only the truly regenerate who prefer the substance to the shadow.

"We have an altar." Our altar, unlike that of Judaism, is inside the veil: "whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus" (Heb. 6:20), after that He had appeared here upon earth to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. To the Christian comes the blessed exhortation, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having a High Priest, over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:19-22). What a marvel of mercy, what a wonder of grace that poor fallen sinners, through faith in Christ's blood, may come into the presence of God without a fear! On the ground of Christ's infinite merits, such are welcome there. The presence of Christ on High is the proof that our sins have been put away, and in the joyous consciousness thereof we may approach God as worshippers.

But the special aspect in which our text sets forth Christ as "the altar" of His people, is to present Him as the One who furnishes them with that spiritual meat which is needed for nourishment and

sustenance in their worship and service. The apostle had just said, "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines: for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein" (verse 9), and when he now adds "we have an altar," his obvious meaning is: we have in Christ the true altar, which supplies us with "grace," that better food which really establishes the heart before God. In other words, the Holy Spirit here explains and declares the fulfillment of those words of Christ "My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed: he that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him" (John 6:55, 56).

Let us now consider our verse a little closer in the light of its immediate context: that there is an intimate connection between them is obvious, for in verse 9 the apostle had spoken of "meats" and here he still refers to "eating"! Of the one he had affirmed they "profited not," concerning the latter he mentions those who have "no right" thereto. Over against the "meats which profited not" he had set that "grace" which establishes the heart, and now he contrasts "the altar" from the defunct figures of Judaism. As we have shown in the preceding article, to have the heart "established with grace" signifies two things: first, to be weaned from self-righteousness and creature dependence as to clearly apprehend that salvation from start to finish is of the unmerited and unconditional favor of God; second, to have the Spirit so shine upon His work within that as we diligently examine the same and carefully compare it with the experience of saints as described in the Scriptures, we may be definitely assured that we are born of God.

Having affirmed the vast superiority of the heart being established with grace over being occupied with "meats"—which expression referred directly to the Mosaical distinctions between clean and unclean articles of diet, but in its wider signification was a part put for the whole ceremonial system—the apostle now declares that the Christian is provided with far more excellent food for the soul. The striking force of this is only apparent by a careful study of the Levitical types and by closely following the apostle's argument in the verses which immediately succeed our text. The Jewish altar had not only typed out Christ offering Himself as a sacrifice to God for the sins of His people, but it had also foreshadowed Him as the life-sustenance of the true worshippers of God. How remarkably full

were the O.T. types, and how much we lose by ignoring the same and confining our reading to the N.T.—no wonder so much in Hebrews seems to be obscure and of little interest to the Gentile.

Of many of the offerings which were laid on the tabernacle altar only parts of them were consumed by the fire, the remaining portions being reserved as food for the priests, or for the offerer and his friends—this food being regarded as particularly sacred, and the eating of it as a great religious privilege. For instance, we read, "This is the law of the meal offering: the sons of Aaron shall offer it before the Lord, before the altar. And he shall take of it his handful, of the flour of the meal offering, and of the oil thereof, and all the frankincense which is upon the meal offering, and shall burn it upon the altar for a sweet savor, the memorial of it, unto the Lord. And the remainder thereof shall Aaron and his sons eat: with unleavened bread shall it be eaten in the holy place" (Lev. 6:14-16). "This is the law of the trespass offering: it is most holy . . . Every male among the priests shall eat thereof . . . And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten the same day that it is offered" (Lev. 7:1,6,15) "And the Lord said unto Aaron, Behold, I also have given thee the charge of Mine heave offerings... In the most holy place shalt thou eat it: every male shall eat it; it shall be holy unto thee" (Num. 18:8-10).

But the Christian has spiritual food far more holy and precious than any Israelite ever had, or even Aaron the high priest was permitted to taste. Christ is our food, the "Bread of life" to our souls. He is not only our sacrifice but our sustenance; He has not only propitiated God, but He is the nourishment of His people. It is true that we should by faith, feed upon Him when remembering His death in the way appointed, yet there is no reference in our text to "the Lord's supper," nor is "the Lord's table" ever called an "altar" in Scripture. Moreover it is our blessed privilege to feed upon Christ not only at "Communion seasons," but constantly. And herein appears again the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism. Israel according to the flesh partook only of the symbols, whereas we have the Reality. They had only certain parts of the offerings—as it were the crumbs from God's table; whereas we feed with Him on the fatted calf itself. They ate of the sacrifices only occasionally, whereas Christ is our daily food.

"We have an altar," namely, Christ, and He is the only altar

which God owns, and the only one which must be recognized by us. For almost nineteen centuries—since God employed the Romans to destroy Jerusalem—the Jews have been without an altar, and are so to this day. For Romanists to invent an altar, and make it both the foundation and center of their entire idolatrous system, is the height of presumption, and a fearful insult to Christ and the sufficiency of His sacrifice. If those "which serve the tabernacle"—they who continued officiating at Jerusalem in the days when the apostle wrote this epistle—had "no right" to "eat" of the Christian's altar, that is, enjoy and derive benefit from the person and sacrifice of Christ, then, how much less have the pope and his satellites any title to the benefits of Christ while they so wickedly usurp His place and prerogative. That the Lord Jesus Himself is our "altar" as well as interceding High Priest also appears from, "Another angel (Christ as 'the Angel of the Covenant') came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto Him much incense, that He should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne" (Rev. 8:3)!

Hebrews 13:11, 12

Chapter 114 - Christ Our Sin Offering

In the verses at which we have now arrived the apostle once more sets before us the O.T. shadow and the N.T. substance, which emphasizes the importance and necessity of diligently comparing one portion of the Scriptures with another, and particularly those sections which record those ordinances that God gave unto Israel wherein the person, office and work of His Son were so vividly, so blessedly, and so fully foreshadowed. The study of the types, when conducted soberly and reverently, yields a rich return. Its evidential value is of great worth, for it affords an unmistakable demonstration of the Divine authorship of the Scriptures, and when the Holy Spirit is pleased to reveal how that type and antitype fit in to each other more perfectly than hand and glove, then the hidden harmony of the different parts of the Word is unveiled to us: the minute analogies, the numerous points of agreement between the one and the other, make it manifest that one presiding Mind controlled the whole.

The comparing of type with antitype also brings out the wondrous unity of the Scriptures, showing that beneath incidental diversity there has ever been an essential oneness in God's dealings with His people. Nothing so convincingly exposes the principal error of the Dispensationalists than this particular branch of study. The immediate design and use of the types was to exhibit unto God's people under the old covenant those vital and fundamental elements of Truth which are common alike to all dispensations, but which have received their plainest discovery under the new covenant. By means of material symbols a fitting portrayal was made of things to come, suitably paving the way for their introduction. The ultimate spiritual realities appeared first only in prospect or existed but in embryo. Under the Levitical instructions God caused there to be shadowed forth in parabolic representation the whole work of redemption by means of a vivid appeal to the senses: "The law having a shadow of good things to come" (Heb. 10:1).

The passage just quoted warrants the assertion that a spiritual study of the O.T. types also affords a valuable aid to the interpretation of much in the N.T. Just as the doctrine expounded in the Epistles rests upon and is illustrated by the central facts recorded in the Gospels, so much in both Gospels and Epistles can only be fully appreciated in the light of the O.T. Scriptures. It is to be deplored that so many Christians find the second half of Exodus and the whole of Leviticus little more than a record of meaningless and effete ceremonial rites. If the preacher would take his "illustrations" of Gospel truths from the types, (instead of searching secular history for "suitable anecdotes"), he would not only honor the Scriptures, but stir up and direct the interest of his spiritual hearers in those portions of the Word now so generally neglected. Christ is set forth as conspicuously in Leviticus as He is in John's Gospel, for "in the volume of the Book" it is written of Him.

The pity is that many of the more sober-minded and spiritual among God's people have been prejudiced against the study of the types, and the valuable use of them in interpreting the N.T., by the untimely efforts of unqualified novices. The types were never designed by the Holy Spirit to provide a field in which young men might give free play to their imagination, or exercise their carnal ingenuity so as to bring out a mystical meaning to the most prosaic facts, and startle their unlearned hearers by giving to trifles a farfetched significance. The wild allegorizing of Origen in the past should serve as a lasting warning. There are essential principles and fixed rules of interpreting the types which are never to be ignored. The interpreter must concentrate his attention upon central truths and basic principles, and not occupy his thoughts with petty agreements and fanciful analogies. The central and all-important subjects exemplified in the types are sin and salvation, the purifying of the soul, and the dedication of the heart and life to God.

Again; familiarity with the types and the spiritual principles they exemplify is a great help to the right understanding of prophecy. A type necessarily possesses something of a prophetic character, for it is a symbolical promise of the ultimate thing yet to appear, and hence it is not at all surprising that in announcing things to come the prophets, to a large extent, availed themselves of the characters and events of past history, making them the images of a nobler future. In the prospective delineations which are given us in

Scripture respecting the final issues of Christ's kingdom among men, while the foundation of all lies in His own mediatorial office and work, yet it is through the personages and ordinances of the old covenant that things to come are shadowed forth. Thus, Moses spoke of the Messiah as a Prophet like unto himself (Deut. 18:18). David announced Him as Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110), while Malachi predicted His forerunner under the name of Elijah (Mal. 3:1, 4:5). Herein are valuable hints for our guidance, and if they be duly observed there will be no more excuse for interpreting "the Son of David" (Matthew 1:1) in a carnal sense, than for literalizing the "we have an altar" of Hebrews 13:10.

From what has been pointed out above on the manifold value of the types—which might be indefinitely amplified, especially the last point—it should be quite evident that they greatly err who look upon the types as a mere kindergarten, designed only for the infancy of the Church. The very fact that the Holy Spirit has preserved a record of them in the imperishable Word of Truth, is clear intimation that they possess far more than a local use and temporary purpose. The mind of God and the circumstances of the fallen creature are substantially the same in all ages, while the spiritual needs of the saints are the same now as they were four thousand years ago, and were the same then as they are today. If, then, the wisdom of God placed His people of old under a course of instruction through the types, it is our folly and loss if we despise the same today. A mathematician still has use for the elementary principles of arithmetic, as a trained musician scorns not the rudimentary scales.

The basic principles underlying the types were made use of by Christ at the dawn of the N.T. era, thus intimating that the fundamental methods employed by God are the same in all generations. Every miracle the Lord Jesus performed was a type in history, for on the outward and visible plane of Nature He displayed the Divine power and work which He came here to accomplish in the higher realm of Grace. In every act of healing men's bodily diseases, there was an adumbration to the eye of sense of that salvation which He would provide for the healing of the soul. In the demands which He made upon those whom He healed, a revelation was given of the principles by which His salvation may be procured by us. The facts of the Gospels are the key to the truths of the Epistles, and the types of the O.T. are the key to the facts of the

Gospel. Thus, one part of Scripture is made dependent on the other, just as no member of our body is independent of its fellow-members.

"For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate" (verses 11, 12). In these verses the apostle supplies a striking illustration and confirmation of what he had just previously affirmed. In the preceding verse he had declared that Christ is the altar of His people—the antitype of all that had been shadowed out by the typical altars of O.T. times—which, as we showed, signifies not only that Christ is their atoning sacrifice unto God, but that He is also the sustenance, the food, for His people. Then followed the solemn statement that those who stubbornly and unbelievably continued to adhere unto Judaism, deprived themselves of the blessings enjoyed by Christians.

As we have so often pointed out, the Hebrew saints were being urged to return unto the Divinely-instituted religion of their fathers. In verse 9 the apostle presents to them two further dissuasives. First, he assured them they now possess the Antitype of all the types of Judaism: why, then, be tempted by the shadows when they possessed the Substance! Second, he solemnly affirms that those who still clung to Judaism cut themselves off from the Christian privileges: they had "no right," no Divine title to "eat" or partake of them. The application of this principle to us today is obvious. The same two-fold argument should suffice to draw off our hearts from doting upon ritualistic rites and performances: possessing Christ as our great High Priest, having access to the Throne of Grace, such things as bowing to the east, elevating the offering (collection), candles, incense, pictures, images, are needless and worthless, and if the heart be set on them and a saving value be ascribed to them, they effectually exclude us from an interest in Christ's salvation.

In the preceding article we showed how strikingly and blessedly the O.T. types pointed to Christ as the nourishment of His people: only parts of the sacrifices were burnt upon the altar, other portions thereof being allotted to the priests or the offerer and his family. But there was a notable exception to this, unto which the apostle now directs our attention. "For the bodies of those beasts,

whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp." The reference is unto the sin offerings. These were slain on the altar in the outer court, but their blood was carried inside the tabernacle and sprinkled before or upon the throne of Jehovah, while their carcasses were utterly consumed outside the camp. This was, of course, while Israel were sojourners in the wilderness and lived in tents but the same order was observed after they entered Canaan and the temple was built in Jerusalem—the bodies of the sin offerings being carried out beyond the walls of the city to be consumed there.

The apostle was referring to such passages as Leviticus 4:1-12, where provision was made for an atonement when a priest had unwittingly sinned against any of the commandments of the Lord. He was to bring a bullock unto the door of the tabernacle for a sin offering, lay his hand upon its head (as an act of identification, to denote that the doom awaiting it was what he deserved), and kill it before the Lord. Its blood was then to be brought into the tabernacle and sprinkled seven times before the Lord, before the veil of the sanctuary, and upon the horns of the incense altar, and the remainder thereof poured out at the base of the brazen altar. The richest portions of the animal were then burned upon the altar, but the remainder of it was carried forth "without the camp," and there utterly consumed by fire. The same order was followed when the whole congregation sinned through ignorance (Lev. 4:12-21), the account closing with "He shall carry forth the bullock without the camp, and burn him as he burned the first bullock: it is a sin offering." The reader may also compare Numbers 19:3, 9.

But there is no doubt that the apostle was alluding more particularly unto the chief sin offering which was offered on the annual day of atonement, when propitiation was made for all the sins of Israel once a year, described at length in Leviticus 16. Concerning the blood of this sacrifice we read, "And he (the high priest) shall take of the blood of the bullock and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercyseat eastward, and before the mercyseat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times" (verse 14). Regarding the bodies of those beasts used on this occasion we are told, "and the bullock for the sin offering, and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall one carry forth without the camp: and they shall burn in

the fire their skins and their flesh, and their dung" (verse 27). These passages, then, make it quite clear to which particular class of sacrifices the apostle was referring in Hebrews 13:10, 11.

The question now arises, Wherein lies the relevancy of this allusion to these passages in Leviticus in our present text? What was the apostle's particular design in referring to the sin offerings? It was twofold. First, to substantiate his assertion that they who served the tabernacle had "no right to eat" of the Christian's altar—i.e., had no title to partake of the benefits of Christ, who has, as our next verse shows, died as a sin offering. There was a Divine prohibition which expressly forbade any feeding upon the same: "And no sin offering, whereof any of the blood is brought into the tabernacle of the congregation to reconcile withal in the holy place, shall be eaten: it shall be burnt in the fire" (Lev. 6:30). Those, then, who clung to Judaism were cut off from the Antitype's sin offering. Second, to exhibit the superiority of Christianity: those who trust in Christ eat His flesh and drink His blood (John 6:54-56).

But let us dwell for a moment on the spiritual significance of this particular detail in the type. It presents to us that feature in the sufferings of Christ which is the most solemn of all to contemplate, namely, His being made sin for His people and enduring the penal wrath of God. "Outside the camp" was the place where the leper was compelled to dwell (Lev. 13:46), it was the place where criminals were condemned and slain (Lev. 24:14 and cf. Joshua 7:25, 1 Kings 21:13, Acts 7:58), it was the place where the defiled were put (Num. 5:3), it was the place where filth was deposited (Deut. 23:12-14). And that was the place, dear Christian reader, that the incarnate Son, the Holy One of God, entered for you and for me! O the unspeakable humiliation when He suffered Himself to be "numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12). O the unutterable mystery of the Blessed One "being made a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). O the unspeakable anguish when the sword of Divine justice smote Him (Zech. 13:7), and God forsook Him (Matthew 27:46).

Yet let it be emphatically insisted upon that Christ remained, personally and essentially, the Untainted One, even when the fearful load of the sins of His people was laid upon Him. This very point was carefully guarded by God—ever jealous of the honor of His son—in the types, yea, in the sin offerings themselves. First, the blood of the sin offering was carried within the sanctuary itself and

sprinkled before the Lord (Lev. 4:6), which was not done with any other offering. Second, "the fat that covereth the inwards" of the animal was burned upon the altar (Lev. 4:8-10), yea, "for a sweet savor unto the Lord," intimating that God still beheld that in His Son with which He was well pleased even while He was bearing the sins of His people. Third, it was expressly enjoined that the carcass of the bullock should be carried forth "without the camp unto a clean place" (Lev. 4:12), signifying it was still holy unto the Lord, and not a polluted thing.

Christ was "as pure, as holy, and as precious in the sight of God whilst groaning under the infliction of damnatory wrath on the accursed tree, as when He was in the bosom of the Father before all worlds—the very same moment in which He was 'bruised' and 'made a curse' for us, being also that in which He offered Himself for us 'an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor.' Never was the character of Jesus exhibited in more transcendent excellency; never were His relations to God and to man maintained in greater perfectness than during the time that He suffered for us on the Tree. Never did the Father more delight in and appreciate the excellency of the Son of His love; never did the Son more love and honor and delight in the Father than when He uttered that bitter cry 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' The very circumstances which placed Jesus, outwardly, in the extreme of distance from Heaven and from God, only proved that there was an essential nearness—an everlasting moral nearness, which not even the fact of His being the Bearer of damnatory wrath could for one moment alter" (B.W. Newton).

The immediate reason why none of the Israelites, not even the high priest, was allowed to eat any portion of the sin offering, and why its carcass was burnt outside the camp rather than upon the altar, seems to lie in the distinctive nature and special design of this offering. Had the priest eaten of any portion thereof, that had given it the character of a peace offering, and had the whole been consumed upon the altar it had too closely resembled the burnt offering. But, as we have pointed out before, the ultimate reason and deeper design was to denote that Judaism had to be abandoned before one could "eat" or derive benefit from the Christian's "altar." Herein lies the superiority of Christianity, that we are permitted to feed upon a Sacrifice of the highest and holiest kind, receiving

therefrom those blessings and benefits which Christ has procured for His people by the shedding of His precious blood.

The apostle, then, has furnished clear proof of what he had asserted in vv. 9, 10, and that from the O.T. Scriptures themselves. There he had said, "it is good that the heart be established with grace," which means for the mind to have such a fixed persuasion of the Truth as to enjoy peace with God, without which there can be no real and solid tranquility. Then the apostle had said, "Not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein," which must be understood in the light of the previous clause: the ceremonial distinctions of the Levitical law were altogether inadequate for justification and peace with God. Moreover, that sacrifice which made atonement for sin provided no food for those who offered it, and the heart cannot be established before God where sins are not remitted.

"Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate." Here is the Christian's altar, here is the all-sufficient sacrifice offered once for all upon it, and here is the blessed effect thereof, his sanctification. The opening "wherefore" of this verse called for the line of thought developed in the opening paragraphs of this article. It intimated that it was for the express purpose of meeting the requirements of the O.T. types that the Lord Jesus was "lead as a lamb to the slaughter" and suffered the horrible ignominy of being cast out of the holy city and put to death in the place where the worst of criminals were executed. What honor did the Substance now place upon the shadows! A wide field of study is here suggested to us, and a reverent and patient survey of it will well repay our efforts.

How frequently in the four Gospels has the Holy Spirit assigned as the reason for what Christ did "that the Scriptures might be fulfilled." That expression is not to be restricted to Christ's design in accomplishing the terms of Messianic prophecy—though, of course, that is included—for it also and often has reference to His so acting in order that the types which foreshadowed Him might be realized. The will of God concerning the Mediator had been intimated in the legal institutions, for in them a prefiguration was made of what Christ should do and suffer, and His perfect obedience to the Father moved Him unto a compliance therewith. Consequently, the fuller be our knowledge of the types, the more

shall we be able to understand the recorded details of our Savior's earthly life (particularly of His last week), and the more can we appreciate the motive which actuated Him—complete subjection to the will of the One who had sent Him. That particular which the Holy Spirit notes in our text is but one illustration from many, if we take the trouble to search them out.

"The complete answering and fulfilling of all types in the person and office of Christ, testifieth the sameness and immutability of the counsel of God in the whole work of the redemption and salvation of the Church, notwithstanding all the outward changes that have been in the institutions of Divine worship" (John Owen). But it did something else too: it left the unbelieving Jews without excuse: Christ's implicit compliance with the types, His complete and perfect production of all that had been foreshadowed of Him, furnished the most indubitable demonstration that He was the promised Messiah, and therefore His rejection by the Nation at large sealed their doom, and was the reason why, a little later, God destroyed their sanctuary, city, and heritage.

"Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate." Christ Himself is the all-sufficient sin-offering of His people. Just as all the iniquities, transgressions and sins of natural Israel were, in a figure, transferred to the typical offering (Lev. 16:21), so all the iniquities, transgressions and sins of the spiritual Israel were imputed to their Surety (Isa. 53:6, 7, 11, 12). Just as the goat bearing the iniquities of natural Israel was sent away "into a land not inhabited" (Lev. 16:22), so "as far as the east is from the west, so far hath Christ removed our transgression from us" (Ps. 103:12). And just as "on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord" (Lev. 16:30), so "The blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

Observe that in strict keeping with the fact that the Redeemer is here contemplated as the antitypical Sin-offering, He is referred to simply as "Jesus," and not "Jesus Christ" as in verses 8, 21, still less "our Lord Jesus" as in 5:20. He is not alluded to in these different ways at random, nor for the mere purpose of variation. Not so does the Holy Spirit order His speech: there is nothing haphazard in His language. The various designations accorded the Savior in the Word

are selected with Divine propriety, and nothing affords a more striking evidence of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures than the unerring precision with which they are used. "Jesus" is His personal name as man (Matthew 1:21); "Christ" is His official title, as the One anointed of God (Matthew 16:16, 20); while "The Lord Jesus" points to His exalted status and authority (John 13:13, Acts 2:36). When "Jesus" is used alone, it is either for the special purpose of identification (as in Acts 1:11), or to emphasize the infinite depths of humiliation into which the Son of God descended.

"Wherefore (in fulfillment of the types which had defined the path He should tread), Jesus also (the Antitype, the Just who had entered the place of the unjust, the infinitely Glorious One who had descended into such unfathomable depths of degradation), that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate." This was the particular feature made most prominent in the type, for the sin-offering was not only slain, and its carcass taken outside the camp, but there it was utterly consumed. It spoke of Christ as the Sin-bearer enduring the fiery indignation of a sin-hating God, suffering His penal wrath. It spoke of Christ offering Himself to God as a sacrifice for the sins of His people, to make atonement for them, for His blood was shed, and blood was never employed under the types except to make atonement (Lev. 17:11). It is, then, by the voluntary and vicarious blood-shedding of their Covenant-head, and by that alone, believers are sanctified.

"That He might sanctify the people." Ponder carefully, my reader, the definiteness of the language here used. Scripture knows nothing of a vague, general, undeterminable and futile shedding of the precious blood of the Lamb. No indeed: it had a predestined, specific, and invincible end in view. That blood was not shed for the whole human race at large (a considerable portion of which was already in Hell when Christ died!), but for "the people," each of whom are sanctified by it. It was for "the sheep" He laid down His life (John 10:11). It was to gather together in one "the children of God that were scattered abroad" that He was slain (John 11:51, 52). It was for "His friends" He endured the cross (John 15:13). It was for the Church He gave Himself (Eph. 5:25).

Hebrews 13:12, 13

Chapter 115 - Outside the Camp

Were it not so pathetic and tragic, it would be most amusing if we could obtain and read a complete record of the manner in which our text has been employed by various individuals and groups during the last four hundred years—to go no farther back. The reader would thereby be supplied with a striking illustration of the fact that "There is no new thing under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9) and see how frequently history repeats itself. He would learn too how easily simple souls were beguiled by a plausible tongue and how successfully Satan deceives the unwary by the very letter of Scripture. He would discover how the different divisive movements in the ecclesiastical realm—whether in Poland, Germany, Great Britain, or the U.S.A.—all started in much the same way, followed the same course, and, we might add, met with a similar disappointing sequel. To be forewarned is to be forearmed: it is because the rank and the of the people do so little reading, and are so ignorant of religious history, that they so readily fall a prey to those with high spiritual pretensions.

Hebrews 13:13 has ever been a great favorite with those who started "Come out" movements. It has been used, or rather misused, again and again by ambitious Diotrephes, who desired to head some new party or cause. It has been made a sop for the conscience' by many a little group of discontented and disgruntled souls, who because of some grievance (fancied or real) against their religious leaders, church, or denomination, forsook them, and set up an independent banner of their own. It is a verse which has been called into the service of all separatists, who urged all whose confidence they could gain to turn away from—not the secular world, but their fellow-Christians, on the ground of trifling differences. That which these men urged their dupes to forsake was denounced as the God-abandoned and apostate "Camp," while the criticism they have (often justly) met with for their pharisaic conduct, has been smugly interpreted as "bearing Christ's reproach."

In his most interesting and instructive work, "The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity"—a standard work which long found a place in all well-furnished libraries—Richard Hooker, three hundred years ago, described the tactics followed by the Separatist leaders who preceded or were contemporaneous with him. We will give here a very brief digest of the same. First, in seeking to win the people's attention unto their "cause," these would-be Separatists, loudly proclaimed the faults and failings of those in high places, magnifying and reproving the same with much severity, and thereby obtaining the reputation of great faithfulness, spiritual discernment, love of holiness. Second, those faults and corruptions which have their roots in human frailty, are attributed to an unscriptural and evil ecclesiastical government, whereby they are regarded as possessing much wisdom in determining the cause of those sins they denounce: whereas in reality, the very failures they decry will adhere to any form of government which may be established.

Third, having thus obtained such sway in the hearts of their hearers, these men now propose their own form of church government (or whatever else they are pleased to designate their scheme or system), declaring with a great blowing of trumpets that it is the only sovereign remedy for the evils which poor Christendom is groaning under, embellishing the same with an ear-tickling name or designation. Fourth, they now "interpret" (?) the Scriptures in such a way that everything in them is made to favor their discipline, and discredit the contrary. Fifth, then they seek to persuade the credulous that they have been favored with a special illumination of the Spirit, whereby they are able to discern these things in the Word, while others reading it perceive them not. Sixth, assured that they are led by the Spirit "This hath bred high terms of separation between such and the rest of the world, whereby the one sort are termed, The brethren, The godly, and so forth; the other, worldlings, time-servers, pleasers of men not of God" (Hooker, Volume 1, page 106).

Finally, the deceived are now easily drawn to become ardent propagators of their new tenets, zealous proselytizers, seeking to persuade others to leave the apostate "Camp" and join them on "the true scriptural ground." "Let any man of contrary opinion open his mouth to persuade them, and they close their ears: his reasons they weigh not, all is answered with 'We are of God, He that knoweth

God heareth us' (1 John 4:6), as for the rest, ye are of the world" (Hooker). Such was the policy pursued by the "Fifth Monarchy men," the "Brownists," Thos. Cartwright and his following in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Such too was the course taken by John Kelly in Ireland, Alex. Campbell in Kentucky, more than a century ago—the latter founding "the Christian Church," denouncing all others as unscriptural. So that Mr. J.N. Darby followed a well-trodden path!

"Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach." After mentioning the Christian's altar and the suffering and offering of Christ thereon, the apostle now draws an exhortation unto that duty which is the basis of our whole Christian profession. There are five things in this brief text which call for prayerful consideration. First, the exact force of its "therefore"—requiring us to ascertain the relation of our text to its setting. Second, what is signified here by "the camp," both as it concerned the Hebrews and as it respects us to-day. Third, in what sense we are to go forth from it. Fourth, how in so doing we go unto Christ. Fifth, by what means this duty is to be discharged.

"Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp." The duty which is here enjoined on the believer is drawn from what had just been declared: "Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate" (verse 12). There were one or two points in that verse which we reserved for consideration in this article. First, with regard to the meaning of "sanctify." We cannot agree with those commentators (among them some for whom we have a high regard) that would here restrict it to "expiate:" we see no reason for this narrowing of its force. Personally, we consider the term has as wide a signification here as elsewhere in Scripture: by His perfect oblation Christ has separated His people from the world, purified them from all their iniquities, consecrated them to God, so that they stand before Him in all the acceptableness of their Head.

Many words have a wider scope in Scripture than in ordinary usage, and the expositor needs to be constantly on his guard against narrowing the meaning of important terms. It is blessedly true that at the cross the believer's Surety expiated all his sins, that is, cancelled their guilt, by making reparation to the Law; but it is the effects of that which are here in view. The sanctification of His people was the

grand object which Christ had in view in becoming incarnate, and that He steadily pursued throughout the whole of His life and sufferings. The Church is now cleansed, set apart, and adorned by His atoning sacrifice. Christ sustained all the transgressions of His people, made atonement for them, removed the same from before God, and washed them from all defilement by His soul travail, bloody sweat, and death; and in consequence, they now stand before the Eye of infinite justice and holiness as everlastingly righteous, and pure.

Herein we may behold once more the outstanding excellency of Christianity above Judaism—something which we must ever be on the lookout for if we are not to miss the principal design of the Spirit in this epistle. These verses abound in details which exhibit the privileges of the new covenant as far surpassing those of the old. First, we have that "establishing of the heart" before God (verse 9) which the natural Israel possessed not. Second, we have "an altar" furnishing the highest and holiest sacrifice of all (verse 10), which they had no right or title to partake of: their sin offerings were burned, not eaten (verse 11). Third, we have an effectual and abiding sanctification of our souls before God, whereas they had a sanctification which was but external and evanescent "to the (ceremonial) purifying of the flesh" (Heb. 9:13). Fourth, Jesus has sanctified the people "with His own blood" (verse 12), which was something that the high priests of Judaism could never do—they offered to God the blood of others, even that of animals.

A further word now on the fact that the Savior "suffered without the gate," that is, outside of the city of Jerusalem which answered to the camp in the wilderness, wherein the tabernacle was first set up. Sundry things were represented thereby. First, this signified that He was not only a sacrifice for sin, but was being punished for sins, dealt with as a malefactor and dying that death which by Divine institution was a sign of the curse (Gal. 3:13). "They took Jesus, and led Him away. And He bearing His cross went forth (out of Jerusalem) into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: where they crucified Him, and two with Him" (John 19:16-18). This was done by the malice of the Jews, yet their wickedness was "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23), so that it might appear Christ is the true sin-offering. Thus, God made the hatred of Satan and his

agents to subserve His purpose and accomplish His own will—how the knowledge of this should comfort us when the wicked are plotting against us!

Second, in ordaining that His Son should be put to death outside the city of Jerusalem, symbolic intimation was thereby given by God to the Jews that He had put an end to all sacrificing in the temple, so far as their acceptance by Him was concerned: now that Christ Himself was laid on the altar, there was no longer any need for those offerings which prefigured Him. The shadow and the substance could not stand together: for the Levitical sacrifices to be continued after Christ's death would denote either that He had not come, or that His offering was not sufficient to obtain salvation. Third, Christ's going forth out of Jerusalem signified the end of the church-state of the Jews, and therefore as He left the city, He announced their destruction: see Luke 23:28-30. Very solemn was this: Christ was no longer "in the Church" of the Jews (Acts 7:38), their house was now left unto them desolate (Matthew 23:38). If, then, a Jew desired to partake of the benefits of the Messiah, he too must leave the camp—the whole temple system.

What a depth and breadth of meaning there is to every action of our blessed Redeemer! what important truths they illustrated and exemplified! How much we lose by failing to meditate upon the details of our Lord's passion! In addition to what had been pointed out above, we may observe, fourth, that Christ's offering Himself as a sin offering to God outside Jerusalem, clearly shows that His sacrifice and its benefits were not confined to the elect among the Jews, but extended equally unto the chosen remnant from the Gentiles. It was, then, yet another sign that "the middle wall of partition" was now broken down, that the barrier which had for so long existed between Judaism and the world no more existed. As 1 John 2:2 declared, "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world"—for an exposition of which see our booklet on "The Atonement."

Thus, the force of the "therefore" in our text is not difficult to determine: because Jesus Himself "suffered without the gate, let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach." But to make it still more simple for the reader to comprehend, let us divide the "therefore" into its component parts. First and more generally, because Christ has left us an example, let

us follow His steps. Second, since we partake of the food of our altar, let us use the strength therefrom in a way pleasing and glorifying to Christ. Third and more specifically, if the Son of God was willing to suffer the ignominy of being cast out of Jerusalem in order to bear our doom, surely it would ill-become the sons of God if they were unwilling to go forth and bear His reproach! Fourth, if Christ in obedience to God took the place of being scorned and hated by men, shall we in disobedience to Him seek to be esteemed and flattered by His enemies? Fifth, because Christ has "sanctified" us, let us evidence our separation from the ungodly.

"Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach." The second thing requiring our careful consideration here is what is meant by "the camp." "The apostle, in all this epistle, hath respect unto the original institution of the Jewish church-state and worship in the wilderness. Therefore he confines his discourse to the tabernacle and the services of it, without any mention of the temple or the city wherein it was built, though all that he speaks be equally applicable unto them. Now the camp in the wilderness was that space of ground which was taken up by the tents of the people, as they were regularly pitched about the tabernacle. Out of this compass the bodies of the beasts for the sin-offerings were carried and burned. Hereunto afterwards answered the city of Jerusalem, as is evident in this place; for whereas in the foregoing verse, Christ is said to suffer 'without the gate,' here He is said to be 'without the camp': these being all one and the same as to the purpose of the apostle" (John Owen).

"The camp" of Israel, then, and later the city of Jerusalem, was the seat and center of the political and religious life of the Jewish church. To be in "the camp" was to have a right unto all the advantages and privileges of the commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2:12) and the Divine service of the tabernacle. For to forfeit that right, for any cause, for a season, meant that the offender was taken out of the camp: Leviticus 14:3; 24:14; Numbers 5:2; 12:15. Now it was in that camp that Christ had been "despised and rejected" by the Nation. It was concerning that camp He had solemnly declared, "your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:38). It was from that camp He had suffered Himself to be conducted, when He went forth to the Cross. Thus, at the time our epistle was written, "the camp" signified an apostate Judaism, which would have none of

Christ, which hated and anathematized Him; and, in consequence, it was the place abandoned by God, given up by Him to destruction—for a generation later it ceased to be, even in a material and outward way.

But Judaism as such has long since passed away, what, then, is its present counterpart? The question should not be difficult to decide, though it meets with varied answers. Some say "the camp" is Romanism, and call attention to the many striking points of analogy between it and Judaism. Some say it is "the dead and carnal professing church"—from which, of course, their denomination is an exception. Others insist that it is "all the man-made sects and systems of Christendom," from which they have withdrawn, only to set up another system of their own, even more pharisaical than those they denounce. But a single consideration is sufficient to dispose of all such vagaries—which have, in the past, misled the writer. Is Christ Himself hated and anathematized by either Rome or the deadeast and most erroneous portions of Protestantism? The answer is, NO. We must turn to other scriptures (like Revelation 18:4 and 2 Timothy 3:5) to learn God's will for us concerning Romanism or the carnal sects, for Hebrews 13:13 cannot be fairly applied to either of them. The very name of Christ was abhorred by Judaism, it is not so by either Rome or degenerate Protestantism.

Let us not be misunderstood at this point. We are not here expressing our views on the whole subject of the Christian's separation from what is dishonoring to Christ, nor are we holding a brief for the Papacy and her daughters. Admittedly Christendom is in a far worse state today than it was a century ago, and there is very much going on in it with which the follower of the Lord Jesus should have no fellowship; but that is a totally different thing from withdrawing from a company where there are many of God's people and where all the fundamentals of the Truth were faithfully proclaimed—think of denouncing Spurgeon's Tabernacle as a part of "Babylon," and refusing to allow those to "break bread" who occasionally attended its services! No; our present object is to define what "the camp" of Hebrews 13:13 actually signifies, and then to show how erroneously that term has been applied to something radically different.

As we have said above "the camp" was that degenerate Judaism which had hounded the Lord of glory to death, and which

could not be appeased by anything less than putting Him to death as a base malefactor and blasphemer. It is readily conceded that not only may numerous points of analogy be drawn between Judaism and Romanism, but that large sections of degenerate Protestantism now have many things in common with it. But it was not its law, its priesthood, its ceremonialism, nor even its corruptions which caused God to give up Jerusalem unto destruction. The "camp" from which the apostle bade his readers "go forth" was a Judaism which had not only rejected Jesus as the Christ of God, denied that He was risen from the dead, but which also insisted that He was a vile impostor, and reviled His very name. But so far as we are aware, there is not a single church or company upon earth that professes to be "Christian" of whom that can be said!

The fact is, there is nothing upon earth today which exactly duplicates the Judaistic "camp" of the apostle's time. Yet there is that which essentially corresponds to it, even though externally it differs somewhat therefrom; and that is the world—the secular and profane world. Concerning it we read, "the whole world lieth in the Wicked one" (1 John 5:19). Those who comprise it are unregenerate, unholy, ungodly. It is true that one of the effects of Christianity has been to cast a veneer of morality and religious respectability over large sections of the world; though that veneer is now getting very thin. It is true that in some circles of it, it is still fashionable to feign respect for Divine things, yet, if the exacting claims of God be pressed upon them, it soon becomes apparent that the carnal mind is enmity against Him. But for the most part, Christ is openly hated by the masses, and His name fearfully blasphemed by them. And there it is that we are plainly told, "the friendship of the world is enmity with God: whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4).

Our next consideration is, In what sense is the Christian to "go forth" from the camp, i.e., from that which is avowedly and actively hostile to Christ? This question needs to be carefully considered, for here too the language of our text has been sadly wrested. Let us bring the point to a definite issue: is it a corporeal or a mental act which is here enjoined? is it by the body or the soul that the duty is performed? is it by our feet or our hearts that obedience is rendered? In other words, is it a "literal" or a metaphorical forsaking of the world which God requires from us? Those who

made the serious mistake of supposing that it is the former, have betaken themselves to monasteries and convents. The explanatory and qualifying words of the apostle "for then (if separation from the wicked were to be taken absolutely) must ye needs go out of the world" (1 Cor. 5:10) shows the error of this; contrary also would it be to the spirit of the Lord's prayer, "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world" (John 17:15).

Let us consider the case of the Jews in the apostle's time. When one of them savingly believed on the Lord Jesus Christ was he required to "literally" or physically get out of Jerusalem? No indeed: even the apostles themselves continued to abide there (Acts 8:1)! It was not a local departure which was intended—though a little later that was necessary if their lives were to be preserved (Luke 21:30-32); rather was it a moral and religious going forth from the camp. "There was nothing that these Hebrews did more value and more tenaciously adhere unto, than that political and religious interest in the commonwealth of Israel. They could not understand how all the glorious privileges granted of old unto that church and people, should so cease as that they ought to forsake them. Hereon most of them continued in their unbelief of the Gospel, many would have mixed the doctrine of it with their old ceremonies, and the best of them found no small difficulty in their renunciation. But the apostle shows them, that by the suffering of Christ without the gate or camp, this they were called unto" (John Owen).

The application of this principle unto us today is not difficult to perceive. It may be stated thus: God requires us to forego and renounce all advantages and privileges—whether social, financial, political, or religious—which are inconsistent with an interest in Christ, communion with Him, or fidelity to His cause. An illustration of this is furnished in Philippians 3:4-10: those things which Saul of Tarsus had formerly counted gain—his Jewish birth and orthodoxy, his pharisaic strictness and righteousness, his persecution of the Church—he now "counted loss for Christ." The same thing obtains now in heathendom: when a Parsee, Buddhist, Mohammedan (or a Jew, or a Romanist) is truly converted, he has to turn his back upon, relinquish those things which he had hitherto most highly venerated. Love to Christ moves him to now hate those things which are directly opposed to Him.

Now for the fourth point in our text: by going forth from the camp we go "unto Him," or, conversely, by going forth unto Christ we go outside the camp. The two things are inseparable: they are convertible terms. We cannot go unto, without going from, and we cannot go "from" without going "unto." This is exactly what conversion is: a turning round, a right-about face. It is the heart turning from Satan to God, from sin to holiness, from things below to things above, from "the camp" unto Christ. That which is opposed to the Lord Jesus is renounced for His sake. The world is left, and He is followed. Self-righteousness is dropped that an band may lay hold of His atoning sacrifice. To "go forth unto Him" is to betake ourselves to Christ in His office as the Prophet, Priest, and King of His Church, and thereby find acceptance with God. It is to cleave unto and own Him under the contempt and opposition of those who despise and reject Him.

To go forth unto Christ without the camp, then, signifies for us to be so enlightened by the Spirit as for the eyes of our understanding to see Him as the promised Messiah, the only Mediator between God and men; to behold the One whom the Jews and Gentiles condemned to a malefactor's death, as the all-sufficient Savior. It is for the heart to be attracted by the supernal excellencies of His person, to be won by Him, the soul perceiving Him to be "the Fairest of ten thousand." It is for the will to be brought into subjection of Him, so that His yoke is gladly accepted and His scepter readily submitted to. In a word, it is to heartily approve of Him whom the world still hates, becoming His humble follower, His willing disciple, and gladly enduring for His sake all the ridicule and persecution which fidelity to Him and His cause entails. Like the Gadarenes of old, the professing world now says to Him "Depart out of our coasts" (Mark 5:17), but those who go forth unto Him exclaim, "my Beloved is mine, and I am His" (Song 2:16).

Hebrews 13:13, 14

Chapter 116 - Outside the Camp

In the preceding article we endeavored to make clear to the reader exactly what was "the camp" from which the apostle exhorted the Hebrews to go forth. The more accurately a term be defined, the less likelihood of its being wrongly employed. It was at this point the present writer failed in an article which appeared in an issue nearly ten years ago—many a sound sermon has been marred by heading it with the wrong text. Dwelling upon many of the incidental analogies which exist between much that now obtains in Christendom and that which marked Judaism of old, we failed to concentrate upon that which was essential and fundamental, and hence, made a wrong application of this particular term "the camp." That which made the Judaism of Paul's day to differ so radically from its worst state in the times of the prophets, was, that it had hated, rejected, and murdered the incarnate Son of God.

It is that particular point, the Jews' casting out of Christ, anathematizing Him, condemning Him to a malefactor's death, which must guide us when seeking to identify the modern counterpart of that "camp." There is, really, no exact replica on earth today of that Judaism which crucified the Lord Jesus: certainly neither Romanism—blasphemous and horrible as are many of its dogmas and practices—nor the most degenerate branches of Protestantism—rotten as some of them are in doctrine and works—can rightly be designated the present-day "camp." No, as we pointed out previously, that which most closely resembles it, that which in principle is essentially like thereto, is the secular, profane world. Its unregenerate and ungodly members do not profess to love Christ: the very mention of Him is hateful to them: they desire to banish Him entirely from their schemes and thoughts—except when they take His holy name in vain.

Next, we sought to show in what sense the Lord requires His people to go forth "outside the camp," that is, separate themselves from the ungodly, from those who hate and revile Christ. This, as we

saw, is not to be understood "literally" or physically, but metaphorically or morally. It is not a local withdrawal from the world, but a religious and spiritual one. In other words, God does not bid His people be fanatics and lead the lives of hermits. Taking refuge in monasteries and convents is the Devil's perversion of this important practical truth. No; the Christian is still left in the world, but he must not be of it. Its policy and maxims must not regulate him, its pleasures and attractions must not capture his heart, its friendship must not be sought; its politics are no concern of his. In heart and soul-interests he is a stranger here, and is to conduct himself as a pilgrim passing through this scene—"using this world, but not abusing it" (1 Cor. 7:31).

Then we pointed out that in going forth from the camp the Christian goes unto Christ: it is the two-foldness of act which the word "conversion" connotes. Yet it is not without reason that the Holy Spirit has worded our text as it is: there is a particular emphasis in it which requires to be noted. It is not, "Let us go forth therefore without the camp unto Him," but "unto Him without the camp." The difference is something more than verbal. It stresses the fact that Christ Himself must be the grand object before the heart, and then the poor baubles of this world will not possess much attraction for us. If He is not, then, though we may become aesthetes, there will be no contentment, still less joy: our case would be like that of many of the Israelites who had "gone forth" from Egypt, yet continued to lust after its fleshpots.

To go forth unto Christ without the camp means for the believer to make a complete break from his former manner of life, to renounce every thing which is opposed to Christ, to relinquish whatever would hinder communion with Him. In a word, the exhortation of our text is only another way of presenting that declaration of our Lord, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). Sin must be mortified, the flesh with its affections and lusts crucified, the world forsaken, and the example which Christ has left us diligently followed. So, then, going forth unto Him outside the camp is not a single act, done once for all at conversion, but an habitual thing, a constant attitude of life. The cross must be taken up by the Christian "daily:" Luke 9:23.

Obedience to this injunction involves "bearing Christ's

reproach." The believer is called unto fellowship with Christ: fellowship now with His sufferings (Phil. 3:10), in the future with His glory. That "reproach" assumes different forms and has various degrees in different locations and periods, according as God is pleased to restrain the enmity of the wicked against His people. But in every age and in every place it has been verified that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). That "persecution," that "reproach" of Christ may be cruel afflictions such as the early Christians experienced; or it may take the milder form of sneers, ridicule, and ostracism, which sensitive souls feel keenly. As Christ declared, "The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). One reason why God permits this, is because His people are so prone to flirt with the world, and if we will not separate from them, He often causes them to give us the cold shoulder and appose us.

The flesh shrinks from and desires to escape such opposition. It is natural for us to want to be well thought of and nicely treated by every one. But let the shrinking Christian call to mind what his Master endured for his sake. In the types, the sin-offering was burned without the camp—far off from the holy of holies where Jehovah had His seat—to represent the sinner's final separation from God, his being cast into "the outer darkness," there to suffer the vengeance of eternal fire. And Christ endured the equivalent of that on the cross, during those three hours of awful darkness. He bore the fearful load of His people's sins, and was deprived of the comforts of God's presence. For Christ it meant entering the place of distance from God, but for us to "go forth without the camp" means going "unto Him"; for Him it entailed enduring the curse, for us it involves naught but Divine blessing! Then let us cleave to Him despite the world's scorn, and stand by His cause on earth no matter what the cost to us.

But let us now consider by what means this duty of going forth unto Christ is discharged. As we pointed out in the preceding article, it is an act of the soul rather than of the body which is here in view. But to particularize. First, the soul of the believer goes forth to Christ by prayer, for real prayer is the breathing of the heart after Him and turning unto Him. Its first cry is "Lord, save me, I perish." There is the daily request for Him to make Himself more real to the

heart, to grant us closer communion with Himself, and to remove those things which hinder the same. There is the asking Him to teach us how to draw from His fullness, to make us more obedient, to conform us more fully to His holy image. "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth: for Thy love is better than wine" (Song 1:2) is the language of one whose heart is "going forth unto Christ outside the camp"—seeking from Him that which is infinitely superior to the best this poor world affords.

Second, it is the motion of faith. Christ is the grand Object of faith, and He can only be known and enjoyed now by faith. It was so at our first conversion; it is so throughout the entire Christian course. "The life which I now live in the flesh," said the apostle, "I live by the faith of the Son of God (faith in Him), who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). When faith is inactive, there is no going forth of the soul unto Christ, no real prayer, no communion with Him. But when faith is operative the heart turns unto Him as instinctively as the needle of the compass does unto the north. When faith is sickly and listless the things of this world gain power over us: either its pleasures attract, or its cares distract us. But when faith is healthy and vigorous, the soul "mounts up with wings as eagles" and "runs and is not weary." It is faith which makes Christ real and precious to the soul. Then let us be more diligent in guarding against those things which weaken and quench it.

Third, going forth unto Christ outside the camp is the act of hope. This is the particular spiritual grace which keeps the heart of the believer from falling into abject despair. There are times when he is sorely tried and dismayed: sin rages within, the accusations of the holy Law sting his conscience, and Satan tries hard to make him believe that all is lost—that having abused his privileges, sinned against much light, turned Divine grace into lasciviousness, there is no remedy. So it seems to the cast-down soul: pray he cannot, and as he reads the Scriptures, instead of finding comfort every page condemns him. Then the Spirit applies some promise, and a little encouragement follows: but conscience still smites, and he groans. Now it is that hope acts: Christ had mercy on the leper, the publican, the dying thief; He is full of compassion, I will cast myself afresh on His pity. So too hope looks beyond this scene—with all its disappointments, sorrows, and sufferings—and anticipates the time when we shall be "forever with the Lord."

Fourth, going forth unto Christ without the camp is also the work of love. The love of God which the Spirit sheds abroad in the hearts of the regenerate is something more than beautiful sentiment: it is an operative principle. Love yearns for the company of the beloved: it cannot find satisfaction elsewhere. Christ is not to be met with in worldly circles, and therefore when the heart of the believer is in a healthy state, it seeks unto its Beloved outside the same. A word from His lips, a smile from His face, an embrace from His arms, is prized above rubies. To sit at His feet and drink from the fountain of His love, is better than heaps of silver and gold. Christ is precious to those whose sins have been removed by His blood, and their affections "go forth" unto Him—not so fervently and frequently as they should, or as they desire; nevertheless, there are seasons in the life of every Christian when he is permitted to lean his head upon the Savior's bosom. Christ's love to His own attracts their love to Him.

Fifth, going forth unto Christ outside the camp is the surrender of the will to Him. There is a change of masters: service to the prince of this world is renounced, and the Lordship of Christ accepted. There is an enlisting under His banner, a putting on of His uniform, a submission to His captaincy, and we act according to His will. How different is all of this from what many suppose our text signifies! One may identify himself with those who claim to have gone forth from "all the man-made sects and systems," and yet the heart be quite dead toward God. Or, one may belong to the most orthodox church, subscribe to its doctrines, adopt their language, echo its groans, and have not a spark of grace in the heart. One may separate from all the world's politics, pastimes and pleasures, and have no love for Christ. There must be the exercise of faith, the stirrings of hope, the actings of love, the surrender of the will, and walking in the path of obedience, in order to meet the terms of our text.

"For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (verse 14). Four questions are suggested by these words: what is their relation to the preceding verse? what is signified by "no continuing city"? what is the "one to come" that we seek? how or in what way do we seek it? That there is a close connection between verse 14 and the previous one is obvious from its opening word. Now that connection is twofold: first, verse 14 supplies two further

reasons to enforce the duty specified in verse 13—additional to those implied in verses 10-12; second, verse 14 may also be regarded as explaining and amplifying the language of verse 13.

The connection of verse 14 with verse 13 will be more apparent as we turn to the second question and consider what is signified by "For here have we no continuing city." Obviously, the "city" is used here metaphorically, as a figure of that which is strong and stable: it is that which provides refuge and rest to the great majority of earth's inhabitants. "Change and decay in all around I see" said the poet: there is nothing lasting, durable, dependable in this world. In Genesis 4:17 we read that Cain "builded a city," and where is it?—destroyed thousands of years ago by the Flood. Thebes, Nineveh, Babylon were all powerful and imposing cities in their day, but where are they now? they no longer exist, yea, their very site is disputed. Such is this world, my reader: "the fashion of this world passeth away" (1 Cor. 7:31), and one day "the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Pet. 3:10).

The things of this earth are transitory: that which the natural man values so highly, and sells his soul to obtain, soon vanishes away. All that is mundane is unstable and uncertain: that is the meaning, in brief, of "here have we no continuing city." There is however an emphasis in these words which we must not miss: it is not simply "here there is no continuing city" but "here have we" none—something which can be predicated of none but believers. True, the worldling has none in reality, but in his imagination, his plans, his affections, he has—he sets his heart upon the things of this world and acts as though he would enjoy them always: "Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue forever, and their dwelling-places to all generations: they call their lands after their own names" (Ps. 49:11). And how is the instability of everything mundane to affect and influence the Christian? Thus: he is to renounce them in his heart—leave "the camp"—that is the connection with verse 13.

"For here have we no continuing city" (verse 14). "A city is the center of men's interests and privileges, the residence and seat of their conversation. Hereby are they freed from the condition of strangers and pilgrims; and have all that rest and security in this world they are capable. For those who have no higher aims nor ends than this world, a city is their all. Now it is not said of believers

absolutely that they belonged to no city, had none that was theirs in common with other men; for our apostle himself pleaded that he was a citizen of no mean city. This is intimated, as we shall see, in the restriction of the assertion: a continuing city. But it is spoken on other accounts" (John Owen). What those "other accounts" are we shall see presently, meanwhile we will consider the more general meaning.

In His providential dealings with them, God often gives His people painful reminders of the fact that "here have we no continuing city." We are prone to be at ease in Zion, to fix our hearts on things below, to settle down in this world. We like to feel that we are anchored for a while at least, and make our plans accordingly. But God blows upon our schemes and compels us to take up the stakes of our tents, saying, "Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest; because it is polluted" (Mic. 2:10). A significant word on this is found in, "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him" (Deut. 32:11, 12). Ah, my reader, it is not a pleasant experience to have our earthly "nest" stirred up, to have our rest disturbed, and be obliged to change our abode; but as that is essential if the eaglets are to be taught to use their wings, so it is necessary for the Christian if he is to live as a stranger and pilgrim in this scene.

God has called His people unto fellowship with Christ, and that means something more than participating in His life and receiving His peace and joy: it also involves entering into His experiences—enduring the wrath of God alone excepted. "When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him" (John 10:4). That denotes two things: that we are not called to tread any path which He did not Himself, traverse, and that we are to experience something of His sorrows: are they which have continued with Me in My temptations" or "trials" (Luke 22:28). Now what was Christ's experience in this word? Even as a child He had no rest here: His parents had to carry Him down into Egypt in order to escape the malice of Herod. Trace the record of His earthly ministry, and how long do we find Him abiding in one place? He was constantly on the move. "Jesus therefore being wearied with His journey sat thus on the well" (John 4:6), and in some form or other His people are required to drink from that same cup. If the Lord of

glory "had not where to lay His head" when in this world, shall we deem it strange that God so often disturbs our rest?

But let us now consider the more specific meaning of our text. First, the Christian has no city on earth which is the center of Divine worship, whereunto it is confined, as had been the case with Judaism. Herein the apostle points another contrast. After the Israelites had wandered for many years in the wilderness, they were brought to rest in Canaan, where Jerusalem became their grand center, and of that city the Jews had for long boasted. But it was not to continue, for within ten years of the writing of this epistle, that city was destroyed. How this verse gives the lie to the pretensions of Rome! No, the Christian has something far better than an insecure and non-continuing city on earth, even the Father's House, with its many mansions, eternal in the heavens!

Second, the believer has no city on earth which supplies him with those things which are his ultimate aim: deliverance from all his enemies, an end to all his trials, an eternal resting-place. His "commonwealth" or "citizenship" is "in Heaven" (Phil. 3:20 R.V.). The Christian does not regard this world as his fixed abode or final home. This is what gives point to the preceding exhortation and explains the force of the opening "For" in verse 14. The fact that everything here is unstable and uncertain should spur the Christian to go forth from the camp—in his heart renounce the world. And further, it should make him willing to "bear the reproach of Christ," even though that involves being driven from his birthplace and compelled to wander about without any fixed residence on earth. Finally, it gives point, as we shall see, to the last clause of our text.

"But we seek one to come" (verse 14). In view of what has been before us, it is quite clear that the "one," the City, that we seek, is Heaven itself, various aspects of which are suggested by the figure here used of it. It is an abiding, heavenly, everlasting "City," which the believer seeks, and the same is referred to again and again in this epistle—in contrast from the temporal and transitory nature of Judaism—under various terms and figures. This "City" is the same as the "better and enduring substance" in Heaven of Hebrews 10:34. It is that "Heavenly Country" of Hebrews 11:16. It is "the City of the living God" of Hebrews 12:22, the seat and center of Divine worship. It is the same as "those things which cannot be shaken" of Hebrews 12:27. It is "the Kingdom which cannot be

moved," in its final form, of Hebrews 12:28. It is the "Inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for us" (1 Pet. 1:4).

An earlier reference to this grand object of the believer's desire and quest was before us in "he looked for a City which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). Those "foundations" are, First, the everlasting good-will and pleasure of God toward His people, which is the basis of all His dealings with them. Second, God's foreordination, whereby He predestined His elect unto eternal glory, concerning which we are told "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. 2:19). Third, the Everlasting Covenant of free, rich, and sovereign Grace, which God entered into with the Head and Surety of the elect, and which is "ordered in all things and sure." Fourth, the infinite merits and purchase of Christ, for "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). Fifth, the whole being confirmed by and resting upon the immutable stability of God's promise and oath: Hebrews 6:17-20.

In addition to the few brief remarks we made upon the signification of this figure of the "City" when expounding Hebrews 11:10, we may note the following—bearing in mind those characteristics of a "city" which specially obtained in ancient times. First, a city was a place of safety and security: "let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans, and for fear of the army of the Syrians: so we dwell at Jerusalem" (Jer. 35:11). In Heaven there will be no wicked men to persecute, no Devil to tempt. Second, a city is compact, being the concentration of numerous houses and homes. So of Heaven Christ declared that in it are "many mansions." There will dwell together forever the myriads of holy angels and the entire Church of God. Third, in a city is stored all manner of provisions and needful commodities; so in Heaven there is nothing lacking to minister unto the delights of its inhabitants.

Finally, as a "city" on earth is the center of the world's interests and privileges, the resting-place of travelers and those who go abroad, so Heaven will be the grand Terminal to the wanderings and journeyings of the Christian. His pilgrimage is ended, for Home is reached. On earth he was a stranger and sojourner, but now he has reached the Father's House. There he will meet with no hardships, encounter none to whom he is a hated foreigner, and no longer have

to earn his daily bread by the sweat of his brow. Unbroken rest, perfect freedom, unassailable security, congenial society, inconceivable delights, are now his portion forever. Faith then gives place to sight, hope to fruition, grace is swallowed up in glory, and we are "forever with the Lord," beholding His glory, bathing in the ocean of His love.

How the anticipation of this should make us set our affection on things above, spur us on to run the race before us, cause us to drop every weight which hinders us in running! How the consideration and contemplation of that "City" should work powerfully in us to look and long, and prepare us for the same! This brings us to ponder for a moment the meaning of "but we seek one to come." This, of course, does not signify that the believer is searching after that which is unknown, but endeavoring to obtain it. It is the treading of that Narrow Way which leads to Heaven, and that with diligence and desire, which is hereby denoted. "And God hath prepared a city of rest for us, so it is our duty continually to endeavor the attainment of it, in the ways of His appointment. The main business of believers in this world is diligently to seek after the attainments of eternal rest with God, and this is the character whereby they may be known" (John Owen).

Here, then, is the use which the believer makes of the uncertainty and instability of everything in this world: his heart is fixed on the Home above, and to get safely there is his great concern. The word "seek" in our text is a very strong one: it is used in, "after all these things (the material necessities of this life) do the Gentiles seek" (Matthew 6:32)—i.e., seek with concentrated purpose, earnest effort, untiring zeal. The same word is also rendered "labor" in Hebrews 4:11: the Christian deems no task too arduous, no sacrifice too much, no loss too great, if he may but "win Christ" (Phil. 3:8). He knows that Heaven will richly compensate him for all the toils and troubles of the journey which lead thither. "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out" (Rev. 3:12).

Hebrews 13:15, 16

Chapter 117 - The Christian's Sacrifices

The verses which are now to engage our attention are closely related with those which immediately precede, as is intimated by the "therefore." The links of connection may be set forth thus. First, "We have an Altar" (verse 10); what use are we to make of it? the answer is, offer sacrifice thereon. Second, Jesus has sanctified His people "with His own blood" (verse 12). What is to be their response? the answer is, draw nigh to God as joyous worshippers. Third, we must go forth unto Christ "without the camp." What then, is to be our attitude towards those who despise and reject Him? The answer is, not one of malice, but benevolence, doing good unto all as we have opportunity and occasion. Such, in brief, is the relation between our present portion and its context.

Calvin suggested, we believe rightly, that the apostle here anticipated an objection which might have been made against what he had previously advanced. In saying that Jesus "suffered without the gate" (verse 11), plain intimation was given that God had done with, abandoned Judaism as such. In bidding Hebrew believers to go forth unto Christ "without the camp," the Holy Spirit signified they must now turn their backs upon the temple and its service. But this presented a serious difficulty: all the sacrifices—those of thanksgiving as well as those of expiation—were inseparably connected with the temple system, therefore it followed that if the temple was to be deserted, the sacrifices also must have ceased. It was to meet this difficulty, and to make known the superior privileges of Christianity, that the apostle penned our text.

If the Christian was debarred from offering any sacrifice to God, then he would occupy an inferior position and be deprived of a privilege which the Jews of old enjoyed, for sacrifices were instituted for the purpose of celebrating God's worship. The apostle therefore shows that another kind of sacrifice remains for us to offer, which is no less pleasing to God than those which He appointed of old, even the praise of our lips. Here we are taught what is the

legitimate way of worshipping God under the new covenant, which presents another striking contrast from that which obtained under the old. As our "Altar" is not one of wood or stone, brass or gold, but Christ Himself, so our "sacrifices" are not the fruits of the ground or the firstlings of our herds, but the adoration of our hearts and the devotion of our lives. The contrast, then, is between the outward and ceremonial and the inward and spiritual.

The Jews offered to God a slain lamb each morning and evening, and on certain special days bullocks and rams; but the Christian is to present unto God a continual sacrifice of thanksgiving. This brings before us a most interesting and blessed subject, namely, those sacrifices of the Christian with which God is well pleased. The first of these was mentioned by David: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17). "When the heart mourns for sins God is better pleased than when the bullock bleeds beneath the axe. 'A broken heart' is an expression implying deep sorrow, embittering the very life; it carries in it the idea of all but killing anguish in that region which is so vital as to be the very source of life. A heart crushed is, to God, a fragrant heart. Men condemn those who are contemptible in their own eyes, but the Lord seeth not as man seeth. He despises what man esteems, and values that which they despise. Never yet has God spurned a lowly, weeping penitent" (C.H. Spurgeon).

John Owen pointed out that there were two things in connection with the O.T. sacrifices: the slaying and shedding of the blood of the beast, and then the actual offering of it upon the altar. Both of these were required in order to the completing of a sacrifice. On the one hand, the mere killing of the animal was no sacrifice unless its blood was placed upon the altar; and on the other hand, no blood could be presented there to God until it had been actually shed. Corresponding to these, there is a twofold spiritual sacrifice in connection with the Christian profession. The first is what has just been made reference to in the paragraph above: the broken heart and contrite spirit of the believer. That signifies evangelical repentance and mortification, or the crucifixion of the flesh, which is the Christian's first sacrifice, answering to the death of the beast before the altar.

The second sacrifice which the believer presents unto God is

his offering of Christ each day. This is done by an act of faith—which is ever preceded by repentance, just as we must feel ourselves to be desperately sick before we send for the physician. As the awakened sinner is convicted of sin and mourns for it before God, pride and self-righteousness are subdued, and he is able to appreciate the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the (elect) world. Christ appears to him as exactly suited to his case and need. He perceives that He was wounded for his transgressions and bruised for his iniquities. He perceives that Christ took his place and endured the penal wrath of God on his behalf. Therefore does he now lay hold of him by faith and present the atoning sacrifice of Christ to God as the only ground of his acceptance. And as he begins, so he continues. A daily sense of defilement leads to a daily pleading of Christ's blood before the throne of grace. There is first the appropriating of Christ, and then the presenting of Him to God as the basis of acceptance.

Now it is this laying hold of Christ and the offering of Him to God in the arms of faith which corresponds to the second thing in connection with the tabernacle (and temple) sacrifices of old. As the fire fell upon the oblation placed upon the altar, incense was mingled therewith, so that the whole yielded a "sweet savor unto God." Just as the mere slaying of the animal was not sufficient—its blood must be laid upon the altar and fragrant incense be offered therewith; so the Christian's sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart will not by itself secure the favor of God. Essential as repentance is, it cannot purchase anything from God. The broken heart must lay hold of Christ, exercise faith in His blood (Rom. 3:25), and plead His merits before God. Only then will our sacrifice of a contrite spirit be a "sweet smelling savor" unto Him.

The third sacrifice which the Christian presents unto God is himself. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). That is an act of consecration. It is the recognition and acknowledgement that I am no longer my own, that I have been bought with a price, that I am the purchased property of Another. Hence, of the primitive saints we read that they "first gave their own selves to the Lord" (2 Cor. 8:5), surrendering themselves to His scepter, taking upon themselves His yoke, henceforth to live to His glory; that as they had formerly

served sin and pleased self, now they would serve God and seek only His honor. As Christ gave Himself for us, we now give ourselves back again to Him. Hereby alone can we know that we are saved: not only by believing in Christ for the forgiveness of sins, but by yielding ourselves up to His government, as living sacrifices for His use.

The fourth sacrifice of the Christian is that mentioned in our text, namely, "the fruit of our lips"; but before taking up the same let us say a few words on the order of what has now been before us. There can be no acceptable sacrifice of praise until we have offered ourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead, for as Psalm 115:17 declares, "The dead praise not the Lord." No, those who are yet in their sins cannot praise God, for they have no love for Him and no delight in Him. The heart must first be made right before it is attuned to make melody unto Him. God accepts not the lip service of those whose hearts are estranged from Him. Of old He complained "This people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me" (Isa. 29:13), and as Christ affirmed "in vain do they worship" Him (Matthew 15:8). Such hypocrisy is hateful to Him.

Nor can any man present himself acceptably to God until he has believably embraced Christ. No matter how willing I am to live honestly in the future, satisfaction must be made for the debts contracted in the past; and nothing but the atoning work of Christ can satisfy the just demands which the Law has against us. Again; how can I serve in the King's presence unless I be suitably attired? and nothing short of the robe of righteousness which Christ purchased for His people can gratify God's holy eye. Again; how could God Himself accept from me service which is utterly unworthy of His notice and that is constantly defiled by the corrupt nature still within me, unless it were presented in the meritorious name of the Mediator and cleansed by His precious blood. We must, then, accept Christ's sacrifice before God will accept ours; God's rejection of Cain's offering is clear proof thereof.

Equally evident is it, yet not so clearly perceived today by a defectively-visioned Christendom, that no sinner can really accept Christ's sacrifice until his heart be broken by a felt sense of his grievous offenses against a gracious God, and until his spirit be truly contrite before Him. The heart must be emptied of sin before there is

room for the Savior. The heart must renounce this evil world before a holy Christ will occupy it. It is a moral impossibility for one who is still in love with his lusts and the willing servant of the Devil to appropriate Christ and present Him to God for his acceptance. Thus, the order of the Christian's sacrifices is unchanging. First, we bow in the dust before God in the spirit of genuine repentance; then we appropriate Christ as His gracious provision, and present Him to God for the obtaining of His favor. Then we yield ourselves to Him unreservedly as His purchased property; and then we render praise and thanksgiving for His amazing grace toward us.

"By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name" (verse 15). This is an exhortation to duty, by way of inference from what was declared concerning the Redeemer and the sanctification of the people by His sufferings. Therein we are shown what use we are to make of our Altar, namely, offer sacrifice. The worship which the Christian presents unto God is the sacrifice of praise. Nothing is more pleasing unto Him, and nothing is more honoring to Him, than the praise of a renewed heart. Has He not declared, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me"? (Ps. 50:23). How thankful for that statement should those believers be who feel themselves to be poor and feeble. Had God said, whoso shall create a world, or even whoso shall preach wonderful sermons and be a successful winner of souls, or whoso shall give a huge sum of money to missions, they might well despair. But "whoso offereth praise" opens a wide door of entrance to every believer.

And have not the redeemed abundant cause for praising God! First, because He has granted them a vital and experimental knowledge of Himself. How the excellencies of God's being, character and attributes, thrill, as well as awe, the souls of the saints! Glance for a moment at Psalm 145, which is entitled a "Psalm of Praise." David begins with "I will extol Thee, my God, O King; and I will bless Thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless Thee, and I will praise Thy name for ever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised" (verses 1-3). In the verses that follow, one perfection of God after another passes in review and stirs the soul to adoration. His "mighty acts" (verse 4), the "glorious honor of His majesty" (verse 5), His "greatness" (verse 6), His "great goodness" and "righteousness" (verse 7), His "fullness of compassion" and

"great mercy" (verse 8), His "power" (verse 11), the "glorious majesty of His kingdom" (verse 12), His everlasting "dominion" (verse 13), His providential blessings (verses 14-17), His dealings in grace with His own (verses 18, 19), His preserving them (verse 20). No wonder the Psalmist closed with, "my mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord, and let all flesh bless His holy name for ever and ever."

If the Psalms be full of suitable petitions for us to present unto God in prayer, and if they contain language well fitted for the lips of the sobbing penitent, yet they also abound in expressions of gladsome worship. "Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding" (Ps. 47:6, 7). What vehemency of soul is expressed there! Four times over in one verse the Psalmist called upon himself (and us) to render praise unto the Lord, and not merely to utter it, but to "sing" the same out of an overflowing heart. In another place the note of praise is carried to yet a higher pitch: "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart" (Ps. 32:11). Not in any formal and perfunctory manner is the great God to be praised, but heartily, joyously, merrily. "Sing forth the honor of His name: make His praise glorious" (Ps. 66:2). Then let us offer Him nothing less than glorious praise.

The "therefore" of our text intimates an additional reason why we should praise God: because of Christ and His so great salvation. For our sakes the Beloved of the Father took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made under the Law. For our sakes the Lord of glory, entered into unfathomable depths of shame and humiliation, so that He cried "I am a worm and no man" (Ps. 22:6). For our sakes He bowed His back to the cruel smiter and offered His blessed face to those who plucked off the hair. For our sakes He entered into conflict with the Prince of Darkness, and the pains of death. For our sakes He endured the awful curse of the Law, and for three hours was forsaken by God. No Christian reader can reverently contemplate such mysteries and marvels without being stirred to the depths of his soul. And then, as he seeks to contemplate what the shame and sufferings of Christ have secured for him, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift," must be the fervent exclamation of his heart.

And observe well, dear reader, how God has allotted to Christ the position of chief honor in connection with our subject. "By Him (the One mentioned in verses 12, 13) let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God." As the Lord Jesus Himself declared, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me" (John 14:6). The saints can no more draw nigh unto God apart from Christ, than the sinner can: we are as dependent upon His mediation to render our worship acceptable to God, as we were at first for obtaining the forgiveness of our sins. As our great High Priest Christ is the "Minister of the Sanctuary" (Heb. 8:2). He meets us, as it were, at the door of the heavenly temple, and we place our spiritual sacrifices in His hands, that He may, in the sweet fragrance of His merits and perfections, present them for God's acceptance. "Another Angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto Him much incense, that He should offer it with the prayers of all saints" (Rev. 8:3).

At every point God has made us dependent upon Christ, the Mediator. Only by Him can we offer acceptable sacrifices unto God. First, because it is through Christ's bloodshedding, and that alone, that our persons have been sanctified, or made acceptable to God—note how in Genesis 4:4 Jehovah had respect first to Abel himself, and then to his offering! Second, because it is through Christ's atonement, and that alone, that a new and living way has been opened for us into God's presence: see Hebrews 10:19-21. Third, because He bears "the iniquity of our holy things" (fulfilling the type in Exodus 28:38), that is, through His perfect oblation our imperfect offerings are received by God: His merits and intercession cancel their defects. Fourth, because as the Head of the Church, He ministers before God on behalf of its members, presenting their worship before Him. Thus, "By Him" signifies, under His guidance, through His mediation, and by our pleading His merits for acceptance with God.

What has just been before us supplies further proof of what was pointed out in an earlier paragraph, namely, that it is impossible for the unregenerate to worship God acceptably. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 15:8). And why? Not only because he is utterly sinful in himself, but because there is no Mediator to come between him and God. This is brought out strikingly in the O. T. types. Not a single "song" is recorded in the

book of Genesis. In Eden our first parents were fitted to sing unto their Creator, and join the angels in ascribing glory and thanksgiving to the Lord. But after the Fall, sinners could only praise on the ground of redeeming grace, and it is not until Exodus is reached that we have the grand type of redemption. That book opens with Israel in Egypt, groaning and crying in the house of bondage. Next, the paschal lamb was slain, Egypt was left behind, the Red Sea was crossed, and on its farther shore they looked back and saw all their enemies drowned: "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel" (Ex. 15:1). Praise, then, is on the ground of redemption.

"By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise." Every word of Holy Writ is inspired of God, and throughout, its language is chosen with Divine discrimination. Therefore it behooves us to carefully weigh each of its terms, or we shall miss their finer shades of meaning. Here is a case in point: it is not "let us render praise unto God," but "let us offer a sacrifice of praise." Christ has made His people "kings and priests unto God" (Rev. 1:6), and here they are called upon to exercise their priestly functions. Thus we are instructed to make a right use of our "Altar" (verse 10). We are not only partakers of its privileges, but we are to discharge its duties, by bringing our sacrifices thereto. The same aspect of truth is seen again in 1 Peter 2:5, where we read that believers are "an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." Yes, offered "unto God" and not to angels or saints; and, acceptable "by Jesus Christ," and not the Virgin Mary!

This particular expression "let us offer a sacrifice of praise to God" not only emphasizes the fact that in their worship believers act in priestly capacity, but it also signifies that we now have the substance of what was shadowed forth by the Levitical rites. It also denotes that the Christian ought to be as particular and diligent in the discharge of his evangelical duties as the Jew was in the performing of his ceremonial obligations. As he was required to bring an offering that was without physical defect, so we must bring to God the very best that our hearts can supply: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name." Content not thyself with offering to God a few formal utterances of thanksgiving, still less hurry through thy worship as a task you are glad to get finished; but strive after reality, fervency, and joy in the same.

When the worshipping Israelite approached the tabernacle or temple, he did not come empty-handed, but brought with him a thank-offering. Then "let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God." When the saints come together for public worship, it should be not only for the object of having their empty vessels filled and their hungry souls fed, but with the definite purpose of offering to God that which will please Him. The more closely we walk with God, and the more intimate be our communion with Him, the easier the performance of this pleasant duty. The more we delight ourselves in the Lord and regale our souls by the contemplation of His perfections, the more spontaneous, fervent, and constant, will be our worship of Him. The more we cultivate the habit of seeing God's hand in everything, and are grateful to Him for temporal blessings, the more will the spirit of thanksgiving possess our hearts and find expression in songs of praise.

This sacrifice of praise is here designated "the fruit of our lips," which is a quotation from Hosea 14:2, where backsliding Israel vows that in return for God's receiving them graciously, they will render to Him "the calves of their lips"—the Hebrew word for "calves" being the same as for "praise." The expression "fruit of our lips" may at first strike us as strange, but a little reflection will reveal its propriety. Isaiah 6:5, 6 serves to open its meaning. By nature our "lips" are unclean: "Their throat is an open sepulcher, with their tongues they have used deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness" (Rom. 3:13, 14). But by God's applying to us the virtues of Christ's atonement, our lips are cleansed, and should henceforth be used in praising Him. "Fruit" is a living thing: the product of the Holy Spirit. When, through backsliding, the heart has cooled toward God and the music of joy has been silenced, cry unto Him "O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise" (Ps. 51:15).

This "sacrifice of praise" is to be offered unto God not merely on the Sabbath, but "continually." Have we not more cause to praise God than to pray? Surely, for we have many things to thank Him for, which we never ask for. Who ever prayed for His election, for godly parents, for their care of us in helpless infancy, for their affection, for their faithfulness in training us the way we should go! Does not God daily heap upon us in favors beyond that we are able to ask or think? Therefore we should be more in praising God than

in petitioning Him. "With thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6): ah, is it not our failure in the former which explains why we are so often denied in the latter? "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2); "with thanksgiving" is as much a command as is the "continue in prayer."

"It is good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O most High" (Ps. 92:1). Yes, it is not only glorifying to God, but it is beneficial to the soul. To cultivate the habit of praising God will preserve the believer from many evils. The trials of life are more cheerfully borne if the spirit of thankfulness to God be kept lively in the heart. A man cannot be miserable while he is joyful, and nothing promotes joy so much as a heart constantly exercised in praising God. The apostles forgot their smarting backs in the Philippian dungeon as they "sang praise unto God" (Acts 16:25). The happiest soul we have ever met was a sister in a London garret (before the days of old-age pensions), who had neither eaten meat or fruit nor had a glass of milk for years past, but was continually praising the Lord.

Mary was offering to God a sacrifice of praise when she exclaimed "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46, 47). That was no mechanical act, but the spontaneous outburst of a heart delighting itself in the Lord. It is not enough that the believer should feel adoring emotions in his soul: they must be expressed by his mouth—that is one reason why the sacrifice of praise is defined in our text as "the fruit of our lips." Vocal, articulated praise, is what becomes those who have received the gift of speech: that is why the saints of all ages have expressed their worship in holy songs and psalms. None of us sing as much as we should—how often the worldling shames us! Then let us say with David "I will praise Thee, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will show forth all Thy marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in Thee: I will sing praise to Thy name, O Thou Most High" (Ps. 9:1, 2).

Hebrews 13:15, 16

Chapter 118 - The Christian's Sacrifices

From the eighth verse onwards (of Hebrews 13) the apostle is engaged in setting forth those spiritual duties of worship of which God Himself is the Object. Therein a series of contrasts are drawn between what obtained under the old covenant and that which pertains to the new. The Christian's privileges greatly excel those which belonged to Judaism as such. These superior blessings have been considered by us as we have passed from verse to verse. What is before us in verse 15 supplies a further exemplification of this general principle. The Levitical rites required God's earthly people to provide material offerings: but the Christian's "sacrifices" are entirely spiritual in their character. The Israelitish worshipper could not offer his sacrifices to God directly, but had to allow the priests to officiate for him: whereas Christians have themselves been made priests unto God, and therefore may sacrifice to Him immediately. The praise-sacrifices under the Law were only presented at particular times and places (cf. the "Feasts" of Leviticus 23): but the Christian may, through Christ, offer a sacrifice to God anywhere, at any time—"continually."

"By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name" (verse 15). More is implied than is expressed. The language of this verse is restricted to the duties of worship and our oral praising of God therein, yet we know full well that He accepts not thanksgiving from us unless it be accompanied by what good old Matthew Henry called "thanksgiving." Thus it is the entire compass of evangelical obedience to God which is comprehended here. Those who have been dedicated to Him by the blood of Christ are under the deepest obligations to please and honor Him. The nature of Gospel obedience consists in thanksgivings for Christ and grace by Him, and therefore the whole of it may be suitably designated "a sacrifice of praise." Gratitude and adoration are the animating principles of all acceptable service. Every act and duty of faith has in it the nature

of a sacrifice to God, wherein He is well-pleased.

John Owen suggests a threefold reason for the particular language in which the Christian's duty of obedience is here expressed. "1st. The great obligation that is upon us of continual thankfulness and praise to God on account of Christ's atonement. The sum and glory of our Christian profession, is, that it is the only way of praising and glorifying God for His love and grace in the person and mediation of Christ. 2nd. This obligation to praise succeeding in the room of all terrifying legal constraints to obedience, alters the nature of that obedience from what was required under and by the Law. 3rd. Where the heart is not prepared for and disposed to this fundamental duty of praising God for the death and oblation of Christ, no other duty or act of obedience is accepted with God."

In bidding us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, two things are denoted: freedom from the limitations of time and place as were appointed under Judaism, and diligent perseverance and constancy therein. To abound in fervent praise unto God is the abiding duty of the Christian. But for that there must be the regular exercise of faith. Calling into question the promises of God quenches the spirit of worship; doubts snap the strings of our harps; unbelief is the deadly enemy of praise. To praise God continually requires us to be in daily communion with Him. It is not to be wondered at that the joy of many believers is so sickly, when we consider how little fellowship they have with the Lord: if there be so little heat around the bulb of their thermometer, how can the mercury rise higher! To praise God "continually" we must cultivate perpetual gratitude, and surely that should not be difficult!

"I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth" (Ps. 34:1): at no lower standard than that must we aim. How this meets the lament made by so many Christians. "There seems so very little I can do to express my gratitude unto the Lord." Ah, my brother, you may not be gifted with talents to exercise in public, you may not have much money to give to God's cause, but what is to withhold your offering unto Him a sacrifice of praise, and that "continually"! Is not this God's due? Did Spurgeon express it too strongly when he said, "Praise is the rent which God requires for the use of His mercies." Then shall we rob God? Shall we withhold that in which He delights? Does not God give us abundant cause to

praise Him "continually"!

"To show forth Thy loving kindness in the morning, and Thy faithfulness every night" (Ps. 92:2). "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being" (Ps. 104:33). What a word is that for the aged and infirm Christian! Ah, dear reader, your eyes may have become so dim that you can scarcely read the Sacred page any more, your strength may have become too feeble for you to walk to the house of prayer, but your lips can still articulate and express thanksgiving! "I will be glad and rejoice in Thy mercy: for Thou hast considered my trouble" (Ps. 31:7): rejoice in His pardoning mercy, preserving mercy, providing mercy. "Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? who can show forth all His praise?" (Ps. 106:2). Well did Goodwin close his reflections upon the Psalms of praise by saying, "My brother, let us pray for such a heart as this, that the saints of the O.T. may not shame us who are Christians under the New."

It is striking to note that the Hebrew word "bara" signifies "to create," while "barak" means "to praise," intimating that the praising of God is the chief end of our creation. Though nothing can be added to God's essential glory, yet praise promotes His manifestative glory, for it exalts Him before others. In this manner the angels glorify Him for they are the choristers of Heaven, trumpeting forth His praise. An old writer quaintly pointed out that believers are the "temples" of God, and when their tongues are praising Him, their spiritual "organs" are then sounding forth. We read that the saints in Heaven have "harps" in their hands (Rev. 14:2), which are emblems of praise. Alas, that so often our harps are "hung on the willows" (Ps. 137:2), and murmurings and complaints are all that issue from our mouths. O my reader, be more earnest and diligent in seeking for grace to enable thee to be praising God continually.

"But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well-pleased" (verse 16). Here is the fifth sacrifice which the Christian is to offer unto God, namely, that of ministering to others, for all the acts and duties of love may fitly be termed "sacrifices." In the previous verse the apostle has shown the great obligation Godwards which the sanctification of the Church by the blood of Christ places upon its members, but here he makes known what influence it ought to have upon our conduct manwards.

Thus, he turns from the first table of the Law to the second, and insists that if redemption places us under additional obligations to love God with all our hearts, it likewise supplies added reasons why we should love our neighbors as ourselves.

The first word of verse 16 is a connective, but the commentators differ as to how it should be translated. Calvin's annotators insist it should be rendered "And"; John Owen suggested "Moreover"; our translators preferred "But." There is no material difference in these variants: if "but" be retained, it is not to be taken as exceptional, as though it introduced something adverse unto what had previously been presented. It is clearly a continuation, or an addition to the duty mentioned in verse 15. As some might think that the entire duty of the Christian was comprehended in rendering to God that homage and devotion to which He is justly entitled, and that while we attend to that, nothing else need concern us, the apostle added "But"—notwithstanding the diligence required in the former duty—forget not to do good unto men and minister to their needs.

Herein we may perceive once more how carefully the Scriptures preserve the balance of truth at every point. The Divine Law is a unit, yet was it written upon two tables of stone, and the one must never be exalted to the disparagement of the other. True, there is an order to be observed: God Himself ever has the first claim upon our hearts, time and strength; nevertheless our fellow-creatures, and particularly our fellow-believers, also have real claims upon us, which we must not ignore. To disregard the second table of the Law, is not only to inflict an injury upon our neighbors, but it is to disobey and therefore to displease God Himself. There is an harmony in obedience, and a failure in any one point disturbs the whole, as is evident from James 2:10, 11. It is for this reason, then, that our verse closes with, "for with such sacrifices God is well-pleased."

It was at this very point that Israel failed so often under the old covenant. Instead of treating their servants considerately, they imposed upon them; instead of ministering to the widow, they robbed her; instead of relieving the poor, they oppressed them. Nevertheless, they were very strict in keeping up their worship of Jehovah! A striking example of this is recorded in the first half of Isaiah 58. The prophet was bidden to cry aloud and spare not, but to

show the people their sins. They had sought God "daily," "forsook not His ordinances," yea, took "delight" in approaching Him (verse 2). They were diligent in "fasting," yet God accepted not their worship, saying "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is is not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh" (verses 6, 7).

Another solemn example is found in Zechariah 7. God challenges them by asking, "When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto Me, even to Me?" (verse 5). Then the prophet cried, "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother; and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart" (verses 9, 10). What a strange anomaly human nature presents! How glaring its inconsistencies! Punctilious in the performances of public worship, yet utterly remiss in attending to private duties! Diligent and zealous in keeping the fasts and feasts of the Lord, yet regardless of the needs and cries of their destitute fellows! How is such to be accounted for? Easily: it bolsters up self-righteousness, feeds the idea that the favor of God can be purchased by the creature, and causes such pharisees to be looked up to for their "holiness" (?) by certain superficial people.

Hence it is that the duties of benevolence inculcated in our text are preceded by "forget not," intimating there is a more than ordinary proneness in professors of the Gospel to neglect them. It is a sinful neglect which is here prohibited. John Owen suggested four reasons or vicious habits of mind from which such forgetfulness proceeds. First, "an undue trust unto religious duties, as in many barren professors," by which he means those who set a high value upon their religious acts and think to win Heaven thereby. How many there be who contribute liberally to "the church" and yet under-pay their employees and overcharge their customers!—the gifts of such are a stench in God's nostrils.

Second, "from vain pleas and pretences against duties attended with trouble and charge." It is much easier and pleasanter

to go to the house of prayer and sing God's praises, than it is to enter the dwellings of the poor and personally wait upon those who are sick. It costs less to put a coin in the collection-plate than it does to feed and clothe the destitute. Third, "a want of that goodness of nature and disposition which effectual grace will produce." The spirit of Christ in the heart will produce consideration and concern for others, and counteract our innate selfishness; but where Christ is absent, the Devil rules the heart. Fourth, "A want of that compassion toward sufferers, which is required of them that are still in the body: verse 3." May God preserve us from all religion that hardens and produces callousness, stifling even "natural affection."

"But to do good and to communicate forget not." "It is the duty of Christians to express their gratitude to God for His goodness to them, through Christ Jesus, by doing good: i.e., by performing acts of beneficence—in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, relieving the distressed; and in this way communicating to their poor and afflicted brethren of the blessings Providence has conferred on them. While the terms are of that general kind as to express beneficence and the communication of benefits generally, it seems probable that the apostle had a direct reference to doing good by communicating to others those blessings for which they were especially bound to give thanks. It is the duty of Christians to do good to their fellow-men by communicating to them, so far as this is competent to them, those heavenly and spiritual blessings for which they are bound continually to give thanks to God" (John Brown).

"But to do good and to communicate forget not." That which is here inculcated is the sacrifice of love unto our fellows. Two words are used to set forth this duty. First, "do good" which concerns the whole course of our lives, especially with regard to others. Three things are included. First, a gracious propensity or readiness of mind thereto: "the liberal deviseth liberal things" (Isa. 32:8): he does not wait till he is asked, but seeks to be on the alert and anticipate the needs of others. Second, the actual exercise of this benevolent inclination, in all those ways which will be useful and helpful, spiritually and temporally, to mankind. Idealizing and theorizing is not sufficient: there must be the acting out of good will. Third, by buying up all occasions and opportunities for the exercise of compassion and loving-kindness to others.

A spirit of philanthropy and benevolence is to be manifested

by well-doing. It is not enough to be good; we must do good. "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). "Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and alms deeds which she did" (Acts 9:36): her charitable actions are called "good works" because they were profitable and did good to others. Nor is this ministering to the wants of others to be confined unto the members of our own family, or even the limits of our denomination. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10)—therein the spirit of Christianity differs from the narrow and clannish spirit of all other religions. God does good unto all men, and we are to be "emulators of Him as dear children" (Eph. 5:1).

"But to do good and to communicate forget not." Christians are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph. 2:10), regeneration capacitating them thereunto. Christ gave Himself for us that we should be a people who are "zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14), for by them we honor Him and adorn our profession. No matter what self-sacrifice they entail, nor how ungrateful be the beneficiaries, we are to be diligent and persevering in helping all we can: "But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing" (2 Thess. 3:13). "For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Pet. 2:15). And even though our well doing fails to silence the criticism of those who believe not, yea, if our perseverance therein brings down upon us increased opposition and persecution, yet it is written, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Pet. 4:19).

The second term used here in connection with the sacrifice of charity is "communicate," which means passing on to others what God has entrusted to us, according as their necessities do require. Literally, the Greek word signifies "having something in common with others." It is the actual exercise of that pity for the poor and indigent which is required of us in the distribution of good things unto them, according to our ability. This is an important evangelical duty which the Scriptures repeatedly charge us with: the glory of God, the salvation of our souls, and the honor of our profession, are highly concerned therein. It is striking to note that when he

commended the Corinthians for their liberal contributions to the poor saints at Jerusalem, the apostle declared that "they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the Gospel of Christ" (2 Cor. 9:13)—obedience to the command in our text is required by the Gospel!

John Owen rightly pointed out that "To be negligent herein is to despise the wisdom of God in the disposal of the lots and conditions of His own children in the world in so great variety, as He hath done always, and will always continue to do." What light that throws on those providential dispensations of God which are often so mysterious and exercising to the hearts of many of His people! Here is an important reason intimated why God blesses a few of His saints with considerable of this world's goods and why many of them have scarcely any at all: it is to provide opportunity and occasion for the exercise of those graces in them which their several conditions call for. By the unequal distribution of His material mercies, the rich have opportunity for thankfulness, charity, and bounty; while the poor are called upon to exercise patience, submission, trust, and humility. Where those graces are mutually exercised, there is beauty, order, and harmony, and a revenue of glory unto God.

Christians are rarely more sensible of God's goodness to them than when giving and receiving in a proper manner. He that gives aright feels the power of Divine grace at work in his heart, and he who receives aright is very conscious of Divine love and care in such supplies: God is near to both. Consequently, to be selfishly callous on the one hand, or proudly independent and scornful of charity on the other, is to impugn the wisdom of God in His disposal of the varied temporal circumstances of His people. No man is rich or poor merely for himself, but rather to occupy that place in the social order of things which God has designed unto His own glory. From what has been before us we may see how that many even of those who believe not are the temporal gainers by the death of Christ and the fruits thereof in the lives of His people.

Many and varied are the motives which Scripture employs to persuade the saint unto this duty of ministering unto the needy of His fellows. "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again" (Prov. 19:17). Do we really believe this? Do we act as though we did? The Lord

allows none to lose by being generous, but repays him with interest one way or another, either to him or his posterity. "He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack; but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse" (Prov. 28:27): the selfish man exposes himself to the ill-will of those whom he callously ignores, and brings himself under the providential curse of God. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the Law (on this matter), even his prayer shall be abomination" (Prov. 28:9)—bear that in mind, dear reader, if you wish to have and retain the ear of God.

"Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38). What an inducement is that! how it should stimulate unto liberality those who by nature have a miserly disposition. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven" (Matthew 5:16): how that should encourage us in the performing of good works! "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (2 Cor. 9:6): the writer has lived long enough to see many striking examples of both of these classes. "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). He was ever thinking of others and ministering to them: feeding the hungry, healing the sick, relieving the distressed; and He has left us an example that we should follow His steps.

Let it be pointed out, however, that God requires us to use discretion and discrimination in the bestowments of charity. There is a class of shiftless idlers who are ever ready to impose upon the compassionate and generous hearted, and make the benevolence of others a reason for their own indolence. It is positively wrong to encourage those who seek to subsist on the liberality of others, instead of earning their own bread. Indiscriminate giving often does more harm than good. It is our bounden duty to go to the trouble of properly investigating each case on its own merits, instead of allowing our sentiment to override our judgment. God Himself has said, "This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10), and it is sinful for us to negative that by giving money to able-bodied loafers.

"For with such sacrifices God is well-pleased." Whatever benefits the Christian bestows on others God regards them as done to Himself, and honors them with the name of "sacrifices." What gracious condescension on His part, that He should dignify our worthless works as to pronounce them holy and sacred things, acceptable to Himself! Rightly, then, did Calvin point out, "When, therefore, love does not prevail among us, we not only rob men of their right, but God Himself, who has by a solemn sentence dedicated to Himself what He has commanded to be done to men." How this consideration ought to stir us up to the exercise of kindness towards our neighbor. The more we do so, the more pleasure do we give unto Him to whom we are infinitely indebted. Withhold not thy hand, then, from that which delights thy God.

"For with such sacrifices God is well-pleased." There is a twofold emphasis in the word "such." First, it implies a contrast, denoting that God no longer required those ancient sacrifices which He had enjoined until an abrogation of the old covenant. Herein was a clear intimation that Judaism had been set aside. Second, it graciously stresses the fact that, though we deem our feeble praises and charitable works as too poor to be worthy of notice or mention, God Himself regards those very things as acts of worship that meet with His hearty approbation.

A beautiful illustration of what has just been pointed out is found in Philippians 4. The Philippian saints had sent a gift to the apostle Paul, which he not only gratefully acknowledged, but declared that the same was "an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God" (verse 18). "Beyond this the highest aspirations of a Christian cannot go. It is all he can wish; it is above all that he can think. To have the approbation of good men is delightful; to have the approbation of our own conscience is more delightful still; but to have the approbation of God, this is surely the highest recompense a creature can reach. This approbation is very strongly expressed in the Word: 'God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister' (Heb. 6:10). It will be still more illustriously displayed when the Son appears in the glory of the Father, and in the presence of an assembled universe proclaims to those who, as a token of gratitude to God for the blessings of salvation, have done good and

communicated: 'For I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took Me in; naked, and ye clothed Me... Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me:' Matthew 25:35-40" (John Brown).

Hebrews 13:17

Chapter 119 - Christian Rulers

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you" (verse 17). It is quite clear from the balance of the verse that its opening words have reference to religious leaders, and not to civil rulers. Adolph Saphir, who was very far from being a "Nicolaitan" was right when he declared: "Verses 7 and 17 show that there was a stated ministry, that there were recognized and regular teachers and pastors in the congregation, whose gifts not only, but whose office was acknowledged." It is impossible that any unprejudiced and impartial mind should attentively consider the terms and implications of these verses and come to any other conclusion. The principle of subordination is absolutely essential to the well-being of any society that is to be rightly ordered and conducted—adumbrated even in the organization of our bodies.

In our text the Holy Spirit sets forth the third great duty which is required in our Christian profession, on account of the sacrifice of Christ and our sanctification by His blood. Most comprehensive and all-inclusive are the exhortations found in verses 15-17. The first respects our spiritual obligation, Godwards, rendering unto Him that which is His due (verse 15). The second respects our social obligation, rendering unto our needy fellows that which the requirements of charity dictates, according to our ability. The third has respect to our ecclesiastical obligation, rendering unto those officers in the church that submission and respect to which they are entitled by virtue of the position and authority which Christ has accorded them. This is a Gospel institution, which can only be disregarded to the manifest dishonor of the Lord and to our own great loss.

Ever since the great Reformation of the sixteenth century, there have been wide differences of opinion among God's people concerning the local church: its constitution, its officers, and its

discipline. Even where there was oneness of mind respecting the fundamentals of the Faith, godly men have differed considerably in their ecclesiastical views. Numbers of the most gifted of Christ's servants have, during the last three hundred years, written extensively upon the polity and policy of the local church, and though widely varying positions have been taken, and though each claimed to appeal to Scripture only for his authority, yet none succeeded in carrying the majority of professing Christians with him, or of persuading his opponents that their system was wrong.

While on the one hand we must admire the wisdom of Him who has providentially ordered as great a variety of types in the ecclesiastical sphere as He has in the physical and social—which though not a rule for us to walk by, is a subject for our admiration; yet on the other hand we cannot but deplore that they who are united on the same foundations and agreed in all the cardinal truths of Holy Writ, should lay such emphasis upon their circumstantial differences in sentiments as to prevent the exercise of mutual love and forbearance, and instead of laboring in concert within their respective departments to promote the common cause of Christ, should so often vex each other with needless disputes and uncharitable censures. Far better be silent altogether than contend for any portion of the Truth in a bitter, angry, censorious spirit.

No true Christian will hesitate to acknowledge that Christ Himself is the one infallible, authoritative Legislator and Governor of His Church, that He is the only Lord of conscience, and that nothing inconsistent with His revealed will should be practiced, and that nothing He has definitely enjoined be omitted, by those professing allegiance to Him. But however generally acknowledged these principles are, we cannot get away from the fact that the misconstruction and misapplication of them have contributed more to divide the people of God and to alienate their affections one from the other, than any other cause that can be assigned. Surely those who are built upon the common foundation, who are led by the same Spirit, who are opposed by the same enemies, should love as brethren and bear each other's burdens. But alas! a mistaken zeal for Christ's honor has filled them with animosity against their fellow-disciples, split them into innumerable factions, and given rise to fierce and endless contentions.

We quite agree with the godly John Newton, when he said in

his "Apologia," nearly two hundred years ago: "Men are born, educated, and called under a great variety of circumstances. Habits of life, local customs, early connections, and even bodily constitution, have more or less influence in forming their characters, and in giving a tincture and turn to their manner of thinking. So that though, in whatever is essential to their peace and holiness, they are all led by the same Spirit and mind the same things; in others of a secondary nature, their sentiments may, and often do differ, as much as the features of their faces. A uniformity of judgment among them is not to be expected while the wisest are defective in knowledge, the best are defiled with sin, and while the weaknesses of human nature which are common to them all, are so differently affected by a thousand impressions which are from their various situations. They might, however, maintain a unity of spirit, and live in the exercise of mutual love; were it not that every party, and almost every individual, unhappily conceives that they are bound in conscience to prescribe their own line of conduct as a standard to which all their brethren ought to conform. They are comparatively but few who consider this requisition to be as unnecessary, unreasonable, and impracticable, as it would be to insist or expect that every man's shoes should be exactly of one size.

"Thus, though all agree in asserting the authority and rights of the Lord Jesus, as King and Head of His Church, the various apprehensions they frame of the rule to which He requires them to conform, and their pertinacious attachment to their own expositions of it, separate them almost as much from each other, as if they were not united to Him by a principle of living faith. Their little differences form them into so many separate interests; and the heat with which they defend their own plans, and oppose all who cannot agree with them in a tittle, makes them forget that they are children in the same family, and servants of the same Master. And while they vex and worry each other with disputations and censures, the world wonders and laughs at them."

The position which has been taken by, perhaps, most of the leading writers, was something like this: Get away from the conflicting views of men, and read the N.T. prayerfully and impartially, and it will quickly be apparent that the Lord Jesus has not left such an important matter as the constitution of the churches undefined, but rather directed His apostles to leave in their writings

a pattern according to which it was His will all His churches in future ages were to be formed, and (according to the particular leanings of each respective writer) that it will be seen the primitive churches were "Congregational," "Baptist," "Presbyterian," or "Brethren Assemblies," and therefore any other system or scheme is unscriptural, and a presumptuous deviation from the declared will of the Lord.

If, however, the reader cares to take the time and trouble to consult a number of the writers in any one of these different schools, he will find that though they are all agreed that a plain and satisfactory model of this "Congregational" church (or "Baptist," or "Presbyterian," or "Brethren Assembly," as the case may be) can easily be collected and stated from a perusal of the N.T.; yet when these same writers attempt to delineate and describe that church, they differ considerably among themselves as to the nature and number of its officers, powers and acts which are requisite to the constitution and administration of a Gospel church. There is very far from being that agreement among themselves which is certainly to be expected if the plan from which they profess to copy be so clearly and expressly revealed in the N.T. as to be binding upon believers in all ages.

It seems, then, that if every detail of the church's government and worship be exhibited in the Scriptures, either in the form of a precept or precedent, yet thus far God has not given sufficient skill to any one so as to enable him to collect and collate the various rules and regulations scattered throughout the Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and the Revelation, and arrange them into a systematic and orderly structure. But that none really takes this principle seriously appears from his own practices. There are a number of things reported of the primitive Christians which few if any companies of Christians today make any attempt to emulate. For example, the holding of all earthly possessions in common (Acts 2:44, 45), greeting one another with a holy kiss (1 Cor. 16:20), making provision for their widows when they reach the age of sixty (1 Tim. 5:9), or sending for the elders of the church to pray over and anoint us when we are sick (James 5:14)!

In reply to what has just been said, it will be pointed out that in the days of the apostles the saints were endowed with extraordinary gifts, and consequently there were some things

practiced by them (in 1 Corinthians 14, for example) which are not proper for our imitation today who have not those gifts. But that very admission surrenders the basic principle contended for. To be told that we should study the apostolic churches for our model, and then to be informed that some parts of their practice were not designed for our emulation, is too bewildering for the ordinary mind to grasp. Moreover, God has not told us anywhere which of the primitive practices were but transient and which were not. Where, then, is the man or men qualified to draw the line and declare authoritatively in what respects the state of the first Christians was hindered from being a pattern for us by the extraordinary dispensations of that generation, and in what cases their actions are binding on us now those extraordinary dispensations have ceased?

To the above it will at once be objected: But consider the only other alternative: surely it is most unreasonable to suppose that the Lord has left His people without a complete church model for their guidance! Is it not unthinkable that Christ would fail His people in such a vitally important matter as to how He would have them order all the concerns of the churches which bear His name, that He would leave them in ignorance of His will, as to their constitution, officers, order of worship, discipline, etc? If God ordered Moses to make all things in the tabernacle according to the pattern shown him in the mount, and if that pattern was so complete that every board and pin in the house of worship was definitely defined, is it believable that He has made less provision for His people today, now that the fullness of time has come? This argument has indeed a most plausible sound to it, and thousands have been misled thereby; but a dispassionate examination of it shows it to be unwarrantable.

In the first place, there is no promise recorded in the N.T. that He would do so, and no statement through any apostle that such a church model has been provided! In the second place, the history of Christendom clearly indicates the contrary. Had such a model been given, it would be as clearly recognizable as the tabernacle pattern, and all who really desired to please the Lord would have responded thereto; and, in consequence, there had been uniformity among the true followers of Christ, instead of endless diversity and variety. But in the third place, this proves too much. If a Divine model has been given supplying all the details for the ordering of

N.T. churches and their worship, as definite and as complete as was given for the tabernacle, then we would have minute regulations concerning the size, shape, and furnishings of the buildings in which we must worship, full directions for the ministers apparel, and so on! The absence of those details is clear proof that no model for the churches comparable to the Divine pattern for the tabernacle has been vouchsafed us.

Then what conclusion are we forced to come to? This: a happy medium between the two alternatives suggested by most of those who have written on the subject. If on the one hand we cannot find in the N.T. that which in any wise corresponds to the "pattern" for the tabernacle (and the minute instructions God gave for the temple), on the other hand the Lord has not left us so completely in ignorance of His will that every man or company of Christians is left entirely to do that which is right in his own eyes. In keeping with the vastly different character of the two dispensations, the "liberty" of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17) has supplanted the rigid legality of Judaism, and therefore has Christ supplied us with general principles (e.g., 1 Corinthians 14:26, 40), which are sufficiently broad to allow of varied modification when applied to the differing circumstances of His people, situated in various climes and generations—in contrast from what was prescribed for the single nation of Israel of old.

In the N.T. we are furnished with a full revelation of all things necessary unto salvation, the knowledge whereof man by his own powers could never attain thereunto; yet there is much lacking there on other matters which was furnished under the old covenant. God not only supplied Israel with the ceremonial law, which was to regulate all their church or religious life, but He also gave them a complete code of precepts for their civil government, and no one pretends He has done this for Christians! In the absence of that civil code, why should it be thought strange that God has left many minor ecclesiastical arrangements to the discretion of His servants? Unto those who are indignant at such a statement, and who are still ready to insist that the Lord has made known His will on all things respecting church and religious affairs, we would ask, Where does the New Testament prescribe what marriage rites should be used? or the form of service for a funeral? But enough.

As Richard Hooker pertinently pointed out, "he who affirms speech to be necessary among all men throughout the world, doth

not thereby import that all men must necessarily speak one kind of language. Even so the necessity of polity and regimen in all churches may be held, without holding any one certain form to be necessary in them all." This is far from granting that all the various modes of church government are equally agreeable to the spirit and genius of the Gospel, or equally suited to the promotion of edification. Once again we fully agree with John Newton when he said, "In essentials I agree with them all, and in circumstantial I differ no more from any of them than they differ among themselves. They all confess they are fallible, yet they all decide with an air of infallibility; for they all in their turn expect me to unite with them, if I have any regard to the authority and honor of the Lord Jesus as Head of the church. But the very consideration they propose restrains me from uniting with any of them. For I cannot think that I should honor the headship and kingly office of Christ by acknowledging Him as the Head of a party and subdivision of His people to the exclusion of the rest.

"Every party uses fair sounding words of liberty; but when an explanation is made, it amounts to little more than this: that they will give me liberty to think as they think, and to act as they act; which to me, who claim the same right of thinking for myself and of acting according to the dictates of my own conscience, is no liberty at all. I therefore came to such conclusions as these: that I would love them all, that I would hold a friendly intercourse with them all, so far as they should providentially come in my way (and, he might have added, so far as they will allow me!); but that I would stand fast in the liberty with which Christ has made me free, and call none of them master; in fine, that if others sought to honor Him by laying a great stress on matters of doubtful disputation, my way of honoring Him should be by endeavoring to show that His kingdom is not of this world, nor consists in meats and drinks, in pleading for form and parties, but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit; and that neither circumcision is anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature, and the faith which worketh by love.

This is the course which the writer has sedulously sought to follow for the past ten years, both in connection with this magazine and in oral ministry. But alas! notwithstanding the boasted "broadmindedness" and "liberality" of this generation, we have

found, everywhere we have been the ecclesiastical barriers are as impregnable today as they were a century ago, and that no church, circle, or company of professing Christians is prepared to really welcome into their midst (no matter what his reputation or credentials) one who is unprepared to join and limit to their party, and pronounce all their shibboleths; and that the vast majority are unwilling to read any religious publication unless it bears upon it the label of their particular denomination. No wonder that the Spirit of God is quenched and His power and blessing absent, where such an un-Christ-like, sectarian, bigoted and pharisaical spirit prevails.

We are not going to prescribe for others; let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. But as far as the writer is concerned, he values his Christian liberty far too highly to voluntarily shut himself up in any ecclesiastical prison, where he is excluded from fellowship with his brethren and sisters scattered abroad. Of course since sinless perfection is not to be found in any individual on earth, it is not to be expected from any group of individuals. No one denomination or party has all the light. On the one hand, if the reader be a member of a church where unsound doctrine is preached or where no Scriptural discipline is maintained, his course is clear: Ephesians 5:11, 2 Timothy 3:5. But if on the other hand, he belongs to any evangelical church which is honestly seeking to honor Christ and where his soul is being fed, then, in our humble judgment, he will be wise to remain there and "obey them that have the rule over him" yet let him not look down upon others who differ from him.

In dissenting from the popular view that the N.T. record of primitive Christianity furnishes a complete model of church government, and that the same is an authoritative rule binding upon the Lord's people throughout the entire course of this dispensation, we are far from supposing that we shall carry with us the majority of our readers—by this time the writer ought to be sufficiently acquainted with human nature to prevent any such foolish day dreaming. And in affirming that the N.T. rather supplies us with general rules and principles, which are sufficiently elastic as to allow for human discretion to be exercised in the application of them to particular instances of the church's outward conduct, we are quite prepared to face the charge that this statement is a "dangerous" one. Our reply is, that we are affirming no more than what is universally

acknowledged concerning the regulation of the details of the life of the individual believer.

Is not the Christian daily made to cry unto God for wisdom how to act in his temporal affairs, and that because there are no specific precepts in the Word which prescribe for those particular exigencies? Is he not obliged, after prayerful deliberation, to use his common sense in applying the general rules of Scripture to a hundred minor details of his life? So common an occurrence is this and so universally does it obtain among the saints, that there is no need for us to enlarge upon it by illustrating the point—there is no need to prove what is self-evident. In view of this simple and obvious fact, why should we be the least surprised that God has ordained that His churches should follow a similar course, for what is a Gospel church but a company of individual believers in organized relationship. If, then, God has not told the individual believer at what hour he should rise on the Sabbath and how many meals he should eat that day, would we expect Him to state how long the minister's sermon is to be, or how many hymns or psalms are to be sung?

"The Lord Christ in the institution of Gospel churches—their state, order, rule, and worship—doth not require of His disciples that in their observance of His appointments they should cease to be men, or forego the use and exercise of their rational abilities, according to the rule of that exercise, which is the light of nature, yea, because the rules and directions are in this case to be applied unto things spiritual and of mere revelation, He giveth wisdom and prudence to make that application in a due manner, unto those to whom the guidance and rule of the church is committed: wherefore, as unto all things which the light of nature directs us unto, with respect unto the observation of the duties prescribed by Christ in and unto the Church, we need no other institution but that of the use of the especial Spiritual understanding which the Lord Christ gives us for that end.

"There are in the Scripture general rules directing us in the application of natural light, unto such a determination of all circumstances in the acts of church-rule and worship, as are sufficient for their performance decently and in order. Wherefore, as was said before, it is utterly in vain and useless, to demand express institution of all the circumstances belonging unto the government,

order, and worship of the church; or for the due improvement of things in themselves indifferent unto its edification, as occasion shall require. Nor are they capable to be any otherwise stated, but as they lie in the light of nature and spiritual prudence directed by general rules of Scripture." (John Owen).

Nor is this to discredit or disparage the Holy Scriptures. The Testimony of God is true, perfect, and all-sufficient for the ends for which it was given; but that Testimony is not honored but dishonored by us, if we extravagantly attribute to it that which God never designed for the same. Rome has erred grievously by declaring that the Scriptures are not sufficient, that "traditions" must be added if we are to have a full revelation of what is absolutely necessary, for us to know in this life in order that we may be saved in the next. But some Protestants have gone to another extreme, taking the position that the Scriptures contain such a complete revelation of God's will for the regulation of our lives, both as individuals and as churches, that to act according to any other rule (be it the promptings of conscience or the dictates of reason) is presumptuous and sinful.

But to insist that the conduct of the church must have an express warrant from the N.T. for every detail of its procedure, and that to act otherwise is displeasing to the Lord, is to go much farther than that which obtained even under the O.T. What commandment from the Lord did the Gileadites have to erect that altar spoken of in Joshua 22:10? Did not congruity of reason—the fitness of things—induce them thereto and suffice for defense of their act? What Divine commandment had the women of Israel to yearly lament for Jephthah's daughter (Judg. 11:40)? What "thus saith the Lord" or scriptural precedent did Ezra have for making "a pulpit of wood" (Nehemiah 8:4), from which he preached to the people? What Divine Commandment had the Jews to celebrate the feast of "Dedication" (John 10:22), nowhere spoken of in the Law, yet solemnized by Christ Himself! To condemn all that is "of human invention" is not only to fly in the face of the judgment of many of the wisest and most godly men, but is to go beyond what the Scriptures themselves permit.

Hebrews 13:17

Chapter 120 - Christian Rulers

In the preceding article we have deviated from our usual custom in this series of giving a word by word exposition of the verse before us, deeming it well to first give it a topical treatment. This magazine, small as is its circulation, goes to hundreds of the Lord's people who are found in many different branches of Christendom. Some of them are sorely perplexed by the babble of tongues which now obtains in the religious realm. The high claims so dogmatically put forth by various sects and systems, assemblies and circles of fellowship, bewilder not a few honest souls, who are desirous of doing that which is most pleasing to the Lord. It was with a desire to afford them some help on what is admittedly a most difficult and complicated subject, that according to the light which God has granted us (or withheld from us), we sought to point out some of the fallacies pertaining to the leading positions taken by ecclesiastical writers.

To say that the diverse denominations, even the evangelically orthodox, cannot all be right, and therefore that among them there must be one much more closely in accord with the Scriptures than the others, sounds very feasible; nevertheless, the writer is satisfied that, generally speaking, it has more of error than truth in it. Comparisons are proverbially odious. As no one believer has all the graces of the Spirit equally developed in him, so no one church or denomination has all the Truth. Think of attempting to draw invidious contrasts between Andrew and Peter, Paul and John, as to which was the more Christ-like! As well might one set the rose over against the lily of the valley, or wheat against oats. As 1 Corinthians 14:10 tells us, "There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification." So in the providence of God each particular denomination has filled a place and served a purpose in His plan concerning His cause upon earth.

Nothing is more offensive to God than creature pride (Prov. 6:16, 17), and nothing is more to be deplored among those who bear

the name of Christ than that a company of them (be it large or small) shall claim "we are the people"—the people who meet on the most scriptural ground, the people who adhere closest to the Word. A spirit of bigotry ill-becomes sinners saved by grace, while jealousies and contentions, enmity and reviling, among members of the same Family are most reprehensible: "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). Differences of opinion are inevitable while we are in the flesh—permitted by God that we should have occasion to be "forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2). That form of church government which accords most closely to the N.T., and where every detail is scrupulously correct, would be valueless in the sight of God unless it were conducted in love and its worship was "in spirit and in truth."

Let it be attentively considered that at the dawn of Christianity the first officers of the church were immediately called by Christ (Gal. 1:2), which none now are, nor have any since the decease of those who were so called at the first; that they were endowed with extraordinary gifts and power, but Christ has not continued to communicate such to His servants; that those original officers were blest with Divine inspiration and infallible guidance, both in preaching the Gospel and appointing things necessary for the churches, which none can rightly pretend unto today; that those first officers had a commission giving them authority towards all the world for evangelization and over all churches for their edification which no servant of Christ can claim today. How utterly vain, then, is the claim, either unto a "succession" of those officers, or to a perfect emulation of their order of things. Nevertheless, church-rulers—bishops and deacons—were to continue, as is clear from 1 Timothy 3, etc.

Now in every orderly society there must be rulers, and in all ages and dispensations the same have been mercifully appointed by God: Moses, Joshua, the judges and kings over Israel, are so many illustrations of this principle. It is the same in this era, nor does the presence of the Holy Spirit render unnecessary rulers in the churches. Christ is not the Author of confusion: but endless confusion and turmoil is inevitable where there are no accredited and acknowledged leaders. True, the rulers Christ has instituted for His churches possess no arbitrary power, for they are themselves subordinate to Him. Their office is that of a steward (Titus 1:7), who

is neither to lord it over the household nor to be entirely under subjection to it, but to superintend and provide for the family.

Take the chief steward or "lord chamberlain," of his majesty king George, and while it may not be strictly parallel with the position and duties of an official servant of Christ, yet there is sufficient in common for the former to help us understand the latter. While on the one hand the "lord chamberlain" has to be regulated by certain rules and well established precedents, yet on the other hand he is far more than an automaton mechanically acting according to a written code. As one qualified for his position, he is allowed considerable freedom in making many arrangements for the Royal household; nevertheless, he is not free to act arbitrarily or follow naught but his own preferences. No, that which regulates him is the well-being of his august master: he plans and arranges so as to please him, to promote his comfort, to serve his interests and honor; and when he is in doubt as to his procedure, consults the king to ascertain his will.

Analogous is the position occupied by the pastor of a local church. "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (Matthew 24:45, 46). Note carefully the following points in this passage. First, the use of the singular number: one servant for each local household! Second, that this servant is made "ruler over the" household! Third, that he is given that position for the purpose of supplying them "meat in due season," which, in its wider signification, means to superintend all the arrangements, to care for all its members, to protect and promote their well-being. Christ does not call dolts and idiots to occupy this place, but men endowed with good common sense, to which He graciously adds spiritual wisdom and discernment.

Now the ruler of Christ's household is neither a supreme sovereign or pope, nor a mere figure head without freedom of action. He, in turn, is the servant, responsible to Him, there to uphold His honor, care for those who are precious in His sight, and to whom he must yet render a full account of his stewardship. Therefore, while on the one hand he must act within the bounds of certain general rules and principles prescribed for his conduct, and must not introduce anything which would dishonor his royal Master

or be inimical to His interests; yet on the other hand he is required to use his own judgment in applying those general rules to particular cases and to make whatever minor arrangement he deems most for his Master's glory and the good of His household; and when he is in doubt as to his right or best course, it is his privilege to plead and count upon the promise of James 1:5.

To extend our analogy one point further. As the "lord chamberlain" has other servants under him to assist in the discharge of his honorable duties, servants who cooperate with him by carrying out his instructions, so Christ has provided the pastor of a local church with deacons, and, as many think, with "ruling elders" (or where the church is a larger one as was the case with many of those in apostolic times—with fellow-pastors or "elders"), to help him in his official duties. So that when our text says "obey them that have the rule over you" it takes in all the officers of the local church, whatever be the technical names they now go under. These additional church officers not only provide assistance for the chief ruler, but they also serve as a check upon him, for if they be endowed with the qualifications specified in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, they will not be a party to anything which is obviously dishonoring to Christ.

If it be true (as many students of Scripture have concluded) that the seven epistles of Revelation 2 and 3 furnish a prophetic outline of the ecclesiastical history of Christendom, then it appears that the trend of church government has passed from one extreme to another, from Nicolaitanism (Rev. 2:6, 15), which signifies the subjugation of the laity, to Laodiceanism (Rev. 3:14) which means the domination of the laity. Nor need this surprise us, for the same change has taken place in the political and social order. It is indeed striking to observe how close is the resemblance between them. The development of Nonconformity and the rapid spread of Independency in the religious world was quickly followed by the rebellion of the American colonies and the formation of Republics in the U.S.A. and in France. Side by side with the growth of a democratic spirit in the churches, has been the spread of "socialism" in the state, the one more and more re-acting on the other.

One of the most radical and far reaching movements of the last century was that which sought to obliterate all distinctions between the clergy, and the laity, establishing a network of

"assemblies" all over the English-speaking world, wherein there are (professedly) no officers, where a one-man-ministry is decried, and where the Spirit is (avowedly) free to use whom He pleases. This modern movement also claims to be founded entirely upon the Scriptures, yea, insists that all other bodies of professing Christians are the daughters of Rome and form part of that mystical and apostate Babylon from which God commands His people to come out. This movement has also split up into scores of conflicting parties, each claiming to be the only one which truly "represents" the Body of Christ on earth. But enough; let us now come to closer grips with our text.

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you (verse 17). In these words respect is had to be the ministerial office. To bear "rule" intimates both the duty and dignity of Christ's official servants. God has graciously appointed them to subserve His honor by maintaining decency and order in His churches, and because they are necessary and for the good of His people. To obey and submit to their spiritual leaders is what church-members are here exhorted unto. In verse 7 the apostle made known the particular duties unto those of their guides who had finished their course; here he presses upon them their obligations toward those who were still with them in the body. To ignore those rulers or to rebel against their authority, is to despise the One who has appointed them.

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves." It is abundantly clear from these words that in the days of the Apostles there were two distinct classes among God's people, namely, the rulers and those that were ruled, and as this is not merely an historical statement but a specific exhortation, it is equally clear that the same is binding upon Christians throughout the entire course of this dispensation. This, of course, presupposes a settled church state among them, in which the distinctive duties of each class is here distinctly defined, according to the office of the one and the obligation of the other. The duties here prescribed contain a succinct summary of all that relates to church rule and order, for all that concerns its welfare is comprised in the due obedience of the church to its rulers, and their due discharge of their office.

The Greek word for "them that have the rule over you" ("hegeomai") is rendered "chief" in Luke 22:26 and "governor" in Acts 7:10—"and he (Pharaoh) made him (Joseph) governor over Egypt and all his house," which sufficiently intimates its scope. They have received power from Christ to preside over His assemblies, to declare His will and execute His laws, to reprove, rebuke, exhort with all authority and longsuffering. They have no arbitrary power except what Christ has given them, yet within the limits He has prescribed, they are rulers, and it is the duty of their members to obey them. "It is of equal importance that the office-bearers in a church should not aspire to a higher degree of authority, and should not be content with a lower degree of authority, than that which their Master has assigned them; and that the members of a church should equally guard against basely submitting to a tyranny which Christ has never instituted, and lawlessly rebelling against a government which He has appointed" (John Brown).

John Owen declared that the twofold duty here enjoined with respect to the ecclesiastical leaders has respect unto the two parts of their office, namely, teaching and ruling: "obey their teaching and submit to their rule." While it be true that their doctrine or preaching is to be obeyed (so far as it accords with the Truth), and that their authority is to be yielded unto as it respects their ordering of the church's life, yet we rather regard the two exhortations as having a distributive force, the second amplifying the first. The word "obey" in our text means an obedience which follows a being persuaded: the mind is first carried along with the preacher so that it believes, and then the will acts—note the marginal alternative in Acts 5:36 for "obeyed" is "believed." "And submit yourselves" seems to us to have reference unto the spirit in which they were to obey—obedience was not to be merely an outward act, but prompted by submissive hearts.

Thus, we take it that "obey them that have the rule over you" is not to be restricted to their teaching (as Owen defined it), but includes their ruling of the church as well; while the "submit yourselves" has a wider significance than yielding to their rule, referring to the spirit which was to regulate the whole of their obedience. As Calvin well expressed it, "He commands first obedience and then honor to be rendered to them. These two things are necessarily required, so that the people might have confidence in

their pastors, and also reverence them. But it ought at the same time to be noticed that the apostle speaks only of those who faithfully performed their office; for they who have nothing but the title, nay, who use the title of pastors, for the purpose of destroying the Church, deserve but little reverence and still less confidence. And this also is what the apostle plainly sets forth when he says, that they watch for their souls—a duty which is not performed but by those who are faithful rulers."

The duty here enjoined, then, may be summed up in: cultivate an obedient, compliant, and submissive spirit unto your pastors and church officers. To "obey" and "submit" denotes such a subjection as of inferiors to superiors. It is not a servile subjection, but that reverent respect which God requires, a "submission" which issues from love, and which has for its end the honoring of those to whom honor is due. It would therefore include the doing of everything in the power of the members which would make the lot of their rulers easier and lighter, and, of course, would take in the providing for their temporal sustenance. Those rulers are appointed by God, standing in His immediate stead, so that the Lord Christ declared, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth Me; and he that receiveth me receiveth Him that sent Me" (John 13:20).

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves." It scarcely needs pointing out that those words are not to be taken absolutely, any more than are "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers" (Rom. 13:1) or "As the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing" (Eph. 5:24). Each of these exhortations is qualified by others: the members of a Gospel church are no more required to receive the pastor's teaching when it be flagrantly opposed to Holy Writ, or to submit to any ruling of his which is manifestly dishonoring to Christ and injurious to His people, than they are to yield to a mandate of Nebuchadnezzar if he sets up an image to himself and commands all to fall down and worship it, or if an ungodly husband required from his wife anything contrary to the laws of nature. No, it is not a blind and implicit obedience which is here enjoined for that would be quite contrary to the whole tenor of Gospel obedience, which is "our reasonable service."

The subjection required by our text is only unto that office

established by Christ Himself. If any usurp that office, and under cloak thereof do teach or enjoin things contrary to what Christ has instituted, then no obedience unto them is required by this command. But it is just at this point that most difficulty is experienced today. For many years past large numbers of professing Christians have been demanding that the religious leaders should speak unto them "smooth things," yea, prophesy unto them "deceits," declining to listen unto what condemned their carnal and worldly lives and refusing to heed the holy requirements of God. In consequence, He has suffered their descendants to reap the evil sowings of their fathers, by largely withholding "pastors after His own heart," and allowing thousands of unregenerate men to occupy the modern pulpit. Instead of "obeying" and "submitting" to them, God requires His people to turn away from and have nothing to do with them.

The true servants of Christ are to be identified by the marks specified in 1 Timothy 3. They are men who are "apt to teach," being qualified by the Spirit to open up the Scriptures and apply them to the consciences and lives of their hearers. They are "not greedy of filthy lucre" nor covetous, demanding a salary which would enable them to live above the level of their members, and declining to serve if there were no pay attached to it. "Not a novice," with little or no experience in the spiritual ups and downs of God's tried people, but one who has himself tested and proved the reliability and sufficiency of what he recommends to his hearers. He must be a man who is "not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine," but "a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate" (Titus 1:7, 8), or otherwise he could not commend what he teaches by his own example. The servants of Christ, then, are endued with a measure of the spirit of their Master, and it is by that they are to be distinguished from the false.

To refuse obedience and submission unto such, to contemptuously rail against "the one man system," is to despise a Divine institution, for the office of the "pastor" is as much the Lord's own appointment as is the church itself, or the gifts and graces of its individual members. It is true that men will and do abuse the good gifts of God, but if some pastors are arbitrary, are not some members unruly? If there be pride in the pulpit, is there none in the pew? Alas, in this Laodicean and communistic age, when it has become the

fashion to "despise dominion and speak evil of dignities" (Jude 8) and when "the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honorable" (Isa. 3:5), almost every individual considers himself qualified to judge and direct both civil and ecclesiastical rulers, to prescribe for both state and church, to scrutinize and criticize everything that is being done, and to say what ought to be done. May the Lord have mercy and subdue the turbulent ragings of pride.

"For they watch for your souls." This is adduced as a reason why we should show proper respect unto Church rulers. "The word used is peculiar unto this place, and it denotes a watchfulness with the greatest care and diligence, and that not without trouble or danger, as Jacob kept and watched the flock of Laban in the night" (John Owen). The true under-shepherds of Christ have no selfish aims, but rather the spiritual and eternal good of those who are entrusted to their care. Many a minister of the Gospel is often awake, burning midnight oil, while the members of his flock are asleep. Many a one can say, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you" (2 Cor. 12:15). The ministerial office is no idler's one: it makes demands on heart, mind, and nervous energy, such as none other does.

Here, then, is a motive, to move the members to gladly be subservient to their rulers. The more labor any one undertakes for our sake and the more difficulty and danger he incurs for us, the greater are our obligations to him. Such is the office of bishops or elders; and the heavier the burden they bear, the more honor they deserve. Let, then, our gratitude be evidenced by giving them that which is their due. "We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thess. 5:12, 13). Let us also add that, young men aspiring unto the ministerial office need to think twice about entering a calling which demands ceaseless self-sacrifice, unremitting toil, and a love for Christ and His people which alone will sustain amid sore discouragements.

"They watch for your souls as they that must give account" supplies a further motive. They are placed in a position of trust, commissioned by the Lord, to whom they are immediately responsible. They often render an account to Him now, keeping up a

constant intercourse with Him, spreading before Him the state and needs of His people, seeking supplies of grace. A full and final account must be rendered of their stewardship in the Day to come. Unspeakably solemn consideration is that, and this it is which actuates them, for they "watch for the souls of their church as those who must give account." They bear in mind the awful warning of Ezekiel 33:5, and seek to heed the exhortation of 1 Timothy 4:16. "That they may do it with joy, and not with grief." Here is a further reason why church members should give to their rulers that which is due them. If on the one hand nothing is more encouraging to a pastor than for his people to be responsive and docile, it is equally true that nothing is more disheartening and saddening to him than to meet with opposition from those whose highest interests he is serving with all his might. Every Christian minister who is entitled to that designation, can, in his measure, say with the apostle, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4).

"For that is unprofitable for you" furnishes the final motive. For the members of a church to so conduct themselves as to be a constant source of grief unto their minister is to despise their own mercies. It not only prevents their receiving his instruction into their hearts, which results in their spiritual barrenness, but it also saps his vigor, quenches his zeal, causing him to proceed with a heavy heart instead of with cheerfulness. What is still more solemn and serious, the Lord Himself is highly displeased, and the tokens of His favor are withdrawn, for He is very sensitive of the mistreatment of His stewards. "We cannot be troublesome or disobedient to our pastors without hazarding our own salvation" (John Calvin)—alas that such erroneous ideas of "salvation" now so widely obtain. May the Lord mercifully pardon any thing in these articles displeasing to Him, and graciously add His blessing to that which is acceptable.

Hebrews 13:18, 19

Chapter 121 - A Good Conscience

Hebrews 13:18, 19 is closely connected with the verse which immediately precedes. In our present portion the apostle mentions another duty which believers owe to those who minister unto them in spiritual things, and this is that they should earnestly remember them before the Throne of Grace. The writer of this epistle besought the prayers of the Hebrews, supporting his plea with a declaration of the sincerity and fidelity with which he had sought to discharge his office. The very fact that the true servants of Christ are so conscientious in the performance of their work, should so endear them to those they minister unto that a spirit of prayer for them ought to be kindled in their hearts. They are the instruments through which we receive the most good, and therefore the least we can do in return is to seek to bear them up before God in the arms of our faith and love.

Before we consider this special need of Christ's servants, and our privilege and duty in ministering unto the same, we propose to devote the remainder of this article unto a careful consideration of the particular reason here advanced by the apostle in support of his request, namely, "for we trust we have a good conscience in all things willing to live honestly." This expression "a good conscience" occurs in several other passages in the N.T., and because of its deep importance it calls for our closest attention. Much is said in the Word about conscience, and much depends upon our having and preserving a good one, and therefore it behooves us to give our best consideration to this weighty subject. Not only is it one of great practical moment, but it is especially timely in view of the conscienceless day in which we live. What, then, is the conscience? What is a good conscience, and how is it obtained and maintained? May the Spirit of Truth be our Teacher as we seek to ponder these vital questions.

Conscience is that faculty of the soul which enables us to perceive of conduct in reference to right and wrong, that inward

principle which decides upon the lawfulness or unlawfulness of our desires and deeds. Conscience has well been termed the moral sense, because it corresponds to those physical faculties whereby we have communion with the outward world, namely, the five senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. Man has an ethical instinct, a faculty or moral sensibility informing and impressing him. "It is far higher in the scale and keener in its perceptions than any mere bodily sense. There is an inner eye, that sees into the nature of right and wrong; an inner ear, sensitive to the faintest whisper of moral obligation; an inner touch, that feels the pressure of duty, and responds to it sympathetically" (A.T. Pierson).

Conscience is that mysterious principle which bears its witness within us for good or evil, and therefore it is the very center of human accountability, for it greatly adds to his condemnation that man continues sinning against the dictates of this internal sentinel. Conscience supplies us with self-knowledge and self-judgment, resulting in self-approbation or self-condemnation according to our measure of light. It is a part of the understanding in all rational creatures which passes judgment on all actions for or against them. It bears witness of our thoughts, affections, and actions, for it reflects upon and weighs whatever is proposed to and by the mind. That it bears witness of emotions is clear from, "My conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart" (Rom. 9:1, 2). So again we read, "Take no heed unto all words that are spoken, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee; for oftentimes also thine own heart (conscience) knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast (inwardly) cursed others" (Ecclesiastes 7:21, 22). Its voice is heard by the soul secretly acquainting us with the right and wrong of things.

That conscience exists in the unregenerate is clear from Paul's statement concerning the Gentiles: "Which show the work of the law written in their hearts: their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another" (Rom. 2:15). Though the heathen never received the Scriptures, as Israel did, yet they had within them that which accused or excused them. There is within every man (save the idiot) that which reproves him for his sins, yea, for those most secret sins to which none are privy but themselves. Wicked men seek to stifle those inward chidings, but are rarely if ever successful. "The sinners

in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites" (Isa. 33:14). Unregenerate men are without faith, yet not without fear: "The wicked flee when no man pursueth" (Prov. 28:1). There is that within man which appalls the stoutest Sinner after the committal of any gross evil: his own heart reproves him.

The Creator has gifted the human soul with various faculties, such as the understanding, affections, and will; and He has also bestowed upon it this power of considering its own state and actions, both inward and outward, constituting conscience both a monitor and judge within man's own bosom—a monitor to warn of duty, a judge to condemn for neglect of the same. It is an impartial judge within us, that cannot be suspected of either undue severity or ill-will, for it is an intrinsic part of our own very selves. Conscience anticipates the Grand Assize in the Day to come, for it forces man to pass verdict upon himself, as he is subject to the judgment of God. It is resident in the understanding, as is clear from 1 Corinthians 2:11, where the conscience is termed our "spirit."

The presence of conscience within man supplies one of the clearest demonstrations of the existence of God. To this fact the Holy Spirit appeals in Psalm 53. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God" (verse 1). Now how does he prove there is a God? Thus, "There were they in great fear, where no fear was" (verse 5). Though there was no outward cause for fear, none seeking to hurt them, yet even those who lived most atheistically were under a fear. An illustration is seen in the case of Joseph's brethren, who accused themselves when there was none other to accuse them: "They said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother" (Gen. 42:21). Though a man should hide himself from all the world, he cannot get away from himself—his heart will pursue and condemn him. Now the very fact that there is such a hidden fear in man after sinning, that their hearts smite them for crimes done in secret, argues there is a God.

This fear is found in the most obstinate sinners, and in those who, because of their high station and power are exempt from human justice. History records how kings and emperors have followed their wickedness without interference, yet even the infamous Caligula trembled when it thundered. It was not a fear that they might be found out by man and punished by him, for in some notable instances this fear prevailed to such an extent that human

punishment had been a welcome relief, and failing which they perforce laid violent hands upon themselves. What can be the reason for this, but that they feared a Judge and Avenger, who would call them to account? As the apostle said of the heathen, "They know the judgment of God" (Rom. 1:32): there is a witness in their own souls that they are liable to His justice. Mark the fearful consternation of Belshazzar: the paling of his countenance, smiting of his knees, loosing of his joints, when he read the sentence on the palace walls (Dan. 5:6).

"There is nothing in man that more challenges and demands adequate explanation than his moral sense. Conscience is a court always in session and imperative in its summons. No man can evade it or silence its accusations. It is a complete assize. It has a judge on its bench, and that judge will not be bribed into a lax decision. It has its witness-stand, and can bring witnesses from the whole territory of the past life. It has its jury, ready to give a verdict, 'guilty' or 'not guilty,' in strict accordance with the evidence; and it has its sheriff, remorse, with his whip of scorpions, ready to lash the convicted soul. The nearest thing in this world to the bar of God, is the court of conscience. And though it be for a time drugged into a partial apathy, or intoxicated with worldly pleasure, the time comes when in all the majesty of its imperial authority this court calls to its bar every transgressor and holds him to a strict account" (A.T. Pierson).

But though the presence of conscience in us bears witness to the existence of a holy, righteous, sin-hating and sin-avenging God, it is scarcely correct to say (as numbers have done) that the conscience is the voice of God speaking in the soul, rather is it that faculty which responds to what He says. When Christ declared "he that hath ears to hear let him hear," He signified, him that has a conscience attuned to the Most High, who desires to know His will and submit to His authority. Conscience sits upon the bench of the heart as God's vicegerent, acquitting or accusing. It acts thus in the natural man, but in the regenerate it is a godly conscience, guided in its operations by the Holy Spirit, bearing its testimony for or against the believer according to his character and conduct, Godwards and manwards.

The actual term conscience is derived from "scio" to know, and "con" with. There is some difference of opinion as to the precise application of the prefix, whether it be a knowledge we have in

common with God, or a knowledge according to His Law. Really, it is a distinction with very little difference. The "knowledge" is of one individual alone by himself, but this "knowledge with" is where two at least share the same secret, either of them knowing it together with the other. Conscience, then, is that faculty which combines two together, and makes them partners in knowledge; it is between man and God. God knows perfectly all the doings of a man, no matter how carefully concealed; and man, by this faculty, also knows together with God the same things of himself. Hence we read of "conscience toward God" (1 Pet. 2:19), or as the Greek may also be rendered (see margin of R.V.) "the conscience of God"—having Him for its Author and Object. Conscience is God's vicegerent, acting for and under Him.

Thus, as the very term implies, conscience must have a rule to work by: "knowledge together with." It is not only a knowledge, but a knowledge coupled with a standard, according to which a process of inward judgment is carried on. Now our only proper rule is the Word, or revealed will of God. That is divided into two parts: what God speaks to man in His holy Law, and what He says to him in His blessed Gospel. If conscience departs from that Rule, then it is a rebellious one, it has ceased to speak and judge for God, and then the light in man is turned into darkness, for the (inward) eye has become evil (Matthew 6:23). In his primitive condition man had only the Law, and the proper work of conscience then was to speak warningly and condemningly in strict accordance with that Rule, and to allow none other. But our first parents listened to Satan's lie, broke the Law, and came under its condemnation.

Wherever we go conscience accompanies us, whatever we think or do it records and registers in order to the Day of accounts. "When all friends forsake thee, yea, when thy soul forsakes the body, conscience will not, cannot, forsake thee. When thy body is weakest and dullest, the conscience is most vigorous and active. Never more life in the conscience than when death makes its nearest approach to the body. When it smiles, acquits, and comforts, what a heaven doth it create within a man! But when it frowns, condemns and terrifies, how does it becloud, yea, benight all the pleasures, joys and delights of this world" (John Flavell). Conscience, then, is the best of friends or the worst of enemies in the whole creation.

Much of our peace of mind and liberty of spirit in this world

will be according to the favorable testimony of conscience, and much of our spiritual bondage, fear, and distress of mind will be according to the charges of wrong-doing which conscience brings against us. When the gnawings of conscience are intensified, they become unendurable, as was the case with Cain, Judas and Sapphira, for they supply a real foretaste of the internal torments of Hell. Most probably this is that "worm that dieth not" (Mark 9:44) which preys upon the lost. As a worm in the body is bred of the corruption that is therein, so the accusations and condemnations of conscience are bred in the soul by the corruptions and guilt that are therein; and as the worm preys upon the tender and invisible parts of the body, so does conscience touch the very quick of the soul.

But notwithstanding what has been predicated of the conscience above, it is, nevertheless, defiled (Titus 1:15). In the natural man it is exceeding partial in its office, winking at and indulging favorite sins, whilst being strict and severe upon other sins to which a person is not constitutionally prone. Thus we find the conscience of king Saul exceedingly punctilious in a matter of the ceremonial law (1 Sam. 14:34), yet he scrupled not to slay eighty-five of God's priests! The reason why the conscience is so uneven is because it has been corrupted by the Fall: it is out of order, just as a foul stomach craves certain articles of diet while loathing others which are equally wholesome. So it is in the performance of duties: conscience in the natural man picks and chooses according to its own perverted caprice: neglecting what is distasteful, performing what is pleasing and then being proud because it has done so.

Now conscience is either good or evil, and that, according as it is governed by the revealed will of God. Briefly, the evil conscience first. This is of several kinds. There is the ignorant and darkened conscience, relatively so and not absolutely, for all (save idiots) possess rationality and the light of nature. This is the condition of the heathen, and alas, of an increasing number in Christendom, who are reared in homes where God is utterly ignored. Then there is the brazen and defiant conscience, which blatantly refuses to be in subjection to God's known will: such was the case with Pharaoh. In the case of Herod we see a bribed conscience, pretending that his oath obliged him to behead John the Baptist. The seared and insensible conscience (1 Tim. 4:2) pertains to those who have long resisted the light and are given over by God to a reprobate

mind. The despairing and desperate conscience leads its possessor to lay violent hands upon himself.

At the new birth the conscience is renewed, being greatly quickened and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Through the exercise of faith the conscience is purified (Acts 15:9), being cleansed by an appropriation of the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:14). A good conscience may be defined, generally, as one that is set to please God in all things, for it hates sin and loves holiness; it is one which is governed by the Word, being in subjection to the authority of its Author. Its binding rule is obedience to God, and to Him alone, refusing to act apart from His light. Consequently, the more conscientious the Christian be, the more he refuses all domination (the traditions and opinions of man) which is not Divine, the more likely is he to gain the reputation of being conceited and intractable. Nevertheless, each of us must be much on his guard lest he mistake pride and self-will for conscientious scruples. There is a vast difference between firmness and an unteachable spirit, as there is between meekness and fickleness.

How is a good and pure conscience obtained? Briefly, by getting it rightly informed, and by casting out its filth through penitential confession. The first great need of conscience is light, for ignorance corrupts it. "That the soul be without knowledge, it is not good" (Prov. 19:2). As a judge that understands not the laws of his country is unfit to give judgment on any matter that comes before him, or as a dim eye cannot properly perform its office, so a blind or uninformed conscience is incapable to judge of our duty before God. Conscience cannot take God's part unless it knows His will, and for a full acquaintance with that we must daily read and search the Scriptures. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy Word" (Ps. 119:9). O to be able to say, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105).

Let us now mention some of the qualities or characteristics of a good conscience. First, sincerity. Alas, how little of this virtue is left in the world: what shams and hypocrisy now obtain on every side—in the religious realm, the political, the commercial, and the social. This is a conscienceless generation, and consequently there is little or no honesty, fidelity, or reality. That which now regulates the average person is a temporary expediency, rather than an acting

according to principle. But it is otherwise with the regenerate: the fear of the Lord has been planted in his heart, and therefore can he say with the apostle, "We trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly." A sincere conscience genuinely desires to know God's will and is truly determined to be in subjection thereto. Guile has received its death wound, and the heart is open to the light, ready to be searched thereby.

Tenderness is another property of a good conscience. By this quality is meant a wakefulness of heart so that it smites for sin upon all occasions offered. So far from being indifferent to God's claims, the heart is acutely sensitive when it has been ignored. Even for what many consider trifling matters, a tender conscience will chide and condemn. Job resolved to preserve a tender conscience when he said, "my heart shall not reproach me as long as I live" (Job 27:6). Again; we may understand this characteristic from its opposite, namely, a seared conscience (1 Tim. 4:2), which is contracted by an habitual practice of that which is evil, the heart becoming as hard as the public highway. Pray frequently for a tender conscience, dear reader.

Fidelity. When conscience faithfully discharges its office there is a constant judging of our state before God as a measuring of our ways by His Holy Word. Thus the apostle Paul could say, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1). The favorable judgment which others may entertain of him will afford no satisfaction to an upright man unless he has the testimony of conscience that his conduct is right in the sight of God. No matter what may be the fashions of the hour nor the common custom of his fellows, one whose heart beats true to God will not do anything knowingly against conscience: his language will ever be, "whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts 4:19). On the other hand, his frequent prayer is, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23, 24).

Tranquillity. This is the sure reward of sincerity and fidelity, for Wisdom's ways (in contrast from those of folly) "are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace" (Prov. 3:17). An offended conscience will offend us, and "a wounded spirit who can bear?" (Prov. 18:14). The Christian may as well expect to touch a live coal

without pain, as to sin without trouble of conscience. But a clear conscience is quiet, condemning not, being unburdened by the guilt of sin. When we walk closely with God there is a serenity of mind and peace of heart which is the very opposite of the state of those who are lawless and disobedient, "for the wicked are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest." The tranquility of a good conscience is an earnest of the undisturbed calm which awaits us on High.

But let it be pointed out that every peaceful conscience is not a good one, nor is every uneasy conscience an evil one. The conscience of some is quiet because it is insensible. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace" (Luke 11:21): that is a quiet evil conscience, because put to sleep by the opiates of Satan. True tranquility of conscience is to be determined from the other properties: it must issue from sincerity, tenderness, and fidelity, or otherwise it is a seared one. We must consider not how much inward peace we have, but how much cause: as in a building, not the fairness of the structure, but the foundation of it is to be most regarded. On the other hand, a tender conscience is liable to err through lack of sufficient light, and needlessly write bitter things against itself, which is a "weak conscience" (1 Cor. 8:12); as we may also be troubled by sins already pardoned.

Now a good conscience can only be maintained by constant diligence: "herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16). The apostle made it his daily employment to keep his conscience clear, that it might not justly accuse him of anything, so that he should have the witness in his own heart that his character and conduct was pleasing in the sight of the Holy One. The maintenance of a good conscience is an essential part of personal piety. "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy... holding faith and a good conscience" (1 Tim. 1:18, 19): that is the sum of personal godliness—faith being the principle of things to be believed by us, conscience the principle of the things to be done. Faith and a good conscience are linked together again in 1 Timothy 1:5 and 3:9, for we cannot hold the one without the other.

If the reader will turn back to Acts 24 he will find that Paul was replying to charges brought against him. In verses 14-16 he made his defense, giving therein a brief epitome of practical and

experimental Christianity. As the foundation he gives an account of his faith: "believing all things which are written"; as the immediate proof thereof—"and have hope toward God"; and then a brief account of his conversation: "herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offense." A saving knowledge of the Truth, then, is such a belief of the Scriptures as produces an hope of eternal life, which is evidenced by a keeping of the heart with all diligence. The same is enumerated again in "The end of the commandment" (the design of the Gospel institution) is that love which fulfils the Law, issuing from a heart that beats true to God (1 Tim. 1:5).

"Herein do I exercise myself": we must make it our constant endeavor. First, by a diligent and daily searching of the Scriptures that we may discover the will of God. We are exhorted "Be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17), and this in order that we may ascertain what is pleasing to Him, so that we offend not either in belief or worship. A conscience ill-informed is, at best, a weak and ignorant one. Second, by a serious inquiry into the state of our heart and ways: "Stand in awe, and sin not; commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still" (Ps. 4:4). We need to frequently challenge and call ourselves to account. If we would have conscience speak to us, we must speak often to it. It is given us for this very reason that we may judge of our state and actions with respect to the judgment of God. Then "Let us search and try our ways" (Lam. 3:40). Take time, dear reader, to parley with yourself and consider how matters stand between you and God. Short reckonings prevent mistakes, so review each day and put right what has come between you and God.

Third, a uniform course of obedience: "Hereby we know that we are of the Truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him" (1 John 3:19). Fourth, by a constant alertness: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Matthew 26:41). Fifth, by a serious resistance and mortification of sin: cutting off the right hand and putting out the right eye. Sixth, by a sincere repentance and confession when conscious of failure. Seventh, by faith's appropriation of the cleansing blood of Christ.

Hebrews 13:18, 19

Chapter 122 - Praying for Ministers

"Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner." As was pointed out in the opening paragraph of the previous article, this passage is closely connected with verse 17, where believers are commanded to obey their ecclesiastical leaders. Here is mentioned a further obligation of Christians unto those who minister to them in spiritual things, namely, that they should remember them before the throne of grace. A due observance of this exhortation would probably do more than anything else to counteract and countervail a widespread evil: those who plead with God for blessings upon the preacher are far less likely to go around criticizing them unto men. A spirit of faultfinding stifles the breath of intercession; contrariwise, a spirit of prayer will curb complaining and gossiping lips.

"Pray for us." The servants of Christ stand in real and urgent need of the prayers of their people. They are but men themselves, ignorant, weak, and erring, and unless they are granted a double portion of the Spirit they are not equipped for their arduous and honorable calling. They are the ones who bear the brunt of the battle, and are the special objects of Satan's attacks. They are often tempted to compromise, to keep back that which, though unpalatable to them, is most profitable for their hearers. In the face of many disappointments and discouragements, they are apt to grow weary in well doing. It is, then, both our duty and privilege to supplicate God on their behalf for daily supplies of grace to be granted them from on High; that they may be delivered from temptations, kept faithful, steadfast and devoted.

It is to be duly noted that this request was made by none other than the writer of this epistle; if, then, the greatest of the apostles stood in need of the intercessory support of his brethren, how much more so the rank and the of God's ministers. How tenderly, how earnestly, and how frequently Paul made this request!

Here he adds, "I beseech you"—language used again in Romans 15:30, where he besought the saints to strive together with him in their prayers to God. In 2 Corinthians 1:11 he speaks of "helping together by prayer for us." A beautiful type of the efficacy of the prayers of God's people to support one of His servants is found in the holding up the hands of Moses (Ex. 17:12), where we are significantly told, "And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand Amalek prevailed."

"Pray for us." We agree with Owen that though the apostle here used the plural number (as was his general custom) that it was for himself alone he made this request: as the "I" in verse 19 intimates. It is a pre-eminently Pauline touch, and, as we pointed out in our second article of this series it supplies one of the many details which serve to identify the writer of this epistle. There is no record in the N.T. that any other of the apostles besought the prayers of the Church. Paul did so in no less than seven of his epistles: Romans 15:30, Ephesians 6:19, Colossians 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:25, 2 Thessalonians 3:1, Philemon 1:22 and here. "He who labored more than the other apostles, and who was endowed with so many gifts, seems to have had the greatest craving for sympathy, for affection, for communion, and the most vivid conception that God only giveth the increase; that it is not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord" (A. Saphir).

"Pray for us": though the immediate reference was to Paul himself, yet obviously the exhortation applies to all the servants of Christ, and is binding upon all to whom they minister. They are the ones, under God, through whom we receive the most good. Oftentimes they are, ministerially, our spiritual fathers (1 Cor. 4:15), our spiritual nurses (1 Thess. 2:7), our guides, counselors, and nourishers. They are to be esteemed very highly for their work's sake (1 Thess. 5:13), and that esteem is to be evident by our constantly bearing them up before God in the arms of faith and love. To earnestly supplicate the throne of grace on their behalf, is the least return we can make them for their loving labors, sacrificial endeavor, faithful ministrations. There is no doubt that the more diligent the people are in discharging this duty, the more help and blessing are they likely to receive through their labors.

"Pray for us." The apostle was persuaded that all the blessing

he needed could be obtained from God, and from Him alone, and that prayer was the appointed means of obtaining those blessings. Someone has said that "If the due obedience of the church by all its members, unto the rulers of it, be the best means of its edification and the chief cause of order and peace in the whole body, certainly prayer for its leaders and fellow-members is the appointed channel for obtaining it." Again, by requesting the prayers of the Hebrew Christians, Paul intimated the regard in which he held them as righteous men, whose prayers would "avail much." His request also signified his confidence in their love for him: a heart that tenderly and faithfully sought their good, doubted not the warmth of their affection for him. Prayer for each other is one of the principal parts of the communion of saints.

The apostle supported his plea for the prayers of his readers by a striking and powerful reason; "For we trust we have a good conscience in all things willing to live honestly." In saying "we trust" two things were intimated. First, his becoming modesty: there was no boastful "we know." Second, his assurance, for such language in Scripture does not express a doubt. Thus though there was confidence in his heart toward God, yet he expressed himself in humble terms—an example we do well to heed in this boastful and egoistic age. It is a grand thing when a minister of the Gospel can truly, though modestly, appeal to the faithful performance of his labors as a reason why he may claim the sympathy and support of his people. It is only when he sincerely aims to do the right and maintains a good conscience that the minister can, with propriety, ask for the prayers of his people.

Probably the reason why Paul here made particular reference to his earnest endeavor to maintain a good conscience, was because he had been so bitterly denounced by his own nation, and no doubt (for Satan was the same then as now) the most unfavorable reports about him had been circulated among the Hebrews. He had been cruelly scourged by his own countrymen, and unjustly imprisoned by the Romans, yet he had the witness within his own bosom that it was his desire and determination to always act with integrity. "Though my name be cast out as evil, and though I be suffering as a wrong-doer, yet I appeal to my faithfulness in the Gospel ministry; I do not walk in craftiness nor handle the Word of God deceitfully, nor do I make merchandise of the Gospel: I have genuinely sought to act

honorably under all circumstances." Happy the man that can say that.

"For we trust that we have a good conscience." As we pointed out previously, the conscience is that faculty with which the Creator has endowed man, whereby he is capable of judging his state and actions with respect to the judgment of God. Its office is twofold: to reveal sin to us, and to discover our duty, according to the light shining into it. There is a twofold light which men have to illumine conscience: natural reason and Scripture revelation, and the Spirit applying the same. If the conscience has only the twilight of nature, as is the case with the heathen, it passes judgment on natural duties and unnatural sins, but if it enjoys the supernatural light of the Word, it judges of those sins and duties which can only be known by Divine revelation. It registers a permanent record in the soul. The more light we have, the greater is our responsibility: Luke 12:48.

Though the heathen possess not the Law delivered by revelation of God to them, yet they have, in their moral sensibilities, the substance of its precepts written in their hearts: Romans 2:15. When Paul said he had "lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1), it was parallel with his "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Phil. 3:6): there was a conformity of his outward conduct to the light which he had in his conscience. Thus "those that say there is no use of the moral law to the Christian, may as well say there is no more use of the faculty of conscience in the soul of a Christian. Tear that faculty out of a man's heart, if you will tear out that other, namely, the obliging precepts. Even as if God would annul colors and light, He must also take away and close up the sense of sight" (Thomas Goodwin).

"The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly" (Prov. 20:27). This moral sense has been rightly denominated the Divine spy in man's soul. Its checks and reproofs are a warning from God: it acts in His name, citing us before His tribunal. It receives its instruction and authority from God, and is accountable to Him and to none other—alas how many are regulated by the customs and fashions of this world, and live upon the opinions and reports of their fellows. Conscience is a part of that light which "lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9). In many passages both the "heart" (1 John 3:20) and the "spirit" (Rom. 8:16, 1 Corinthians 2:11) signifies the conscience,

while in Psalm 16:10 it is called the "reins." In yet other passages it is likened unto the physical "eye" (Luke 11:34-36): as the eye is the most sensitive member of the body and its visual faculty so is the conscience to the soul.

Conscience, then, is God's witness within man: it is the voice of His Law directing and admonishing the heart, conveying to us a knowledge of right and wrong. Its functions are to give testimony and force a moral verdict. Its business is to pronounce upon each action, whether it be good or evil, with the reward or punishment belonging to it, and then by a reflex act it deposes or witnesses that we have done righteously or unrighteously. Yet while conscience convicts of sin, it in no wise helps us to believe the Gospel: on the contrary, its workings withstand faith. No matter to what extent the natural conscience be enlightened, it conduces nothing to faith, nay it is the greatest enemy to it that the heart of man hath. Faith is the gift of God, a supernatural bestowment, something which is the operation of the Holy Spirit, altogether apart from and transcending the greatest height to which the unaided faculties of fallen man can reach unto.

What has just been pointed out above may, at first sight, surprise the reader; yet it ought not. Conscience is fully capable of hearing what the Law says, for it is but the Law written in the heart naturally; but it is quite deaf to what the Gospel says, and understands not a word of it. If you speak to natural conscience about a Savior and urge it to believe on Him, its answer will be like unto that of the Jews (and it was this principle of conscience which made them so speak), "as for Moses we know that God spake unto him, but as for this fellow (Christ) we know not whence He is" (John 9:29). Talk to a man of the Law, and conscience responds, for it knows what he ought to do; but as for the Gospel its voice is that of a stranger to him. Conscience is quite incapable of pointing out the way of deliverance from the condemnation and penalty of sin, yea, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

It is true that the more conscience be enlightened, the more will it discover to us all manner of sins, and rebuke us for them; yet conscience alone will never discover unbelief to us, and convict us of its heinousness—only the immediate light of the Holy Spirit shining in the heart will do that. There are two great sins which lie

outside the jurisdiction of conscience to set them upon the heart, ordinarily. First, the guilt of Adam's original transgression, which has been justly imputed unto all his posterity. An instructed conscience may perceive the depravity and corruption of a nature which has resulted from our fall in Adam, but it will not convict of that fatal condemnation we lie under because of our first father's offense. Second, conscience will not acquaint us with our lack of faith in Christ, and that this is the sin of all sins; only the special operation of the Spirit upon the quickened heart can accomplish this. Examine those who are most troubled in conscience, and it will be found that none of them are burdened because of their unbelief.

Until conscience be subordinated unto faith, it is the greatest hindrance to believing which the natural man hath. What is the chief obstacle which an awakened and convicted soul encounters? Why, the greatness of his sins, his heart telling him that he is beyond the reach of mercy, and it is naught but the accusations of a guilty conscience which produces that sense of hopelessness in the heart. Conscience brings our sins to light, makes them to stare us in the face, and terrifies us with their enormity. Conscience it is which tells a distressed soul that salvation is far off from such an one as I am. Conscience will set us working and doing, but only in a legal way: so far from leading us into the path of true peace, it will take us farther away from it. Thus it was with the Jews of old, and thus it is still: "For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness" (Rom. 10:3).

In the case of a Christian, conscience and faith supplement each other in their workings. If conscience convicts of sin or rebukes for the omission of duty, faith eyes the mercy of God in Christ, penitently confesses the fault, and seeks cleansing through the precious blood. "The worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins" (Heb. 10:2)—no more apprehensions of them as standing against us. It is the believer's bounden duty to maintain a good conscience: 1 Timothy 1:19; 3:9, but in order to that there must be a continual judging of ourselves and our ways. The revealed will of God is its only rule, for nothing else can lawfully bind it; therefore it is infinitely better to offend the whole world than God and conscience. "All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure he will be enticed and we shall prevail against him," and what was the prophet's response and recourse? This, "But

Thou, O Lord of hosts, that triest the righteous and seest the reins and the heart, let me see Thy vengeance on them: for unto Thee have I opened my cause" (Jer. 20:10, 12).

The sole rule to regulate the conscience of the Christian is God's written Word, for "whatsoever is not of faith (and therefore according to the Word: (Rom. 10:17) is sin" (Rom. 14:23); that is, whatsoever is not done from a settled persuasion of judgment and conscience out of the Word, is sin. The defects of a good conscience are, First, ignorance or error: some children of God are very imperfectly established in the Truth and are much confused as to what is right and wrong in the sight of God, especially in things indifferent, concerning which there is much difference of opinion. They understand not that liberty which Christ has purchased for His people (Gal. 5:1), whereby they are free to make a right and good use of all things indifferent—i.e, things not specifically forbidden by Scripture. "Wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face shine" (Ps. 104:15), which goes beyond bare necessities; to which we may add those innocent recreations which refresh mind and body. How to make a proper use of such things is defined in 1 Timothy 4:4, 5.

Second, and closely connected with the preceding, is what Scripture calls a "weak conscience" (1 Cor. 8:12), which is due to lack of light, wrong teaching, to personal prejudice and idiosyncrasies. It is often trying and difficult to know how to act towards those thus afflicted: on the one hand, love desires their good, and must be patient with them and refrain from acting recklessly and needlessly wounding them; but on the other hand, their fads and scruples are not to be so yielded to by us that our own spiritual liberty is annulled—Christ Himself refused to bring His disciples into bondage by yielding to the traditions of men (Mark 7:2), even though He knew they were spying for some fault in Him, and would be offended by His conduct. Third, a doubting conscience: Romans 14: 22, 23. Fourth, a wounded conscience, whose peace is disturbed by unrepented and unconfessed sins.

The benefits and blessings are indeed rich compensation for every effort we make to maintain a good conscience. First, it gives us confidence Godwards. When we have sinned away our peace there is a strangeness and distance between the soul and the Holy One. When our inward monitor convicts and condemns us, the heart

grows shy of God, so that we cannot so comfortably look Him in the face. It is only when everything is made right with God, by contrite confession and faith's appropriation of the cleansing blood of Christ, that we can approach the throne of grace with boldness. "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Heb. 10:22)—i.e. a conscience which no longer accuses us before God. "If I regard iniquity in my heart (which is inconsistent with a good conscience) the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18); but on the other hand "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God; and whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandment and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:21, 22).

Second, a clear conscience affords his chief relief when the believer is falsely accused and aspersed by his enemies. What unspeakable consolation is ours when we can rightfully appropriate that benediction of Christ, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake" (Matthew 5:11). This was the case with the apostle Paul: "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that In simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world" (2 Cor. 1:12). Third, a clear conscience vindicates its possessor against the accusations of Satan. The great enemy of our souls is constantly seeking to take away our peace and joy, and we are powerless against his onslaughts when a guilty conscience confirms his charges. But when we can appeal to a pure conscience and expose his lies, then his fiery darts are successfully quenched. The Psalmist was very bold when he said—see Psalm 7:3, 4, 5, 8.

Fourth, a pure conscience gives great advantage to its possessor when he is lawfully reproofing others. The admonitions of that Christian whose life is inconsistent have no weight but he who walks closely with God speaks with authority. That man who is upright before God and his fellows, wields a moral force which is felt even by the ungodly. Finally, a peaceful conscience affords unspeakable comfort in a dying hour. When one has the inward witness that, despite many failures, he has sincerely endeavored to do that which was right before God and unto his fellows, he has an easy pillow to rest his head upon. "Remember now, O Lord, I

beseech Thee, how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight" (Isa. 38:3): that was an appeal to a good conscience by one who was "sick unto death."

Paul's testimony of his having a good conscience consisted in this: "in all things willing to live honestly." A resolute will and a sincere endeavor to act rightly under all circumstances is the fruit and evidence of a good conscience. Being "willing" signifies a desire and readiness, with an accompanying effort and diligence. "In all things" takes in our whole duty to God and man, expresses the strictness and exactness of the apostle's course to maintain a conscience "void of offense" (Acts 24:16). What a striking commentary upon this declaration of Paul's is furnished in the account of his manner of life at Ephesus: see Acts 20:18-27. How his devotion, fidelity, and constancy puts to shame the flesh-loving indolence of so many preachers today. What strictness of conscience God requires from His servants: as the least bit of grit in the eye hinders its usefulness, so any sin trifled with will trouble a tender conscience.

We are commanded to "Provide things honest in the sight of all men" (Rom. 12:17): a good conscience respects the second table of the Law equally with the first, so that we owe no man anything and are not afraid to look anybody in the face. Any faith which does not produce an impartial and universal obedience, is worthless. All the mysteries of our most holy faith are mysteries of godliness (1 Tim. 1:9; 3:16). But if the Word of God has come to us in word only and not in power, then are we but Christians of the letter and not of the spirit. Alas, how many today are sound in doctrine and have a carnal assurance of eternal life, yet who exercise themselves not to maintain a conscience void of offense. Alas, alas, what a conscienceless age our lot is cast in. How many souls are stumbled by the loose living of the majority of those who now profess to believe the Gospel.

"In all things willing to live honestly." We are exhorted to have our conversation "honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2:12). The Greek word in our text expresses more than is commonly understood by "honestly," being the same as that used in "He hath

done all things well" (Mark 7:37). Its real force is "excellently" or "honorably." In his "in all things willing to live honestly" the apostle again expresses his humility and truthfulness. A sincere desire and a diligent endeavor so to act is the highest perfection attainable in this life, for we all fail in the carrying out of it. Thus, in all ages the saints have prayed, "O Lord, I beseech Thee, let now Thine ear be attentive to the prayer of Thy servant, and to the prayer of Thy servants, who desire to fear Thy name" (Nehemiah 1:11). It is blessed to be assured by God Himself that "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (2 Cor. 8:12).

"But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner" (verse 19). In this verse Paul added a further reason why he desired the Hebrew saints to pray for him. Many things are intimated therein: that he had been with them previously, but circumstances over which he had no control now prevented his return—the best of ministers may be kept from their people (1 Kings 22:27, Jeremiah 38:6); that he greatly desired to come to them again, which shows that not his own comfort (deliverance from prison) but their good was uppermost in his mind; that he had strong confidence in the prevalency of prayer and of their affection for him. "When ministers come to a people as a return of prayer, they come with greater satisfaction to themselves and success to the people. We should fetch in all our mercies by prayer" (Matthew Henry).

The language used here by Paul denotes that he believed man's goings are of the Lord, that He disposes the affairs of the Church much according to their prayers, to His glory and their consolation. "That I may be restored to you the sooner" is very striking, showing that Paul was no blind fatalist: if God had decreed the exact hour, how could prayer bring it to pass "the sooner"? Ah, it is utterly vain for us to reason about or philosophize over the consistency between God's eternal decrees and prayer: sufficient for us to be assured from Scripture that prayer is both a bounden duty and blessed privilege. It is God's way to make us feel the need of and then ask for the bestowment of His mercies before He gives them: Ezekiel 36:37. We know not if this prayer was answered, nor is it at all material: "according to our present apprehensions of duty we may lawfully have earnest desires after, and pray for such things,

as shall not come to pass. The secret purposes of God are not the rule of prayer" (John Owen).

Hebrews 13:20, 21

Chapter 123 - The Apostle's Prayer

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen" (verses 20, 21). Let us begin by considering the connection which these verses have with what precedes: first with their wider context and then with their more immediate. In them there is really a gathering up into a brief but comprehensive sentence of the whole of what had been previously set forth, except that the apostle here prays there might be wrought in the Hebrews that unto which they had been exhorted. The substance of the whole doctrinal portion of the epistle is included therein, and the apostle now begs God to apply to the hearts of his readers the benefits and fruit of all the important instruction which he had presented to them. These verses, then, form a fitting conclusion, for what follows them is virtually a postscript.

Viewing our text in the light of its immediate context, we perceive a blessed exemplification of the fact that the apostle practiced what he preached, for what he had required from his readers he is here seen doing for them. In verses 18, 19 he had besought the prayers of the Hebrews on his behalf, and now we find him supplicating the Throne of Grace on their behalf. What a blessed example the chief of the apostles has left unto all whom Christ has called unto public service. If ministers desire the prayers of their people, then let them see to it that they are not backward in praying for those God has committed to their charge. This is an essential part of the minister's functions. It is not sufficient that he faithfully preaches the Word: he must also fervently and frequently ask God to bless that Word unto those who have heard him. O that all who are called to the sacred office may feelingly exclaim "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you"

(1 Sam. 12:23).

The verses which are now before us are in the form of an apostolic benediction or prayer. In them is set forth, in a striking and appropriate manner, the Object to whom the prayer was offered, following which is the matter for which supplication was made. In this article we shall confine ourselves unto the former. The Person to whom the apostle prayed is here described first by one of His titles, namely, "the God of peace"; and then by one of His works, the raising of Christ from the dead, and this in turn is ascribed unto the blood of the everlasting covenant. Those who have followed us through this lengthy series of articles may perceive how aptly the apostle reduces his grand exposition of the superiority of Christianity over Judaism unto these three chief heads: the God of peace, the risen Shepherd of the sheep, the blood of the everlasting covenant.

"The God of peace." The varied manner in which God refers to Himself in Scripture, the different appellations He there assumes, are not regulated by caprice, but ordered by infinite wisdom; and we lose much if we fail to weigh diligently each one. It is not for the mere sake of variation in diction, but each distinguishing title is selected in strict accord with its setting. He is spoken of as "The God of patience and hope" in Romans 15:5, because that is in keeping with the subject of the four previous verses. In Romans 16:27 He is addressed "To God only wise," because the immediate context has made known the revelation of the mystery wherein His inscrutable wisdom had been veiled. Before considering the significance of "the God of peace," let it be pointed out that it is an entirely Pauline expression, occurring nowhere in the writing of any other apostle—another identifying mark of the penman of this epistle. It is found in Romans 15:33 and 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:11, Philippians 4:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 2 Thessalonians 3:16, and here—seven times in all.

"The God of peace." First, this title contemplates God in relation to His people, and not mankind in general; yet in His forensic character, that is, in His office of Judge. It will be remembered that in that blessed passage where the two covenants are placed in antithesis and Sion is contrasted from Sinai, it is said, "But ye are come... to God the Judge of all" (Heb. 12:23), which is the climacteric feature of the Gospel. The face of the Supreme Judge

is wreathed in smiles of benignity as He beholds His people in the face of His Anointed. But it was not always thus. On the morning of creation as God saw us in Adam, our federal head, He viewed us with complacency, as "very good" (Gen. 1.31). But alas! sin came in, a breach was made between the Creator and the creature, and a state of alienation, mutual alienation, ensued, for a holy God could not be at peace with sin.

It needs to be clearly recognized that from the beginning God has sustained other relationships to man than those of Creator and Benefactor. Adam, and the human race in him, were placed under law, and therefore became subject to Divine government. In consequence of this, God was his Lord, his King, his Judge. While he remained in loyal subjection unto the Divine authority, yielding obedience to the King's laws, His favor was enjoyed, but when he transgressed, all was altered. Sin has not only defiled man, corrupting the whole of his nature, but it has brought him under the curse of the Divine law, and has subjected him to the Divine wrath. Fallen man, then has to do with an offended Judge. This was speedily made evident unto the original rebel, for we read, "therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from where he was taken. So He drove out the man" (Gen. 3:23, 24).

Alas, how little is this most solemn aspect of the Truth preached today! Sin has not only vitiated our nature, it has alienated us from God: as it is written "alienated from the life of God" (Eph. 4:18). Man has not only lost the image of God in which he was created, but he had forfeited the favor of God in which he was instated. In consequence of the fall, there is a mutual antagonism between God and man. Sin has made a breach between them, so that all the harmony and concord which there was, both spiritual and judicial, has been completely destroyed. Not only is the carnal mind "enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7), "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. 1:18). That God is alienated from the sinner and antagonistic to him, is as clearly taught in the Scriptures as is man's enmity against God.

The One with whom fallen man has to do, is his outraged King and offended Judge, and His own Word leaves us in no doubt as to His judicial attitude toward the fallen creature. "Thou hatest all

workers of iniquity" (Ps. 5:5). "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11). "But they rebelled and vexed His Holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their Enemy, He fought against them" (Isa. 63:10). It was for this reason that none other than our blessed Redeemer said, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell" (Matthew 10:28), which is to be understood not simply of God's absolute power or omnipotency, but also and chiefly of His judicial power or rightful authority, as we are His prisoners and obnoxious to His judgments. Why is the modern pulpit so culpably silent upon these and similar passages?

God's holiness burns against sin, and His justice clamors for satisfaction. But is He not also of infinite mercy? Blessed be His name, He is, nevertheless His mercy does not override and nullify His other perfections. Grace reigns but it reigns "through righteousness" (Rom. 5:21), and not at the expense of it. When therefore God had designs of mercy toward His people—who sinned and fell in Adam, in common with the non-elect—His wisdom contrived a way whereby His mercy might be exercised consistently with His holiness, yea, in such a way, that His law was magnified and His justice satisfied. This grand contrivance was revealed in the terms of the Everlasting Covenant, which was entered into between God and the Mediator before the foundation of the world, but in view of the entrance of sin and the fall of the elect in Adam. Christ undertook to restore the breach which had been made, to effect a perfect reconciliation between God and His people, to make full satisfaction for all the harm which sin had done to God's manifestative glory.

Many, adopting the horrible heresy of the Socinians ("Unitarians"), will not allow that the reconciliation is mutual: but God has been reconciled to His people as truly as they to Him. As we have shown above, the Scriptures not only speak of enmity on men's part but also of wrath on God's part, and that, not only against sin but sinners themselves, and not the non-elect merely, but the elect too, for we "were by nature the children of wrath (yes, of "wrath" in addition to depravity!) even as others" (Eph. 2:3). Sin placed God and His people at judicial variance: they the parties offending, He the party offended. Hence, for Christ to effect perfect conciliation, it was required that He turn away the judicial wrath of

God from His people, and in order to this, Christ offered Himself a propitiatory sacrifice to God, Himself bearing that wrath which was due to them.

This central truth in the Atonement, now so generally repudiated, was portrayed again and again in the O.T. types. For instance, when Israel sinned so grievously in connection with the golden calf, we find Jehovah saying to Moses, "Now therefore let Me alone, that My wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them" (Ex. 32:10). But notice how blessedly the immediate sequel shows us the typical mediator interposing between the righteous anger of Jehovah and His sinning people, and turning away His wrath from them: see verses 11-14. Again we read in Numbers 16 that upon the rebellion of Korah and his company, the Lord said unto Moses "Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment" (verse 45). Whereupon Moses said unto Aaron "Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them; for there is wrath gone out from the Lord: the plague is begun." Aaron did so, and we are told, "he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stayed" (verses 46, 48).

Surely nothing could be plainer than the above examples, to which many others might be added. All through the patriarchal and Mosaic economies we find that sacrifices were offered for the specific purpose of averting God's righteous wrath, to appease His judicial displeasure, to turn away His anger, the effect of which being expressly termed a "reconciliation:" see Leviticus 16:20, 2 Chronicles 29:24, Daniel 9:24. Most obviously the Israelites offered not their sacrifices to turn away their own enmity against God. Inasmuch, then, as those O.T. sacrifices were foreshadowings of Christ's oblation, what a turning of things upside-down is it to affirm that the great end of Christ's work was to reconcile sinners to God, instead of to divert God's wrath from us. The testimony of the N.T. is equally plain and emphatic: then let us bow to the same, instead of resisting and reasoning against it.

Of Christ it is said, "Whom God hath set forth a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare (not His love or grace, but) His righteousness" (Rom. 3:25). Now a "propitiation" is that which placates or appeases by satisfying offended justice. The force of this

verse is by no means weakened by the fact that the Greek word for "propitiation" is rendered "mercyseat" in Hebrews 9:5, for the mercyseat was a blood-sprinkled one. It was the place where the typical mediator applied the atoning sacrifice for the satisfying of God's justice against the sins of His people. As a matter of fact the Hebrew word for "mercyseat" signifies "a covering," and it was so designated for two reasons: first, because it covered the ark, hiding from view the condemning Law—the tables of stone beneath it; and second, because the blood sprinkled upon it covered the offenses of Israel from the eye of offended justice by an adequate compensation. Thus it fittingly portrayed the averting of deserved vengeance by means of a substitutionary interposition.

"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Rom. 5:10). Yes, when we were "enemies," God's enemies—obnoxious to His righteous judgment. This term denotes the relation in which we stood to God as the objects of His governmental displeasure and subject to the curse of His law. But we were "reconciled," that is, restored unto His favor, and that, not by the Spirit's work in us subduing our enmity, but by "the death"—the propitiatory sacrifice—of God's Son. That this statement refers to the turning away of God's anger from us and the restoring us to His favor is clear from the previous verse: "Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." Now to be "justified is the same as God's being reconciled to us, His acceptance of us into His favor, and not our conversion to Him. Being "justified by His blood" points to the procuring cause of our justification, and that blood was shed that we might be "saved from wrath." God is now pacified toward us, because His wrath was exhausted upon our Surety and Substitute.

"That He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Eph. 2:16). "That He," that is, the Mediator, the incarnate Son. "Might reconcile," that is, restore to God's judicial favor. "Both," that is, elect Jews and elect Gentiles. "Unto God," that is, considered as the moral Governor of the world, the Judge of all the earth. "In one body," that is, Christ's humanity, "the body of His flesh" (Col. 1:22)—here designated "one body" to emphasize the representative character of Christ's atonement, as He sustained the responsibilities and liabilities of all His people: it is the

One acting on behalf of the many as in Romans 5:17-19. "Having slain the enmity thereby," that is, God's holy wrath, the hostility of His law. The "enmity" of verse 16 cannot possibly refer to that which existed between Jews and Gentiles, for that is disposed of in verses 14, 15. "Enmity" is here personified ("slain") as "sin" as in Romans 8:3. Thus, Ephesians 2:16 signifies, that all the sins of God's people meeting on Christ, Divine justice took satisfaction from Him, and in consequence God's "enmity" has ceased, and we are restored to His favor.

Let it not be thought that we are here inculcating the idea that Christ died in order to render God compassionate toward His people. Not so, the Father Himself is the Author of reconciliation: 2 Corinthians 5:19. The gracious means by which He designed to effect the reconciliation originated in His own love, yet the atonement of Christ was the righteous instrument of removing the breach between us. The term is entirely a forensic one, contemplating God in His office as Judge. It concerns our relationship to Him not as our Creator, or as our Father, but as our King. The reconciliation which Christ has effected wrought no change in God Himself, but it has in the administration of His government: His law now regards with approbation those against whom it was formerly hostile. Reconciliation means that transgressors have been restored to the judicial favor of God through Christ's having closed the breach which sin had made. It was the amazing love of God which gave Christ to die for us, and His atonement was in order to the removing of those legal obstacles which our sins had interposed against God's love flowing out to us in a way consistent with the honor of His justice.

The great controversy between God and His people has been settled. The fearful breach which their sins occasioned has been repaired. The Prince of peace has silenced the accusations of the law and removed our sins from before God's face. Peace has been made—not a peace at any price, not at the cost of righteousness flouted; no, an honorable peace. "The God of peace," then signifies, first, the Judge of all is pacified; second, the King of Heaven has been reconciled to us; third, Jehovah, by virtue of His covenant-promises, has received us to His favor—for while He continued offended, we could not receive any gifts of grace from Him. Just as surely as Christ turned away God's wrath from His elect, so does He in due

time send the Holy Spirit into their hearts to destroy their enmity against God, this being a consequence of the former.

We trust that what is next to be before us will render yet more intelligible and forcible all that has been said above. "That brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus." Here is the grand evidence that God is pacified toward us. When God raised Christ from the dead, He showed that He was propitiated, that He had accepted the ransom which had been given for our redemption. Let it be carefully noted that in our present verse it is the Father who is said to raise Christ, and that, in His character of "the God of peace." We will consider these two things separately. There is an order preserved in the personal operations of the Godhead. Resurrection was a work of Divine power, and that Divine power belongs in common to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who being one and the same God concur in the same work. Yet They concur in a way proper to Them: in all Their personal operations it is ascribed to the Father, as the Fountain of working and Wellhead of all grace, who doth all things from Himself, yet by the Son and Spirit.

In the grand mystery of redemption God the Father sustains the office of supreme Judge, and hence we read "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36 and cf. 10:36). So it is in our text: the raising of Christ is there viewed not so much as an act of Divine power, as of rectoral justice. It is God exercising His judicial authority which is emphasized, as is clear from the particular terms used. We are ever the losers if, in our carelessness, we fail to note each single variation of language. It is not who "raised again," but "brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus." The force of that expression may be ascertained by comparing Acts 16:35, 37, 39. The apostles had been unlawfully imprisoned, and when, later, the magistrates bade them go forth, they refused, demanding an official delivery; and we are told "they came and brought them out of prison"—compare also John 19:4, 13 for the force of this term "brought."

When Christ was in the state of the dead, He was in effect a prisoner under the arrest of Divine vengeance; but when He was raised, then was our Savior let out of prison, and the word "brought again" suitably expresses that fact. Christ possessed the power to raise Himself—and considering His death and burial from another

angle, He exercised that power; but in His official character as Surety, He lacked the necessary authority. The God of peace sent an angel to remove the stone from the sepulcher, not to supply any lack of power in Christ, but as the judge when he is satisfied sends an officer to open the prison doors. It was God Himself, as the Judge of all, who "delivered" Christ up for our offenses, and it was God who raised Him for our justification (Rom. 4:25). This was very blessed, for it evidences the perfect subjection of the Son to the Father even in the grave: He did not exercise His might and break prison, but waited till God brought Him forth honorably from the dead.

Let us next observe the particular office Christ sustained when the God of peace brought Him again from the dead: "that great Shepherd of the sheep." Note, not "the," but "that great Shepherd," because Paul was writing to those who were familiar with the O.T. "That Shepherd" signifies the One who was promised in such passages as "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm and carry them in His bosom" (Isa. 40:11), "And I will set up one Shepherd over them, and He shall feed them, even My Servant David: He shall feed them, and He shall be their Shepherd" (Ezek. 34:23)—the Object of the faith and hope of the Church from the beginning. Into the hands of our blessed Redeemer God placed His flock, to be justified and sanctified by Him. Let it be duly recognized that a shepherd is not the lord of the flock, but a servant to take charge of and care for it: "Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me" (John 17:6) said Christ.

Christ is the "Shepherd of the sheep" and not of the "wolves" (Luke 10:3) or the "goats" (Matthew 25:32, 33), for He has received no charge from God to save them—how the basic truth of particular redemption stares us in the face on almost every page of Holy Writ! There are three main passages in the N.T. where Christ is viewed in this particular character. He is "the good Shepherd" (John 10:11) in death, the "great Shepherd" in resurrection, and the "chief Shepherd" in glory (1 Pet. 5:4). The "great Shepherd" of the sheep calls attention to the excellency of His person, while the "chief Shepherd" emphasizes His superiority over all His un-der-shepherds or pastors, the One from whom they receive their authority. How jealously the Holy Spirit guarded the glory of Christ at every point: He is not only the "Shepherd" but "that great Shepherd," just as He is not only High Priest, but our "great High Priest" (Heb. 4:14), and not merely

King, but "the King of kings."

"Through the blood of the everlasting covenant." This is obviously an allusion to "As for Thee also, by the blood of Thy covenant I have sent forth Thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water"—the grave (Zech. 9:11). What is said of Christ is often applied to the Church, and here what is said of the Church is applied to Christ, for together they form "one Body." If, then, He was brought back from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant, much more shall we be. To say that God brought again from the dead "that great Shepherd of the sheep" means, He was raised not as a private person, but as the public Representative of His people. "The blood of the everlasting covenant" was the meritorious cause; as it was "by His own blood He entered in once into the Holy Place" (Heb. 9:12) and that we have "boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus" (10:19), so it is according to the infinite value of His atoning blood that both the Shepherd and His sheep are delivered from the grave.

As Christ (and His people) was brought into death by the sentence of the Law, so from it He was restored by the law's Administrator, and this according to His agreement with Him before the foundation of the world. This it is which gives additional meaning to the Divine title at the beginning of our verse: He is called "the God of peace" from that compact which He made with the Mediator, concerning which we read, "The counsel of peace shall be between Them Both" (Zech. 6:13); "My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee" (Isa. 54:10). The older commentators were about equally divided as to whether the final clause of our verse refers to that eternal agreement between God and the Mediator or to the new testament or covenant (Matthew 26:28); personally, we believe that both are included. The new covenant (about which we hope to have more to say later in our Covenant articles) is proclaimed in the Gospel, wherein is made known the terms on which we personally enter into the peace which Christ has made, namely, repentance, faith, and obedience. The new covenant is ratified by Christ's blood, and it is "everlasting" because its blessings are eternal.

Hebrews 13:20, 21

Chapter 124 - The Apostle's Prayer

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant; make you perfect in every good work to do His will: working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ." Though this be in the form of a prayer yet it presents a succinct summary of the entire doctrine of the epistle. The "blood of the everlasting covenant" stands over against "the blood of bulls and of goats," that "great Shepherd of the sheep," risen from the dead, is in contrast from Moses, Joshua, David, etc., who had long ago died; while "the God of peace" presents a striking antithesis to Jehovah's descent upon Sinai "in fire." Let us briefly consider these three things again, but this time in their inverse order.

"Through the blood of the everlasting covenant." We consider that this clause has a threefold force, that it is connected—both grammatically and doctrinally—with each of the preceding clauses. First, it is through the blood which He shed for sinners that Christ became the great Shepherd of the sheep—He was so previously by ordination, but He became so actually by impetration—the sheep were now His purchased property. Second, it was through or because of the atoning blood that God delivered Christ from the grave, for having fully satisfied Divine justice He was fully entitled to deliverance from prison. Third, it was through or by virtue of the pacifying blood of Christ that God henceforth became "the God of peace" unto His people, the whole controversy which their sins raised having been satisfactorily settled. And Christ shed His precious blood in fulfillment of the stipulations of the Everlasting Covenant, or that agreement which He entered into with the Father before the foundation of the world.

"That brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep." "The Father is frequently said to raise Christ from the dead because of His sovereign authority in the disposal of the whole work of redemption, which is every where ascribed unto

Him. Christ is said to raise Himself or take His life again when He was dead, because of the immediate efficiency of His Divine person therein. But more is intended here than an act of Divine power, whereby the human nature of Christ was quickened. The word used is peculiar, signifying a recovery out of a certain state: a moral act of authority is intended. Christ as the great Shepherd of the sheep was brought into the state of death by the sentence of the Law, and was therefrom restored by the God of peace, to evidence that peace was now perfectly made. The bare resurrection of Christ would not have saved us, for so any other man may be raised by the power of God; but the bringing of Christ from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant is that which gives assurance of the complete redemption of the Church (condensed from Owen).

"The God of peace." He is such first, because He takes this title from the Covenant itself (Isa. 54:10). He is so second, because as the supreme Judge He is pacified, and that because His law has received perfect satisfaction from our Surety. He is so third, because He is, in consequence, reconciled to us. Having accepted the person, obedience, and soul-travail of Christ, God is at peace with all His people in Him. Because He is at peace with them, He freely pardons all their iniquities and bestows every needed blessing upon them. When God removes from us all penalties and evils, and gives unto us all the privileges and good of the justified (such as the Holy Spirit to break the power and reign of sin in us) it is as the "God of peace" He does so; yea, as the supreme Judge, acting according to the principles of His government constituted in the everlasting covenant, by virtue of the merits of Christ and of our interest in Him.

God is also called "the God of peace" because He is the Author of that tranquility which is felt at times in the hearts and consciences of His people, as He is also the Lover of that concord which obtains in measure among them upon earth. Owen suggests a further reason why the apostle uses this Divine title here. "He might have also herein an especial respect to the present state of the Hebrews, for it is evident that they had been tossed, perplexed, and disquieted with various doctrines and pleas about the law, and the observance of its institutions. Wherefore, having performed his part and duty in the communication of the truth to them for the information of their judgments, he now in the close of the whole applies himself by prayer to the God of peace: that He, who alone is

the Author of it, who creates it where He pleaseth, would, through his instruction, give rest and peace to their minds" (John Owen).

So completely is God appeased that there is a new covenant procured and constituted, namely, the Christian Covenant, called here "the everlasting covenant." First, because it shall never be repealed and continueth unalterable, the called obtaining by it the title and possession of an eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15). Second, because Christ's atoning blood is the foundation of this covenant, and as the virtue of it never ceaseth, therefore is it made effectual to secure its end, namely, the eternal salvation of sinful men who are converted and reconciled to God. This new covenant is also designated "the Covenant of Peace:" "I will make a covenant of peace with them" (Ezek. 37:26). First, because in the same this peace and reconciliation is published, and offered to us: "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36 and cf. Ephesians 2:17), because in this covenant the terms of this peace between us and God are stated: God binding Himself to give to sinful men forgiveness of sins and eternal life upon the conditions of repentance, faith, and new obedience.

A most important practical question is, How do we come to be interested in this Divine peace and reconciliation? A threefold answer may be returned: by ordination, impetration, and application. First, by the Father's eternal decree or foreordination, for as to who should enter into the same has not been left to chance; hence, God's elect are termed "the sons of peace" (Luke 10:6). Second, by the Son's impetration or paying the purchase price: "having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself" (Col. 1:20). Third, by the Spirit's application, who subdues our enmity, bends our stubborn wills, softens our hard hearts, overcomes our self-righteousness, and brings us into the dust before God as self-condemned criminals suing for mercy. It is at our conversions this Divine peace is actually conveyed to us, for it is only then that God's wrath is removed from us (John 3:36) and that we are restored to His favor. Further grace is given us day by day as those already reconciled to God.

A final reason may now be advanced why God is here addressed as "the God of peace," and that is, to afford us valuable instruction in connection with prayer. It is very striking to note that in more than half of the passages where this particular Divine title

occurs, it is where He is being supplicated—the reader may verify this for himself by consulting Romans 15:33 and 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:11, Philippians 4:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 2 Thessalonians 3:16, and here. Thus, it is employed for the purpose of encouraging us in our addresses at the Throne of Grace. Nothing will impart more confidence and enlarge our hearts more than the realization God has laid aside His wrath, and has only thoughts of grace toward us. Nothing will inspire more liberty of spirit than to look upon God as reconciled to us by Jesus Christ: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand" (Rom. 5:1, 2).

"Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ." Before taking up the coherency of this sentence let us point out the great practical lesson it contains. No matter how diligent the minister has been in his pulpit preparations, nor how faithfully he has delivered his message, his duty is by no means then fully discharged: he needs to retire to the closet and beg God to apply the sermon to those who heard it, to write it on their hearts, to make it effectual unto their lasting good. This is what the great apostle did. In the body of this epistle he had exhorted the Hebrews unto many good works, and now he prays that God will enable them thereto. The same thing holds good for those in the pew. It is not enough to listen reverently and carefully, we must also entreat God to bless unto us what we have heard. It is failure at this point which makes so much hearing unprofitable.

Though the apostle's prayer be brief, it is a most comprehensive one. It makes known the method by which Divine grace is administered to us. The grand fountain of it is God Himself, as He is the God of peace: that is, as in the eternal counsel of His will, He designed grace and peace unto poor sinners, agreeably to His goodness, wisdom, justice and holiness. The channel through which Divine grace is communicated, and that in a way suitable in His death and resurrection. God would have us know that while He is Himself the Giver, yet it is our Surety who merited for us every spiritual blessing we enjoy. The nature of this Divine grace relates particularly to our sanctification or perfecting, and this is expressed under the two heads of this prayer, namely, the grand end to be ever

kept in view, and the means whereby that end is attained.

Having dwelt at some length upon the solemn manner in which the apostle addressed the Throne of Grace, we now turn to contemplate the import of his prayer, observing the two things here asked for the Hebrews. The first was that God would "make them perfect in every good work to do His will." This will require us to enquire into the meaning of this petition, to ponder its extensiveness, and then to mark its implications. Different writers have given various definitions to the "make you perfect," though they all amount to much the same thing. Thos. Scott gives "rectifying every disorder of their souls and completely fitting them for every part of His holy service." Matthew Henry enters into more detail: "A perfection of integrity, a clear mind, a clean heart, lively affections, regular and renewed wills, and suitable strength for every good work to which they are called."

Owen rendered it "make you meet, fit and able." And adds "It is not an absolute perfection that is intended, nor do the words signify any such thing, but it is to bring the faculties of the mind into that order so as to dispose, prepare, and enable them, so that they may work accordingly." The Greek word for "make you perfect" is rendered "fitted" in Romans 9:22, "framed" in Hebrews 11:3, and "prepared" in Hebrews 10:5, where the product of Divine workmanship is seen in each instance. In the case before us it is the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit in connection with the progressive sanctification of the believer. Personally, we regard the definition of Scott (given above) as the best: the most accurate and elucidating.

The work of Divine grace in the elect begins when they are born again by the quickening operations of the Holy Spirit, and this work of grace is continued throughout the whole of their remaining days upon earth. Perfection of grace is not attained in this life (Phil. 3:12, 13), yet additions to our present attainments in grace are to be diligently sought (2 Pet. 1:5-7). No matter what spiritual progress has, by grace, been made, we are never to rest satisfied with it: we still need to be further strengthened for duties and fortified for trials. A child grows until it becomes fit for all manly actions, yet further progress is attainable after the state of manhood is reached. So it is spiritually. God requires from us the mortification of every lust, and an universal and impartial obedience from us, and therefore we may

perceive how perfectly suited is this prayer to our needs.

Next, we turn to consider the extensiveness of this petition: "Make you perfect in every good work." This comprehensive expression includes, as Gouge pointed out, all the fruits of holiness Godwards and of righteousness manwards. There is to be no reservation. God requires us to love Him with "all our hearts," that we be sanctified in our "whole spirit, and soul, and body," and that we "grow up into Christ in all things." Many will do some good, but are defective in other things—usually in those which are most necessary. They single out those duties which make the least demand upon them, which require the least denying of self. But we shall never enjoy sound peace of heart till we are conformed unto all the revealed will of God: "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all Thy commandments" (Ps. 119:6). Then pray daily to be Divinely fitted unto every good work, especially those which you will find the hardest and most exacting.

"To do His will." Here we have a Scriptural definition of what is a "good work:" it is the performing of God's preceptive will. There are many things done by professing Christians which, though admired by themselves and applauded by their fellows, are not regarded as "good works" by the One with whom we have to do; yea, "that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). Of old the Jews added their own traditions to the Divine commandments, instituting fasts and feasts, so that the Lord asked "who hath required this at your hand?" (Isa. 1:12). We see the same principle at work today among the deluded Romanists, with their bodily austerities, idolatrous devotions, arduous pilgrimages, and impoverishing payments. Nor are many Protestants free from self-appointed deprivations and superstitious exercises. It is not the heeding of religious impulses, nor conforming to ecclesiastical customs, but doing the will of God which is required of us.

The rule of our duty is the revealed will of God. The "works" of man are his operations as a rational creature, and if his actions are conformed to God's Law, they are good; if they are not, they are evil. Therefore a man cannot be a good Christian without doing God's will. If it be God's will that he should refrain from such an act or practice, he dare not proceed to do it: see Jeremiah 35:6, Acts 4:19. On the other hand, if it be the revealed mind of God that he

should do such a thing, he dare not omit it, no matter how it cross his inclination or fleshly interests: "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). his not enough that we thoroughly understand the will of God: we must do it; and the more we do it, the better shall we understand: John 7:17.

"Make you perfect in every good work to do His will." Various things are clearly implied by these words. First, that we are imperfect or not qualified unto every good work. Yes, even after we have been regenerated, we are still unprepared to obey the Divine will. Notwithstanding the life, light and liberty we have received from God, yet we have not ability to do that which is well pleasing in His sight. This is indeed an humbling truth, yet truth it is: Christians themselves are unable to perform their duty. Though the love of God has been shed abroad in their hearts, a principle of holiness or new "nature" communicated to them, this of itself is not sufficient. Not only are they still very ignorant of God's will, but there is that in them which is ever opposed to it, inclining them in a contrary direction. Nor do the Scriptures hesitate to press this solemn fact upon us: rather is it frequently iterated for the humbling of ourselves before God.

Second, yet our spiritual impotency is not to be excused, nor are we to pity ourselves because of it; rather is it to be confessed to God with self condemnation. Third, none but God can fit us for the performing of His will, and it is both our duty and privilege to ask Him so to do. We need to diligently beg Him to strengthen us with might by His Spirit in the inner man, to incline our hearts unto His testimonies and not to covetousness, to so bedew our souls that we will grow in grace; for the new nature in the believer is entirely dependent upon God. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor. 3:5). If we need Divine grace to think a good thought or conceive a good purpose, much more do we need His strength to resolve and perform that which is good. Therefore did the apostle pray for supplies of sanctifying grace to be given unto the Hebrews, to enable them to respond to the will of God in the duties of obedience required of them.

"Working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight." This is both in elucidation and amplification of that which has just preceded, intimating how God makes us perfect or fits us unto every

good work. The previous petition expressed the grand end for which the apostle prayed, namely, the progressive sanctification of his readers; here, he expresses the means by which this was to be accomplished in them. This is effected not by moral persuasion and instruction only, but by an actual and effectual inworking of Divine power. So perverse are we by nature, and so weak even as Christians, that it is not sufficient for our minds to be informed by means of an external revelation of God's will; in addition, He has to stimulate our affections and propel our wills if we are to perform those works which are acceptable to Him. "Without Me ye can no nothing."

"Working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight." This respects the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the regenerate. It presents a striking and blessed contrast between the unsaved and the saved. Of the former we read, "The prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2); whereas of the latter it is said "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). First, God puts within us the will or desire unto that which is good, and then He bestows His strength to actually perform. These are quite distinct, and the latter is never commensurate with the former in this life. The distinction was clearly drawn by the apostle when he said, "For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom. 7:18): yet even that "will" or desire had been wrought in him by Divine grace.

Only as these two truths are clearly recognized and honestly acknowledged by us—the Christian's spiritual powerlessness, and the efficiency of inwrought grace—will we rightly ascribe unto God the glory which is His due. To Him alone is due the honor for anything good which proceeds from us or is done by us: "By the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). Not only do we owe to God the new nature which He has placed within us, but we are entirely dependent upon Him for the renewing of that new nature "day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). It is God who worketh in His people spiritual aspirations, holy desires, pious endeavors: "from Me is thy fruit found" (Hos. 14:8). The more this

be realized, the more will our proud hearts be truly humbled.

"Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight." By linking the two sentences together we are taught the most important lesson that there cannot be conformity to the will of God in the life, till there be conformity to Him in the heart. Herein we see the radical difference between human efforts at reformation and the Divine method. Man concentrates on that which is visible to the eyes of his fellows, namely, the external: "Woe unto you scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess" (Matthew 23:25 and cf. 27). Not so with Him who looketh on the heart: He worketh from within outward, fitting us for an obedient walk by effectually exciting the affections and empowering the will. It is thus that He continues and carries on to completion His work of grace in the elect.

Ere passing on to the next clause, let it be duly pointed out that while it is due alone to the gracious operations of the Spirit that we understand, love, believe, and do the things which God requires from us, it by no means follows that we are warranted to lie upon a bed of ease. No, far from it: we are responsible to use every means which God has appointed for our growth in grace and practical sanctification. Those who are fondest of quoting "for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure," are usually the slowest to emphasize the preceding exhortation: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). We are commanded to give all diligence to add to our faith the other graces of the Spirit: 2 Peter 1:5-7. Then let us shake off our carnal security and lethargy: use the means and God will bless our endeavors (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

"That which is well-pleasing in His sight." First, let us endeavor to live day by day in the consciousness that all we do is done in the sight of God. Nothing can escape His view. He observes those who break His law, and those who keep it: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). How it should curb and awe us to realize that God is an observer of every action: "in holiness and righteousness before Him" (Luke 1:75). Second, let this be our great aim and end: to please God. That is sound piety, and nothing else is. Pleasing man is the

religion of the hypocrites, but pleasing God is genuine spirituality. More than once does the apostle inculcate this as the right end: "Not as pleasing men, but God"; "that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing" (Col. 1:10).

Third, let us see to it that all our works are so ordered as to be pleasing to God. In order to this our actions must square with the rule of His Word: only that which is agreeable to His will is acceptable in His sight. But more: it is not sufficient that the substance of what we do be right, but it must issue from a right principle, namely, love to God and faith in Christ; "For without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb. 11:6), yet it must be a faith that "worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6)—not as forced, but as the expression of gratitude. Finally, as to the manner of this: our good works must be done with soberness and all seriousness: "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28)—as becometh a menial in the presence of His Majesty. Remember that God actually takes delight in such works and those who do them: Hebrews 11:4—what an incentive unto such!

Hebrews 13:22

Chapter 125 - Divine Exhortations

Before taking up our present verse let us offer some further remarks upon the last portions of 5:21, which, through lack of space, we had to omit from the preceding article. The central thing which we sought to make clear in the previous paper was, that, while the believer received at his regeneration a new nature or principle of grace (often termed by the older writers "the habit of grace"), yet it is not sufficient of itself to empower us unto the actual execution of good works. At the beginning God did place in Adam everything necessary to equip him for the performing of all obedience; but not so with the Christian. God has not communicated to us such supplies of grace that we are self-sufficient. No indeed: rather has He placed in Christ all "fullness" of grace for us to draw on (John 1:16), thereby making the members dependent on their Head. And, as we shall now see, it is from Christ that fresh supplies of grace are communicated to us.

"Working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ" (verse 21). The "through Jesus Christ" has a double reference: to God's working in us, and to the acceptance of our works. First, in the light of verses 20, 21 as a whole, it is clear that what is there insisted upon is, that there are no communications of grace unto us from the God of peace except in and by Jesus Christ—by His mediation and intercession. This is a most important point to be clear upon if the Redeemer is to have that place in our thoughts and hearts which is His due: all the gracious operations of the Spirit within the redeemed, from their generation to their glorification, are conducted according to the mediation of the Savior and are in response to His intercession for us. Therein we may perceive the admirable wisdom of God, which has so contrived things that each Divine Person is exalted in the esteem of His people: the Father as the fountain of all grace, the One in whom it originates; the Son, in His mediatorial office, as the channel through which all grace flows to us; the Spirit as the actual communicator and bestower of it.

Second, in our judgment, these words "through Jesus Christ" have also a more immediate connection with the clause "that which is well-pleasing in His sight," the reference being to those "good works" unto which the God of peace perfects or fits us. The best of our duties, wrought in us as they are by Divine grace, are not acceptable to God simply as they are ours, but only on account of the merits of Christ. The reason for this is, that Divine grace issues through an imperfect medium: sin is mixed with our best performances. The light may be bright and steady, yet it is dimmed by an unclean glass through which it may shine. We owe, then, to the Mediator not only the pardon of our sins and the sanctification of our persons, but the acceptance of our imperfect worship and service: "To offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5) states that aspect of truth we are here emphasizing.

"To whom be glory for ever. Amen." Here the apostle, as was his custom, adds praise to petition. This is recorded for our instruction. The same principle is inculcated in that pattern prayer which the Lord Jesus has given to His disciples, for after its seven petitions He teaches us to conclude with, "for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen" (Matthew 6:13). here is some uncertainty as to whether the ascription of praise in our text be unto the God of peace, to whom the whole prayer is addressed, or whether it be unto Jesus Christ, the nearest antecedent. Personally, we believe that both are included and intended. Both are equally worthy, and both should receive equal recognition from us. In Philippians 4:20 praise is offered distinctively unto the Father; in Revelation 1:5, 6 to the Mediator; while in Revelation 5:13 it is offered unto both.

"And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words" (verse 22). We will first give a brief exposition of this verse, and then make some remarks upon its central theme. The opening word is misleading in our Version, for it is contrastive and not connective, being rightly rendered "But" in the R.V. In the preceding verse, the apostle had spoken of God working in His people that which is well-pleasing in His sight: here he addresses their responsibility, and urges unto diligence on their part. Herein we may perceive again how perfectly Paul ever preserved the balance of truth: unto the Divine operations

must be added our endeavors. Though it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure, nevertheless, we are exhorted to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling: Philippians 2:12, 13.

The "word of exhortation" refers, in our judgment, to the entire contents of this epistle. The Greek word for "exhortation" is quite a comprehensive one, including within its meaning and scope direction, admonition, incitation, and comfort. It is usually translated "consolation" or "exhortation," one as often as the other. Manifestly it was very appropriate for the apostle to thus summarize the whole of his epistle, for, from beginning to end, its contents are a most powerful and impressive incitation unto perseverance in the faith and profession of the Gospel, in the face of strong temptations to apostasy. "The word of exhortation is the truth and doctrine of the Gospel applied unto the edification of believers, whether by way of exhortation or consolation, the one of them including the other" (John Owen—and so all the best of the commentators). But let us observe the tactfulness and gentleness with which the apostle urged the Hebrews to attend unto the exhortations that had been addressed to them.

First, he said, "But I beseech you." This was "an affectionate request that they would take kindly what on his part was meant kindly" (J. Brown). Paul did not set himself on some lofty pedestal and command them—as he might well have done by virtue of his apostolic authority—but placing himself on their level, he tenderly urged them. "This word of exhortation as it comes out of the bright atmosphere of truth, so it comes out of the genial atmosphere of affection" (A. Saphir). Second, he added, "I beseech you, brethren," "denoting (1) his near relation unto them in nature and grace, (2) his love unto them, (3) his common interest with them in the case to hand—all suited to give an access unto his present exhortation" (John Owen); to which we may add, (4) it evidenced his commendable humility and lowliness of heart.

Third, he added "But I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation." This of course implied there were things in this epistle which were opposed to their corruptions and prejudices. This also revealed once more the deep solicitude which the apostle had for the Hebrews. He had written to them some pointed warnings and some severe admonitions, and he was deeply concerned that they

should not miss the benefit thereof, either through their negligence or because of their natural antipathy. "Probably he records (uses) the word of exhortation for this reason: though men are by nature anxious to learn, they yet prefer to hear something new, rather than to be reminded of things known and often heard before. Besides, as they indulge themselves in sloth, they can ill bear to be stirred and reproofed" (John Calvin).

Here we may perceive again what a blessed example the apostle has left all ministers of the Word. The preacher must be careful to stir up his hearers to seek their own good: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the Word at My mouth, and give them warning from Me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die: and thou givest him not warning, nor speaketh to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand" (Ezek. 3:17, 18). In nothing are our hearers (even the saints) more backward than to appreciate and respond to the word of exhortation. Yet exhortation was the apostle's keynote all through this Epistle. God has given His Word to us for practical ends, and the faith of God's elect is "the acknowledging of the truth which is alter godliness" (Titus 1:1). The Holy Scriptures have been placed in our hands that we may be furnished unto all good works, instructed in every duty, fortified against every temptation. No doctrine is rightly understood unless it affects our walk. But in pressing unto a compliance with the Divine precepts let us seek grace that we may do it with the fidelity, wisdom, humility, and tenderness that the apostle evidenced and exemplified.

"For I have written a letter unto you in a few words." Strange to say, some have been puzzled by this clause, because most of Paul's epistles are much shorter than this one, and hence they have invented the wild theory that verse 22 alludes only to this final chapter, which Sir Robert Anderson strangely designated "a kind of covering letter." But the apostle was not here referring absolutely to the length of his epistle, but to the proportion between its length and the momentousness and sublimity of the theme of which it treats. In comparison with the importance and comprehensiveness of the many subjects which he had touched upon, brevity had indeed marked his treatment throughout. Nothing more than a short compendium had been given of the new covenant, the office and

work of Christ, the superiority of Christianity over Judaism, the life of faith, and the varied duties of the Christian.

The principal subject referred to in our present verse is the Divine exhortations, which is one of the greatest practical importance and value, yet alas, it is sadly neglected and generally ignored today. In Calvin's time men preferred "to hear something new, rather than to be reminded of things known and often heard before," but the present generation is woefully ignorant of those paths of righteousness which God has marked out in His Word, and so far from often hearing of many of those duties that God requires us to perform, most pulpits are largely silent thereon, substituting themes and topics which are more agreeable to the flesh, studiously avoiding that which searches the conscience and calls for reformation. Now an "exhortation" is an urging to the performance of duty, an incitation unto obedience to the Divine precepts. In developing this theme, we feel that we cannot do better than follow the order set forth in Psalm 119.

We are there shown, first, the blessedness of those who respond to God's claims upon them: "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the Law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, that seek Him with the whole heart" (verses 1, 2). The Psalmist began here because it is essential that we should have a right understanding of what true blessedness consists. All men desire to be happy: "There be many that say, Who will show us any good?" (Ps. 4:6). This is the cry of the world, "Good, good:" it is the yearning of nature for contentment and satisfaction.

Alas, sin has so blinded our understandings that by nature we neither know where real blessedness is to be found nor how it is obtained. So thoroughly has Satan deceived men, they know not that happiness is the fruit of holiness, a conscience testifying to God's approbation. Consequently, all, until Divine grace intervenes, seek happiness in riches, honors and pleasures, and thus they flee from it while they are seeking it—they intend joy, but choose misery. "Thou has put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased" (Ps. 4:7)—yes, "their corn and their wine:" not only possessed by them, but chosen by them as their portion and felicity. But David found that by treading the highway of holiness, God had put a gladness in his heart to which the pleasures of the worldling could not for a moment compare.

The main difference in thought between the first two verses of Psalm 119, wherein the secret of true happiness is revealed, is this: in the former the outward conduct of the man of God is described; in the latter, the inward principle which actuates him is seen, namely, whole-hearted seeking unto the Lord. As it is out of the heart there proceeds all the evils enumerated by Christ in Matthew 15:19, so it is out of the heart there issues all the graces described in Galatians 5:22, 23. It is for this reason we are bidden, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). This is very solemn and searching, for while "man looketh on the outward appearance, the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). Therefore there must be the exercise of faith and of love before our outward conduct can be pleasing unto God.

After affirming and describing the blessedness of those who walk in the Law of the Lord (verses 1-3), the Psalmist next reminds us that God has "commanded us to keep His precepts diligently" (verse 4). First, he sets before us a most attractive inducement to heed the Divine commands, and then we are reminded of God's righteous claims upon us. We are His creatures, His subjects, and as our Maker and Ruler He has absolute authority over us. God's will has been clearly revealed in His Word, and we are obligated to give our best attention and respect thereunto. God will not be put off with anything: He requires to be served with the utmost care and exactness. Thus, it is not left to our caprice as to whether or not we will walk in God's Law—an absolute necessity is imposed.

"O that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes" (verse 5). Awed by a sense of the authority of God, conscious of the propriety of His commanding His creatures, and of the justice of His claims, the Psalmist now felt his own weakness and utter insufficiency, his deep need of Divine grace, to enable him to fulfill his duty. This is one of the marks of a regenerate soul: first he is enlightened, and then he is convicted. Knowledge of the path of duty is communicated to him, and then consciousness is awakened of his inability to walk therein. Holiness begins with holy desires and aspirations: O that I were walking in the Law of the Lord, and keeping His precepts diligently. He realized that in the past, he had followed his own ways and paid little or no attention unto God's authority. But now he longs for this to be radically altered.

This panting after a conformity to the Divine will is the

breathing of the new nature, which is received at regeneration. A change of heart is ever evidenced by new desires and new delights. "For they that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:5). When the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, our love goes out to God, and as His love is a regard for our good, so our love for Him is a regard for His glory. Love to God is testified by a longing to be subject to Him: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). The more clearly the believer discerns the wisdom, goodness, purity, and holiness of the Divine precepts, the more earnestly does he long to obey them: "O that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes"—this is the longing of the heart for directing grace.

Passing over the intervening verses, we observe, next, the Psalmist's prayer for enabling grace: "Blessed art Thou O Lord: teach me Thy statutes" (verse 12). One of the duties of God's people in connection with the Divine precepts is to turn them into prayer. This is in accord with the new covenant, where precepts and promises go hand in hand. What God requires from us, we may ask of Him. "Why doth God require what we cannot perform by our own strength? He doth it (1) to keep up His fight; (2) to convince us of our impotency, and that upon a trial: without His grace we cannot do His work; (3) that the creature may express his readiness to obey; (4) to bring us to lie at His feet for grace" (T. Manton).

Prayer is the expression of our desires, and if we truly long to obey God, then we shall earnestly supplicate Him for enabling grace. The first thing sought is that God would teach us His statutes, which has reference to both the outward means and the inward grace. The letter of the Word and the preaching thereof must not be despised, for it is an ordinance which is appointed by God; yet it is only as the Divine blessing attends the same that we are truly profited. When the Lord Jesus taught His disciples we are told, that He first opened to them the Scriptures, and then He opened their understandings (Luke 24:32, 35). The inward teaching of the Spirit consists in enlightening the understanding, inflaming the affections, and moving the will, for Divine teaching is ever accompanied by drawing (John 6:44, 45).

The great need for such inward teaching by the Spirit is our obstinacy and prejudice. To live for eternity instead of for time, to

walk by faith and not by sight, to deny self and take up the cross daily, seems utter foolishness to the natural man. To yield ourselves wholly to God, is to row against the raging stream of our lusts. The old nature has a long start on the new, so that we are confirmed in evil habits, and therefore to act contrary to our natural bent and bias is likened unto cutting off right hands and plucking out right eyes. Moreover, every step we take, yea, attempt to take, along the highway of holiness, is hotly opposed by Satan. Thus, the need is real, urgent, imperative, that we should be Divinely empowered to discharge our duties. None but God Himself can work in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

Next we find the Psalmist declaring, "I will meditate in Thy precepts, and have respect unto Thy ways" (verse 15). Prayer is vain unless it be accompanied by faithful endeavor on our part. Here is David's hearty resolution and purpose to discharge his responsibility. He knew that he would never have that respect for God's ways of holiness which is their due, unless he made His precepts the subject of his constant thoughts. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." If our minds were constantly engaged with sacred things, the savor thereof would be apparent in our conversation. But the fear of God and a delight for His Word must first be established in our hearts, for our thoughts follow our affections—that which the heart has no relish for, the mind finds irksome to dwell upon. Difficulties in holy duties lie not in the duties themselves, but in the backwardness of our affections.

"I will meditate in Thy precepts and have respect unto Thy ways" (verse 15). The order is deeply suggestive: meditation precedes obedient conduct. Meditation is to be far more than a pious reverie: it is an appointed means to God-pleasing conduct: "Thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written" (Josh. 1:8). Meditation is not for the purpose of storing the mind with curious notions and subtle ideas, but is to be turned to practical use. Observe well, dear readers, it is not "I will meditate in Thy promises" (though that too has its proper place), but "in Thy precepts." And why is it so essential that we should meditate therein? That they may be fixed more permanently in the memory, that they may make a deeper impression on the heart, and that we should the better discern their manifold application unto the varied duties of our lives.

"I will meditate in Thy precepts." This was no passing fancy with David, like the forming of a New Year's resolution that is never carried into execution. He repeats his determination "I will meditate in Thy statutes" (verse 48), and again he declares, "I will meditate in Thy precepts" (verse 78). It is often said that, in this strenuous and bustling age, meditation is a lost art. True, and is not this one of the chief reasons why obedience to God's commands is a lost practice? God complained of old, "My people do not consider" (Isa. 1:3): what goes in at one ear, goes out at the other. "When anyone heareth the Word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the Wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart" (Matthew 13:19): and how can the Word be understood unless it be prayerfully pondered, turned over and over in the mind. "Let these sayings sink down into your ears" (Luke 9:44)—by means of serious reflection and steady contemplation thereof.

"Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments, for therein do I delight" (verse 35). Here we find David praying for compelling grace. Though he was a regenerate man and delighted in the Divine precepts, he was painfully conscious of the fact that there was still much in him which pulled the other way. The flesh lusted against the spirit, so that he could not do the things which he would. True, Divine grace has placed within the born-again soul an inclination and tendency toward that which is good, yet fresh supplies of grace are needed daily before he has strength to perform that which is good. And for this grace God would be sought unto. Why so? That we may learn that power belongeth unto Him alone, and that we may be kept lowly in our own esteem. Were God to send sufficient rain in a day to suffice for a year, no notice would be taken of His acts of providence; and were He to grant us sufficient grace at the new birth to suffice the rest of our lives, we would quickly become prayerless.

It is a very humbling thing to be brought to realize that we must be "made to go" in the path of God's commandments, yet sooner or later each believer experiences the truth of it. Godly desires and holy resolutions are not sufficient to produce actual obedience: God has to work in us to do, as well as to "will" of His good pleasure. Peter's resolution was strong when he declared that he would not deny Christ, though all others should do so; yet in the hour of testing he discovered that he was as weak as water. We are

told of Hezekiah that "God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chron. 32:31); and at times He does this with all His people, that they may discover that without Him they can do nothing. When this discovery is made, the soul feels the suitability of this prayer, "Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments."

"Incline my heart unto Thy testimonies, and not to covetousness" (verse 36). In these words there is a confession implied, as well as a supplication expressed. There is an acknowledgment that the natural bent of the heart is away from God unto worldly things. That for which he prayed was that the bias of his heart should be turned unto God and His precepts. For the heart to be "inclined" unto God's Word means, for the affections to be so inflamed unto holiness that the will is carried after them. Just as the power of sin lies in the love it has for the objects attracting us, so our aptness for godly duties lies in the love we have for them. When God says "I will cause you to walk in My statutes" (Ezek. 36:27), it means that He will so enlighten the understanding and kindle the affections that the will is inclined thereto.

But let it be said again that, diligent effort on our part must be added to praying, for God will not heed the petitions of the slothful and careless. Hence we must carefully note that not only did David beg God to "Incline my heart unto Thy testimonies," but he also declared "I have inclined mine heart to perform Thy statutes always" (verse 112). It is our bounden duty to incline our hearts unto God's Law, yet it is only by God's enablement we can do so. Nevertheless, God deals not with us as stocks and stones, but as rational agents. He sets before us motives and inducements which it is our responsibility to respond unto. He appoints means, which it is our duty to use. He bestows blessings, which it is our obligation to improve—trading with the pound He has given us. And this David had done. True, it was all of grace, as he had been the first to acknowledge: nevertheless the fact remained he had cooperated with grace: working out what God had worked in; and all is vain till that be done.

Our space is exhausted. Does some captious critic ask, What has all the above to do with Hebrews 12:22? We answer, much every way. How are we to "suffer the Word of Exhortation"? Psalm 119 supplies a detailed answer! By frequently reminding ourselves that

compliance therewith is the way of true blessedness; by constantly calling to mind the Divine authority with which it is invested; by owning and bewailing our perverse disinclination thereto; by earnest prayer for enabling grace; by meditation daily thereon; by begging God to make us go in the path of His commandments; by diligent improvement of the grace given.

Hebrews 13:23

Chapter 126 - Spiritual Freedom

Before turning to our present verse we must complete our observations on the one which occupied our attention in the last article, for the practical importance and value of it cannot be over-estimated or over-emphasized. "Suffer the Word of Exhortation." In its local meaning to the Hebrews this expression comprehended the entire contents of the Epistle which Paul had addressed to them, for, from beginning to end, it was in the nature of an earnest entreaty that they would relinquish the now effete system of Judaism, and remain steadfast in the profession of Christianity and the performance of Gospel duties, This was, then, a final word from the apostle that his readers would duly take to heart the message he had delivered to them, that no matter how radically it conflicted with their traditions, sentiments, and prejudices, their eternal welfare depended upon receiving what was worthy of all acceptance. It was an affectionate appeal to them that they would not, through natural disinclination, miss and lose the inestimable value of what he had written.

But this expression "the Word of Exhortation" has a still wider meaning and application for us. It may legitimately be taken for the entire Word of God, for what are the Scriptures—considered from one essential viewpoint—but a continuous exhortation? Just as in Romans 9:9 we read of "the Word of Promise" and in 2 Peter 1:19 of the more sure "Word of Prophecy," so here the Scriptures are designated "the Word of Exhortation"—the emphasis being changed in each case. And just as responding to the Word of Exhortation meant to the Hebrews that they must first relinquish something, and then adhere to another thing in its place; so it is with us. The Hebrews were called upon to forsake the Christ-dishonoring camp of Judaism and act by faith in the revelation which God had made in His Son; whereas we are called upon to forsake the world and its vanities, to forsake the pleasures of sin and the indulging of our fleshly lusts, and to tread that highway of holiness which alone

conducteth unto Everlasting Life. No matter how much the Divine exhortations cross our wills and oppose our corruptions, obedience thereto is absolutely necessary if we are to escape the wrath to come.

In our last article we sought to show how we are to "suffer the Word of Exhortation," how we are to respond thereto, by making use of what is found in Psalm 119 on this subject, for it is there, more fully than anywhere else in Scriptures, we are taught how the man of God conducts himself with reference to the Divine Law. We briefly touched upon seven things, and pointed out that we are to "suffer" or give the Word of Exhortation that place in our hearts and lives to which it is entitled, by frequently reminding ourselves that obedience thereto is the way of true blessedness (Ps. 119:1-3), by constantly calling to mind the Divine authority with which it is invested (verse 4), by earnestly praying for enabling grace (verses 12, 27), by frequently meditating therein (verses 15, 48, 78), by begging God to make us go in the path of His commandments (verse 35), by praying Him to incline our hearts thereto (verse 36), by our own diligent improvement of the grace which God has already given to us (verse 112): let us now add a few more words upon this last point.

"I have inclined mine heart to perform Thy statutes always, even unto the end" (verse 112). Was this creature boasting? Most certainly not, any more than Paul was guilty of the same when he declared "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." It is not unusual for Scripture to ascribe to us what God works in us, and that because of our subservient endeavors to Divine grace, as we pursue the work of God. The soul responds to the impressions which the Spirit makes upon it. God gives us breath, yet we breathe. God supplies food, yet we have to prepare and eat it. God sets motives before us, but we have to respond thereto. God imparts grace, but we must improve it. This is the way to get more: Luke 8:18. It is our duty to heed that injunction "now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God" (1 Chron. 22:19); and as Paul "If that I may apprehend (lay hold of) that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12).

Moreover, there are certain aids and helps thereto, which it is our privilege to employ. For example the Psalmist said, "I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of them that keep Thy precepts" (Ps. 119:63). We are largely affected and influenced by the

company we keep: "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go" (Prov. 22:24). We must not expect to love and obey God's precepts if we have fellowship with those who despise them. But communion with godly souls will be a stimulus to our own piety. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise" (Prov. 13:20). Here too our responsibility is exercised, for we are free to choose our companions. So far as Providence permits, it is our duty to cultivate acquaintance with those who make conscience of obeying God's commands. Pious conversation with them will kindle the spark of grace in our own hearts: "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel" (Prov. 27:9).

There is one other thing we would notice in Psalm 119 as it bears upon the subject of obedience to God's commands, and that is, profiting from Divine chastenings, begging God to sanctify to us the various trials through which we pass. "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept Thy Word" (verse 67). It is in seasons of temporal prosperity that we are most apt to decline spiritually, and generally we have to pass through deep waters of trouble before we are restored—the snapping dog of adversity is employed to recover the strayed sheep. Afflictions are blessings in disguise when they cool our lusts, wean us from the world, make us realize our weakness, and cast us back immediately upon God. So declared the Psalmist: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes" (verse 71). Then "despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him" (Heb. 12:5).

Ere turning from this subject, let us remind the reader that the Greek word rendered "exhortation" in Hebrews 13:22 is translated "consolation" in Hebrews 6:18, for the term not only signifies to entreat and incite, but it also means to relieve and refresh. It may seem strange to some that the same word should have such different forces as exhortation and consolation, yet these two things have a much closer affinity than is generally realized, and this twofold meaning is designed by the Spirit to inculcate an important practical lesson. To despise the Word of Exhortation is to forsake our own comforts, as many a backslidden Christian can testify. Obedience to the Divine precepts carries its own reward now: peace of conscience, tranquility of mind, contentment of heart, and assurance of God's approbation. Divine consolation is secured by

heeding the Word of Exhortation!

"Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you" (verse 23). Following our usual custom we will first raise the question, What is the connection between this verse and the context? At first glance there does not appear to be any relation between them, yet further examination seems to indicate otherwise. Some of our readers may deem us fanciful, but it appears to the writer that this historical allusion to the "liberty" of Timothy Supplies an illustrative encouragement for us to respond to the call contained in the preceding verse. Let us set it forth thus: those who refuse to heed the Word of Exhortation, and instead give free play to their own corruptions, are in the worst servitude of all—the bondage of sin and Satan; but those who yield submission to the commands and precepts of God enter into true spiritual freedom.

It is one of the great delusions of the natural man that he is free only so long as he may please himself, supposing that to be placed under the authority of another is to curtail his liberty and bring him into bondage. But that is a putting of darkness for light and light for darkness. For just so far as the language of our hearts be "let us break Their bands asunder, and cast away Their cords from us" (Ps. 2:3) are we tyrannized over by our lusts. In proportion as we follow the inclinations and devices of our evil hearts are we in servitude to sin and Satan. Lawlessness is not liberty, but libertinism, which is the worst bondage of all: "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the slaves of corruption, for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (2 Pet. 2:19).

Alas, what widespread ignorance and delusion abounds on this subject today. Carnal liberty is but moral thralldom. To make this the more evident let it be pointed out, first, that which most infringes upon a man's real liberty is that which most hinders and disables him to prosecute his true happiness. When the things of sense crowd Out the things of the spirit, when the concerns of time oust the interests of eternity, when Satan is given that place in our lives which belongs only to God, then we are forsaking our own mercies and come under the most cruel task-masters. Second, that which disorders the soul and puts reason out of dominion, is certain spiritual bondage. When the base prevail over the honorable, it is a

sign that a country is enthralled: and when our fleshly lusts, rather than our understanding and conscience, prevail over the will, it is sure proof that we are in Spiritual bondage.

Again; consider the great power and tyranny of sin. Sin, in various forms and ways, has such complete dominion over the unconverted that it robs them of all control over themselves and their actions: they are "serving divers lusts and pleasures" (Titus 3:3). This is most evident in the case of the confirmed drunkard and the drug addict—what fetters they have forged for themselves, and how helpless they are to break from them! Yet, the bondage of pleasure and worldly pursuits is just as real, if not so apparent. Sin, even in its most refined forms, obtains such a mastery over its victims that they have no command of their affections and still less of their wills, so that they are quite unable to forsake what they themselves believe to be vanity or follow that which they know to be good. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jer. 13:23). Therefore do many of them say, "There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will everyone do the imagination of his evil heart" (Jer. 18:12).

Now on the contrary, true liberty is to be found in the ways of God, for spiritual freedom is a freedom from sin and not to sin, a freedom to serve God and not self, a freedom to take upon us the easy yoke of Christ and not the despising of it. Genuine liberty is not a liberty to do what we please, but to do what we ought. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17); contrariwise, where Satan rules there is captivity (2 Tim. 2:26). Said the Psalmist, "And I will walk at liberty: for I seek Thy precepts" (119:45). Yes, just so far as we walk according to the Divine precepts, are we freed from the fetters of our corruptions. It is that miracle of grace which brings the heart to love the Divine statutes, that sets the heart at rest. "The way of holiness is not a track for slaves, but the King's highway for freemen, who are joyfully journeying from the Egypt of bondage to the Canaan of rest" (Spurgeon).

First, the way of God's precepts is in itself liberty, and therefore God's Law is called "the perfect Law of liberty" (James 1:25). How grievously are they mistaken, then, who accuse us of bringing souls into bondage when we insist that the Law is the believer's Rule of Life—the bondage of the Law from which

Divine grace delivers, is from the Law as a covenant of works, and therefore from its condemnation and curse; and not from the preceptive authority of the Law. Yet ever since we drank that poison, "ye shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5), man affecteth dominion over himself and would be lord of his own actions. But Scripture makes it clear that the most dreadful judgment which God inflicts upon the wicked in this world is when He withdraws His restraints and gives them over to do as they please: Psalm 81:12, Romans 1:26-29.

Real liberty is found in the ways of God because it is there we are directed to attain unto true felicity. The way of sin seems broad and easy to the flesh, yet is it strait and painful to the spirit—"the way of transgressors is hard." Contrariwise, the way of holiness seems strait and narrow to the flesh, yet, because it is life and peace, it is broad and easy to the spirit—all of Wisdom's ways are "ways of pleasantness." He liveth the freest life who liveth under the bonds of duty, who maketh conscience of pleasing God, for it is the Truth which makes us free (John 8:32). The fuller be our obedience, the more completely emancipated are we from the fetters of moral slavery. The only unshackled ones are those who walk with God.

Second, liberty is given to walk in God's ways. At regeneration the soul, hitherto in prison, is set free by Christ (Luke 4:18, John 8:36). "For the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). Conversion is a change of masters: "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:17, 18). Redemption is a being delivered from the cruel task-masters of Egypt and coming under the Lordship of Christ. In loving, fearing, serving, and praising God the highest faculties of the soul are exercised in their noblest and most regular way of operation. The soul is lifted above the things of time and sense, elevated to occupation with heavenly and eternal things. (For some things in the last few paragraphs we are indebted to Manton's sermon on Psalm 119:45.)

We trust that the reader is now able to perceive the connection between the deeper spiritual significance of Hebrews 13:23 and the verse which immediately precedes it. The historical

allusion to the physical release of Timothy from his imprisonment, coming immediately after the call for us to heed the Word of Exhortation, is to be regarded as an illustration of the spiritual freedom which attends our compliance with that Divine injunction. Just in proportion as we yield subjection to the Divine precept, do we enter into and enjoy real freedom of soul. If this should seem too fanciful to some of our more prosaic readers, perhaps they will be willing that others should be permitted to exercise their own judgment thereon.

"Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty." "Who this Timothy was, what was his relation unto Paul, how he loved him, how he employed him and honored him, joining him with himself in the salutation prefixed unto some of his epistles, with what care and diligence he wrote unto him with reverence unto his office of an evangelist, is known out of his writings. This Timothy was his perpetual companion in all his travels, labors and sufferings, serving him as a son serveth his father, unless when he designed and sent him unto any special work for the Church. And being with him in Judea, he was well known unto the Hebrews also, as was his worth and usefulness" (John Owen).

Timothy means "precious to God." His father was a Greek; his mother a Jewess. Nothing is known of the former. That his mother was a true believer we learn from 2 Timothy 1:5, where the apostle makes mention of the unfeigned faith which "dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice." The expression "unfeigned faith" testifies to the reality and genuineness of it, in contradistinction from the empty profession of others who, without just cause, posed as believers. From the above reference many have concluded that Timothy, in his early days, received a godly training. This is confirmed by "From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). Apparently the family resided at Lystra.

The first visit of the apostle Paul to Lystra is recorded in Acts 14. There he and Barnabas "preached the Gospel" (verse 7). There too God wrought a mighty miracle through Paul, by healing an impotent man who had never walked, being a cripple from his mother's womb (verse 10). A deep impression was made upon the heathen inhabitants, who could scarce be restrained from doing

homage to the apostles as gods. But shortly after, Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and persuaded the people—so fickle is human nature—to stone Paul. The writer believes that he was then actually stoned to death and that God restored him to life. Possibly the following passage refers to that incident: "We would not, brethren have you ignorant of our troubles which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in Whom we trust that He will yet deliver" (2 Cor. 1:8-10).

It was during this first visit of Paul to Lystra that young Timothy was converted. This seems clear from the fact that in 1 Timothy 1:2 he refers to him as "my own son in the faith"; while in 2 Timothy 3:10, 11 Paul reminds him now that he fully knew the persecutions and afflictions which befell his spiritual father "at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra." The expression "my own son in the faith" signifies that Paul had, ministerially, begotten him through the Gospel (1 Cor. 4:17). The Lystrians had dragged the body of Paul outside the city (Acts 14:19), but he rose up and returned into it. Next day he departed to Derbe, but after preaching the Gospel there, he returned to Lystra, "confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (verse 22).

What has been pointed out above explains the fact that when Paul revisited Lystra some three or four years later, Timothy is already spoken of as a "disciple" (Acts 16:1). The second verse intimates how he had acquitted himself during the apostle's absence. During that time he had established a reputation for godliness, not only in Lystra, but in Iconium. He had become well known to the churches at both cities, and was "well reported of." Probably it was this good report which attracted Paul, who then stood in need of a fellow-helper—Barnabas and Mark having in the interval deserted him (Acts 15:39). The commendation of Timothy's "brethren" inclined Paul to select him for a wider work. But there was, however, one hindrance in the way: Timothy was a Gentile, and the Jewish Christians were not yet, generally, prepared to receive an uncircumcised leader. To place him in office as a teacher might arouse prejudice, so Paul, in deference to their scruples, circumcised

the young disciple.

Nothing is told us of what it must have cost Eunice to give up such a son: but God took notice (Ps. 56:8). From now on Timothy figured prominently in the history of Paul, becoming his companion and fellow-laborer. Two of his epistles were addressed to him, and in six others he is associated with him in the superscription: compare 2 Corinthians 1:1. Timothy was with the apostle during his second great missionary tour, accompanied him to Jerusalem, and was with him in his first imprisonment. In 1 Corinthians 4:17 we find Paul affirming that Timothy was "faithful in the Lord." Philippians 2:19-22 presents to us a lovely picture of the gracious power of the Spirit triumphing over the affections of the flesh, and the love of Christ constraining unto unselfishness. The apostle was prisoner in Rome, and Timothy, who was there, was very dear unto him; yet was he willing to part with his beloved companion, even in his sorrow and solitariness, He was solicitous for the welfare of the Philippian saints, and having none other he could send, authorized Timothy to visit them.

In referring to Timothy as being "like minded" with himself, Paul gives us an insight into his ability. Not only was Timothy his "own son in the faith" but he speaks of him "as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the Gospel" (Phil. 2:22). Young believers generally become like those with whom they associate most intimately. Blessed is it when we see them growing up to follow the example of godly leaders—"imitators of us and of the Lord" (1 Thess. 1:6). How solemnly important it is, then, that the leaders should live so that the younger Christians may not be made to stumble.

From the personal exhortations addressed by Paul to Timothy (in the epistles bearing his name), it seems clear that he was of a sensitive, shrinking, and timid nature. The word in 2 Timothy 1:6 (cf. 1 Timothy 4:12, 14, 16) seems to imply that he was almost ready to give up in despair. The "God hath not given us the spirit of fear"—really "cowardice" (2 Tim. 1:7) and the "be not ashamed" (verse 8) intimate that there was need for the exhortation "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12) and "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3, and cf. 4:5). That he was a man of frail constitution is evident from 1 Timothy 5:23. Yet to Paul he was "his dearly beloved son" (2 Tim. 1:2). Timothy's "tears" (2 Tim.

1:4) over Paul's imprisonment show that he was a man of feeling.

"Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty: with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you" (Heb. 13:23). This supplies one more incidental confirmation that Paul was the writer of the Hebrews' epistle, for it is clear from this verse that Timothy was the one who accompanied him on his missionary journeys—there is no hint elsewhere that Timothy was the fellow-worker of any one else but Paul. The actual incarceration of Timothy is not recorded in the Acts or elsewhere, but it is clear from this verse that he had been restrained, but that he was now free. The imprisonment of faithful ministers is an honor to them, yet is their release an occasion of rejoicing to the saints; and therefore the apostle acquaints the Hebrews of this good news, for he knew how highly they esteemed Timothy. He had not yet returned to Paul himself—apparently having been imprisoned at some other place than Rome, but if God directed him thither, he purposed that they should both again visit the churches in Judea. Whether this hope was realized, we know not.

Hebrews 13:24, 25

Chapter 127 - Conclusion

Everything down here comes, sooner or later, to its end. Terrible prospect for the wicked, for there awaits them naught but the blackness of darkness forever. Blessed outlook for the righteous, for then they are done with sin and suffering forever, and only everlasting glory and bliss Stretches before them. How would it be with you, my reader, if the hand of time were now writing the final lines of your earthly history? Did the apostle experience a pang of regret as he arrived at the parting salutation? did his readers? We cannot be sure, but this writer certainly feels sorry that the dosing verses are now reached; and we are assured that not a few of those who have followed us throughout this series will feel much the same. For rather more than ten years we have journeyed together through this epistle, and now we have come to the Conclusion.

It is very doubtful if the writer will ever again attempt a task of such dimensions. Be that as it may, he certainly will never be engaged with a more momentous and glorious subject. There is no book in the N.T. of greater importance, and few of equal. First, it furnishes us a sure guide to the interpretation of the O.T., the Holy Spirit moving the apostle to here open up its principal types. Second, it supplies us with a vivid description and explanation of the Mediator's office and work, demonstrating the worthlessness and needlessness of all other intermediaries between the soul and God. Third, it therefore places in our hands the most conclusive exposure of the errors and fallacies of the Papacy. Fourth, it makes clear to us why Judaism has passed away, and how it can never again be restored.

The deep importance of this epistle is intimated by a feature which is peculiar to it, namely, the absence of the writer's name. But let it be noted that he did not conceal himself, for in Hebrews 13:18-24, especially, Paul made it quite clear to the Hebrews who was the penman of this epistle: he plainly declared himself and his circumstances as one who was well known to them. The true reason

why he did not prefix his name to this epistle, as to his others, was this: in all his other epistles he dealt with the churches by virtue of his apostolic authority and the revelation of the Gospel which he had personally received from Christ; but in dealing with the Hebrews, he laid his foundation in the authority of the Holy Scriptures, which they acknowledged, and resolved all his arguments and exhortations thereunto.

They who regard the body of this epistle as concerned merely with the refutation of those arguments brought against the Gospel by the ancient Jews, do greatly err. That which the apostle here took up is of vital moment for each generation. Human nature does not change, and the objections brought against the Truth by its enemies are, in substance, the same in every age. As the best means of getting rid of darkness is to let in the light, So the most effectual antidote for the poison of Satan is the pure milk of the Word. Only as we are established in the Truth are we fortified against the sophistries of error. In this epistle the apostle deals with the fundamental principles of Christianity, and no effort should be spared to arrive at a sound understanding of them. The foundations of the Faith are ever being attacked, and the ministers of Christ can perform no better service than to establish their people in the grand verities of the Faith.

The chief design of the Holy Spirit in this epistle is to set forth the great difference between the administration of the Everlasting Covenant before Christ came and since His coming. The following contrasts may be observed. First, the difference between the instruments God used: the "prophets"—His own Son: Hebrews 1:1, 2. Second, the difference between priesthood and Priesthood: Hebrews 7:11-17. Third, the difference between surety and Surety: Hebrews 7:21, 22. Fourth, the difference between the law and the "Oath:" Hebrews 7:28. Fifth, the difference between mediator and Mediator: Hebrews 8:6; 9:15. Sixth, between promises and Promises: Hebrews 8:6. Seventh, between blood and Blood: Hebrews 9:12-14. Eighth, between sacrifices and the Sacrifice: Hebrews 9:26. Ninth, between sprinkling and Sprinkling: Hebrews 9:13, 14. Tenth, between tabernacle and Tabernacle: Hebrews 9:8, 24. Eleventh, between the "shadow" and the Substance: Hebrews 10:1 and cf. Colossians 2:17. Twelfth, between "country" and Country: Hebrews 11:9, 16. In all these contrasts the difference is

between the Old and N.T. administrations of the Everlasting Covenant.

The outstanding contrast between the Old and N.T. regimes is that the one was but evanescent, whereas the other is abiding. Judaism was but preparatory, a temporary economy; whereas Christianity is permanent, ushering in an everlasting order of things. This is intimated in the opening sentence of the epistle: "God hath in these last days spoken unto us in His Son:" finality has now been reached!—there is no other dispensation to follow this: cf. 1 Corinthians 10:11, 1 Peter 4:7, 1 John 2:19. In keeping with this we may note how frequently the emphasis is laid upon the abidingness and finality of what is here treated of. We read of "He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him" (Heb. 5:9), of "eternal judgment" (Heb. 6:2), that "He is able also to save them for evermore that come unto God by Him" (Heb. 7:25), of "eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12), of "the eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14), of an "eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9:15), of "the everlasting covenant" (Heb. 13:20).

"Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you" (verse 24). It was the custom of the apostle to close his epistle with a warm greeting: not that this was merely a courtesy or pleasantry, for in those days the love of Christians was strong and fervent, both unto the Lord Himself and to His redeemed: "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another" (1 Thess. 4:9). How radically different things were then from what they now are! Yet only so in degree, and not in essence, for wherever the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, the affections of that soul will necessarily flow unto all His people. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14), which is as true today as it was in the first century.

Salute all that have the rule over you." This evinced the apostle's good will unto the ministers and officers of the churches in Judea, as well as according honor to whom honor is due. Mutual amity between the servants of Christ is to be sedulously sought and lovingly maintained. The large-heartedness of the apostle in this important particular Shines forth again and again in the N.T. Calvin suggested that the reason why this salutation was sent more

particularly unto the rulers of the churches was "as a mark of honor, that he might conciliate them, and gently lead them to assent to his doctrine"—which was so radically opposed to their earlier training. The "rulers" referred to in this verse are, of course, the same as those mentioned in verses 7, 17.

"And all the saints." One lesson here inculcated is that the servants of Christ should be absolutely impartial, manifesting equal respect unto the highest and lowest of God's dear people. This clause also condemns that detestable spirit of eclecticism, fostered so much by Rome. The Gospel has no secrets reserved for the initiated only, but the whole of it is the common property of all believers. "This epistle, containing strong meat for the perfect, is addressed to the whole congregation. If any part of Scripture was to be kept from the common people, we might fancy it would be this epistle. The writings of the apostles, as well as the prophets, were read in the public assembly; how much more ought it now to be left to every one to read them according to his need" (Bengel).

Believers are here designated "saints" or separated ones, which is their most common appellation in the N.T. They are so in a fourfold respect. First, by the Father's sovereign choice, whereby before the foundation of the world, He singled them out from the mass of their fellows, to be the objects of His special favor. Second, by the Son's redemption, whereby He purchased "a peculiar people" unto Himself, thereby distinguishing between the sheep and the goats. Third, by the Spirit's regeneration, whereby He quickens them unto newness of life, thus making them to differ from those who are left in their natural state—dead in trespasses and sins. Fourth, by their own consecration, whereby they surrender themselves unto the Lord, and dedicate themselves to His service. Their saintship is evidenced by their lives: devoted to the love, fear, and will of God. Such are the only proper members of a local church, and such are the only true members of the Church of God.

"They of Italy salute you." They did so through the apostle unto the entire body of the Hebrews: knowing of his intention of sending a letter to them, they desired to be remembered to them. "They of Italy" if not all of them Gentiles, certainly included many among their number. A most significant detail was this. In the previous verse Paul had referred to sending "Timothy" unto them, and his father was a Gentile! But still more striking was this word: it

was more than a hint that the "middle wall of partition" was already broken down. Certainly "Italy" was "outside the Camp" of Judaism: Jerusalem was no longer the center of God's earthly witness!

"They of Italy salute you." This is very blessed, showing the victory of the spirit over the flesh. "How does Christianity melt down prejudices! Romans and Jews, Italians and Hebrews, were accustomed to regard each other with contempt and hatred. But in Christ Jesus there is neither Romans nor Jews, neither Italians nor Hebrews: all are one in Him. Christians of different countries should take all proper opportunities of testifying their mutual regards to each other. It is calculated to strengthen and console, and to knit them closer and closer in harmony. Proper expressions of love increase love on both sides" (John Brown).

"Grace be with you all. Amen" (verse 25). The epistle closes with the sign-manual of Paul himself. He commonly employed an amanuensis (Rom. 16:22), but this sentence was written by his own hand. This particular apostolic benediction was his own distinctive token. "The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle, so I write: that the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen" (2 Thess. 3:17, 18). If the reader will turn to the closing verse of each of the other thirteen epistles of this apostle, it will be found that the same token, substantially, is given in each one. This is the more striking for neither James, Peter, John, nor Jude employed it. Thus, this closing "grace be with you all" is conclusive evidence that Paul was the writer of this epistle.

"Grace be with you all. Amen." This is the most comprehensive petition that can be presented to God on behalf of His people, either individually or collectively, for it comprises all manner of the blessings of His free favor. Divine grace comprehends and contains all things pertaining to life and godliness. By grace we are saved (Eph. 2:8), in grace we stand (Rom. 5:2), through grace we are preserved. These words signify, Let the favor of God be toward you, His power be working in you, bringing forth the fruits of holiness. Thus, the epistle closes with prayer! "When the people of God have been conversing together, by word or writing, it is good to part with prayer, desiring for each other the continuance of the gracious presence of God, that they may meet together in the world of glory" (Matthew Henry.) "Grace be with you all" denoted their actual participation therein.

And now our happy task is completed. Very conscious are we of our limitations and infirmities. We can but commit our poor efforts to God, pleading the merits of Christ to countervail our demerits, and asking Him to bless that which was pleasing to Himself. Let those who have accompanied us throughout these articles join the writer in asking: do we now better understand the contents of this difficult yet blessed epistle? Have we a deeper appreciation of that grand order of things that has superceded Judaism? Is Christ more real and precious to our souls? Are we more conscious of the sanctifying effects of the doctrine which it inculcates? Are we now paying more diligent heed to its weighty exhortations? Are our souls more deeply impressed by its solemn warnings against apostasy? May Divine grace indeed be with us all.

N.B. The articles comprising this series have been written on land and sea. They were commenced in Australia, continued as we crossed three oceans, resumed in England, considerably added to during the years we spent in the U.S.A., and completed in Scotland and England.

